



'ALĪ-REŻĀ ABBĀSĪ

'ALĪ-REŻĀ ABBĀSĪ TABRĪZĪ, 10th-11th/16th-17th century calligrapher born and trained in Tabrīz but active principally in Qazvīn and Isfahan. His birth date is unknown but Qāzī Aḥmad, writing in 1005/1596, speaks of him as still young; his documented professional activity stretches from 993/1585 to 1025/1617, though he is said to have been alive in 1038/1628-29. Principally remembered for the *ṭoloṭ* inscriptions he designed for the buildings of Shah 'Abbās in Isfahan, in his own time he was more famous as a *nasta'liq* calligrapher; examples of his work in *nask* have also survived. He was trained in the scripts of *ṭoloṭ* and *nask* by 'Alā'-al-dīn Moḥammad Tabrīzī, better known as Atābeg Tabrīzī, a renowned practitioner of the scripts forming the basis of the Iranian-Iraqi tradition: *ṭoloṭ*, *nask*, *req'a rayḥān*, *moḥaqqaq*, and *tawqī'*; 'Alī-Reżā probably had skill in all of these. In addition he appears to have taught himself *nasta'liq*, in which he followed the style of Mīr 'Alī Heravī to the point that their works are indistinguishable. His professional employment appears to have begun in Qazvīn, where he came in 993/1585 because of the Ottoman invasion of Tabrīz. Initially he lived in Qazvīn for about six years executing inscriptions and album pages. Then around 999/1590-91 he entered the service of the Safavid general Farḥād Khan Qarāmānlū, accompanying him on his campaigns for about two years. A calligraphy sample signed 'Alī-Reżā Tabrīzī and executed in the "*yeylāq* of Gūrāndašt" may have been produced for Farḥād Khan. Soon, however, Shah 'Abbās requested that 'Alī-Reżā join his entourage, which he is said to have done on 1 Šawwāl 1001/1 July 1593; he remained in this capacity until Shah 'Abbās died in 1038/1628-29. Then he appears to have returned to Qazvīn,



where he executed inscriptions for the principal mosque. H. Feżā’elī reports that inscriptions by ‘Alī-Reżā are preserved on a former Safavid palace now serving as police headquarters (*šahr-bānī*) of Qazvīn.

After joining the entourage of Shah ‘Abbās, ‘Alī-Reżā began to sign his works as “al-‘Abbāsī,” abandoning his former epithet “al-Tabrīzī.” On the occasion of his new appointment he compiled an album of calligraphy samples and paintings for the shah; its name, “*Ḳerqat-nāma*,” gives the date 1001/1593-94 in the *abiād* system. His influence and intimacy with Shah ‘Abbās appear to have increased after the move of the court to Isfahan in 1005/1597. Shortly thereafter he appears to have become the *ketābdār* of ‘Abbās’ library, replacing Šādeqī Beg Afšār. For the next two decades he continued to produce album pages, but probably one of his chief responsibilities was designing inscriptions for the projects of Shah ‘Abbās in Isfahan and elsewhere. In 1011/1602-03 he designed inscriptions for the mosque built near the *maydān* of Isfahan by Maqṣūd Beg and also gold plaques for the tomb of Imam Reżā in Mašhad. The former inscriptions are in *tolot*, the latter in *nasta’līq*. The high esteem in which he was held by Shah ‘Abbās is indicated by the fact that he designed the portal inscriptions for two new mosques erected in Isfahan, Masjed-e Šayḵ Loṭfallāh in 1012/1603-04 and Masjed-e Šāh in 1025/1617. He also executed further inscriptions in Mašhad at the shrine of Imam Reżā and the tomb of Ḳvāja Rabī’ in 1024/ 1615-16 and 1026/1617-18.

Authors of various *taḍkeras* have stressed ‘Alī-Reżā’s rivalry with the calligrapher Mīr ‘Emād and suggested his complicity in the latter’s assassination. Although certainly Mīr ‘Emād’s inability to obtain patronage from Shah ‘Abbās may well reflect the opposition of ‘Alī-Reżā, no tangible evidence of ‘Alī-Reżā’s complicity in this murder is cited. Equally obscure are the last years of ‘Alī-Reżā’s life. Presently no known works by him are dated later than 1026/1617-18, although he is said to have lived at least until 1038/1628-29.

Characteristic of the calligraphy of ‘Alī-Reżā is its strong sense of order and proportion. The clarity of his architectural inscriptions makes them more legible than those found on many buildings of the Safavid period. In the portals of Masjed-e Šāh and Masjed-e Šayḵ Loṭfallāh a single continuous text is arranged in two levels, which are separated by various devices, e.g., the elongated tail of a *yā*’ is employed to underscore the upper level in the text. In both levels the letters are formed of well-designed shapes that give the whole a sense of order. Curiously his own signature is also in two levels with inverted



yā's used to separate the two portions. The word "Alī" is written above and "Rezā" below, "al-'Abbā" below and "sī" above. The elongated inverted yā' of the upper portion provides visual drama to the signature. This two-tier arrangement is also found in buildings where the calligraphy was executed by other scribes; 'Alī-Rezā may have been responsible for the basic design of all these inscriptions. The influence of his style of arrangement can also be found in later Safavid buildings.

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