



## 'ALĪ TABRĪZĪ (CALLIGRAPHER)

'ALĪ or MĪR 'ALĪ TABRĪZĪ, 8th/14th century calligrapher who is often credited with the invention of the *nasta'liq* script. Little is known about his life except that he was a *sayyed* and a contemporary of both Tīmūr (d. 807/1405) and the poet Kamāl Ƙoǰandī (d. 803/1400); he is also said to have been a poet. Modern scholars have been uncertain which of the two Mīr 'Alī Tabrīzīs active in the late 8th/14th century was known as *wāže' al-ašl* (the inventor of the archetype). Most have assumed that it was 'Alī b. Elyās Tabrīzī, the scribe of a manuscript, now in the British Library (Add. 18113) and renowned for its paintings, of Ƙvājū Kermānī's poetry; but M. Bayānī has demonstrated that the Mīr 'Alī in question was 'Alī b. Ḥasan Tabrīzī. This information is given in a colophon written by his most famous student, Ja'far Tabrīzī, who identifies his teacher as Mīr 'Alī b. Ḥasan Tabrīzī. Despite Mīr 'Alī's fame, the sole known extant manuscript by his hand appears to be a copy of Neẓāmī's *Ƙosrow o Šīrīn* now in the Freer Gallery, Washington. In the damaged colophon, of which the date is illegible, the scribe gives his name as 'Alī b. Ḥasan Solṭānī and the place of transcription as Tabrīz. It is not known for whom 'Alī b. Ḥasan prepared this manuscript, but his calligraphic tradition was perpetuated by scribes working in Herat for the Timurids. Ja'far Tabrīzī, also known as Bāysonǰorī, wrote in a style closely analogous to that of Mīr 'Alī, as did his contemporary Aẓhar Solṭānī. This canon of proportion was also transmitted to their students and other later scribes. The high regard of Herat calligraphers for the writing of Mīr 'Alī can be seen from the didactic poem on calligraphy composed by Solṭān-'Alī Mašhadī (d. 926/1529); he not only credits Mīr 'Alī with the invention of *nasta'liq*, but claims that the latter was skilled in "all styles of



writing,” adding that both his calligraphy and his verse were notable for their equilibrium. The respect of Herat calligraphers for Mīr ‘Alī’s work continued into the 10th/16th century. Mīr ‘Alī Heravī (d. 951/1554-55), a scribe active in Herat, Mašhad, and Bukhara, copied Mīr ‘Alī’s works and praised him in his own essay on calligraphy, *Madad al-koṭūṭ*. Indeed ‘Alī Heravī’s manner of writing small-scale *nasta’līq* bears a striking resemblance to the hand of ‘Alī Tabrīzī; his use of Mīr ‘Alī’s canon of proportion transmitted it to later generations.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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