



ĀQĀ TABRĪZĪ

ĀQĀ TABRĪZĪ, MĪRZĀ, 19th-century civil servant and writer, whose chief claim to notice is the authorship of four comedies for long erroneously attributed to Mīrzā Malkom Khan. Little is known of his life. In a letter written in 1288/1871 to Mīrzā [Fath-ʿAlī Ākūndzāda](#)—the source of his dramaturgical inspiration—he says that he was born to one Mīrzā Mahdī Monšī-bāšī in Tabrīz, where he conceived an early interest in learning French and Russian. He states further that “after serving for a number of years at the royal teachers’ training college (? *moʿallem-kāna-ye pādešāhī*) and other posts in Baghdad and Istanbul . . . I have now been working for almost seven years as first secretary (*monšī-e awwal*) at the French Embassy in Tehran” (text of letter contained in Ākūndzāda, *Alefbā-ye jadīd wa maktūbāt*, eds. Ḥ. Moḥammadzāda and Ḥ. Ārāslī, Baku, 1963, pp. 389-90). Mīrzā Āqā Tabrīzī was working as a civil servant in Khorasan in 1262/1846 and spent the years 1853-58 as an interpreter and instructor in French at the Dār al-Fonūn (F. Ādamīyat, *Amīr(-e) Kabīr wa Īrān*, 5th ed., Tehran, 1356 Š./1977, pp. 362, 365, 379). His posts in Istanbul and Baghdad are said to have been in conjunction with the appointment of Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Mošīr-al-dawla as Iranian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (Ḥ. Šadīq, *Panʿ namāyeš-nāma-ye Mīrzā Āqā Tabrīzī*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1356 Š./1977, intro., p. 21). Mīrzā Āqā Tabrīzī appears to have had no experience of European travel; otherwise he would surely have had some understanding of the structure and functioning of a theater, something clearly lacking in his plays.

He appears first to have considered translating Ākūndzāda’s plays from Azeri



Turkish into Persian, at a time when Jalāl-al-dīn Mīrzā was casting about for a translator, at the behest of Ākūndzāda. Ultimately he decided however to attempt an original composition in Persian, imitating the works of Ākūndzāda, in order to offer “specimens of this new genre to the Iranians.” This attempt—which must have taken place in about 1288/1871, shortly before he wrote the letter to Ākūndzāda quoted above—resulted in the first plays written in Persian roughly along Western lines. The plays, which should strictly be designated as farces rather than comedies, were: *Sargozašt-e Ašraf Kān . . . dar ayyām-e tawaqqof-e ū dar Tehrān* (The story of Ašraf Khan during the days of his sojourn in Tehran); *Ṭarīqa-ye hokūmat-e Zamān Kān-e Borūjerdī* (The method of government of Zamān Khan of Borūjerd); *Ḥekāyat-e Karbalā raftan-e Šāhqolī Mīrzā . . .* (The story of Šāhqolī Mīrzā’s journey to Karbalā . . .); *‘Āseq šodan-e Āqā Hāšem* (Āqā Hāšem falls in love); and *Ḥājjī Moršed Kīmīāgur* (Ḥājjī Moršed the alchemist).

Following the example of Ākūndzāda, Mīrzā Āqā Tabrizī conceived of his plays as a means of social criticism and reform, but he was a far less talented playwright than his preceptor. Numerous features of his plays make them, indeed, impossible to stage, prompting Ākūndzāda to remark, in a friendly but frankly critical letter: “these plays are more for reading than for putting on the stage” (letter quoted by H. Şadiq, op. cit., intro., p. 20). Ākūndzāda also disapproved of the crude and even obscene episodes featured in some of the plays, notably *Ḥekāyat-e Karbalā raftan-e Šāhqolī Mīrzā*, which he thought should be burned as completely irredeemable. The romantic and optimistic elements which serve to offset the severity of Ākūndzāda’s critical purpose in his comedies are totally lacking in the farces written by Mīrzā Āqā Tabrizī; he presents instead totally corrupt characters who are at the mercy of an utterly degenerate environment and incapable of the slightest positive development. He ignored all suggestions by Ākūndzāda (made in the same critical letter) to bring the plays more into conformity with the spirit and style of his own works.

The first publication of the plays took place in the Tabriz newspaper *Etteḥād* in 1326/1908, but only one of them—*Sargozašt-e Ašraf Kān*—had been serialized in its entirety before the royalist coup d’état against the Constitution resulted in the closing down of the newspaper. This publication was not accompanied by any mention of the author’s identity. In 1340 Š./1921-22, three of the plays were published in Berlin by Kāzemzāda Īrānšahr with their authorship attributed to the celebrated diplomat and essayist, Mīrzā Malkom Khan. The



reason for this false attribution is not apparent, although it may go back to the text belonging to Baron Friedrich Rosen, a diplomat who had spent a number of years in Iran, that was used by Īrānšahr. For many years thereafter the plays were thought to have been written by Malkom Khan, and translations of various of the plays made into Russian (by Y. A. Eingorn in 1927), French (by A. Bricteux in 1933), Danish (by A. Christensen in 1933), and Italian (by G. Scarcia in 1967), all identified him as the author. The matter was however clarified in 1956 by two Azarbaijani scholars who basing themselves on material in the Ākūndzāda archive in Baku clearly established Mīrzā Āqā Tabrīzī as the author (see A. E. Ibrahimov and H. Mämmädzadä, “Mīrzā Mälkümkhana Aid Hesab Ādilān Pyeslārin Āsl Müällifi Haggīnda,” *Nizami Ađına Ādäbiyat vā Dil Institutunun Āsārlāri (Ādäbiyat Seriyası)* 9, 1956. Their findings were confirmed by Sa‘īd Nafīsī, who in the course of his research on Mīrzā Āqā Tabrīzī discovered a previously unknown autograph work—*Resāla-ye aklāqīya* (Treatise on ethics), dated 1291/1874—by the same author in the library of Tehran University (see Guseini Abul’fas, “Eshcho raz ob avtore pervykh persidskikh p’es,” *Narody Azii i Afriki* 6, 1965, pp. 142-45).

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