



‘AQD-NĀMA

‘AQD-NĀMA, contract, now specifically marriage contract; synonyms, *qabāla-ye ezdewāġ*, *paymān-nāma*. Marriage contracts belong to the class of Islamic legal deeds or certificates such as *qabāla* (deed of purchase), *wakālat-nāma* (power of attorney), or *waqf-nāma* (deed of endowment) and, on a more general level, relate to firmans, and official letters (*dast-kaṭṭ*). However, the wide variety of scripts and different colored inks as well as a varied number of painted, gilded and, later, stenciled designs distinguish them from their plainer legal counterparts. Most extant marriage contracts date from the last two centuries with a few examples belonging to the 18th century.

The text begins with a prologue containing an invocation to God, and appropriate verses from the Qur’ān or the Hadith. Many contracts begin with the verse “He is the one who brings hearts together” (*howo al-mo’allem bayn al-qolūb*), then follows the main part of the text with the marriage proposal proper containing the names and titles of the bride and groom, their respective genealogies and places of residence, many references to the bride’s purity, and a precise enumeration of all the elements of the *mahrīya*, i.e., the marriage settlement provided by the groom without which the marriage would be invalid. This might consist of as little as a lump of sugar or as much as a large sum of cash, lands, houses, slaves, household items, or even sheep, depending on the social status of the participants. Curiously the offer of marriage (*ījād*) comes from the bride and its acceptance (*qabūl*) from the groom. The agreement is attested to by witnesses whose signatures and seals appear on the document, which is dated at the bottom.



The documents are usually executed on single rectangular sheets of paper, or cloth in exceptional cases, varying in size from book folio (ca. 30×20 cm) up to a meter or more in length and 80-90 cm in width. From the mid-19th century onwards, contracts, in the shape of booklets, sometimes with elaborate lacquer, velvet, or plain leather covers begin to appear. The text is situated in a long central panel, sometimes asymmetrically placed, so as to allow for extensive witness signatures, seals and later amendments. The panel is often surmounted by a richly decorated upper section (*sar lawḥ*) with arabesque, floral or geometric designs, often continued in the spaces to the right. Other decorative devices include roundels (*šamsa*), calligraphic monograms (*toḡrā*), calligraphic birds (*morḡ-e besmallāh*), escutcheons, vases with flowers, birds and flowers (*gol o botta*), paisley leaf designs, and arabesque rinceaux. The script is always cursive, the most popular being *nasta'liq* (plain and *šekasta*), *reqā'*, and *tolt*; *nask* and *ta'liq* are less frequent.

Eighteenth and early nineteenth century contracts tend to be finer in design and execution, whereas later 19th century examples are more colorful, larger in scale and increasingly carelessly executed. However, even the later examples show a great vigor in the design, originality in the organization of the text, and mastery of the decorative possibilities of the script that distinguish these works of art from any other document executed in the same period. Though little used as source material for Iranian history, these documents provide much interesting information about marriage customs, genealogies, land and weight measurements, and details of Iranian domestic life.

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For the use of the term as contract see Ḥasan b. Moḥammad Qomī, *Ketāb-e tāriḳ-e Qom*, Pers. tr. Ḥasan b. ‘Alī Qomī, ed.

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