



BEHZĀD, ḤOSAYN

BEHZĀD, ḤOSAYN (1273/1894-1347 Š./1968), lacquer artist, painter, and book illustrator. Born in Tehran, he was the son of Mīrzā Fażl-Allāh Eşfahānī, painter and penbox maker and grandson of Mīrzā Loṭf-Allāh Wā‘eż, a religious orator in Shiraz who had moved to Tehran in the late 13th/19th century.

After a brief stay in the Šaraf-e Możaffar school Behzād was apprenticed to Āqā Mollā ‘Alī Qalamdānsāz and later to Ḥasan Āqā Peykarneḡār, painters who had workshops in the *bāzār*. There he learned his craft, specializing in copies of the late Timurid and Safavid styles. Eventually he opened his own workshop, first in the Kāravānsarā-ye Ḥājī Raḡīm Khan and then in the vicinity of Šams-al-‘Emāra. Later he worked in partnership with Mīrzā Ġolām-Ḥosayn Khan Mīnāsāzbāšī in his workshop in the goldsmith’s section of the *bāzār*.

It is in this period that he was commissioned to illustrate an old manuscript of Neżāmī’s *Ḳamsa*, which like many other works of Behzād’s was eventually sold to a Western museum or collector as an authentic work of the Safavid period (Mīrbahā, p. 117). In his autobiography Behzād claims that this *Ḳamsa* was commissioned by Fotūḡ-al-Salṡana and eventually sold by him to the British Museum. There it was seen by a number of Persian dealers and scholars, including Dr. Bahrāmī, Leon Gevorkian and Āqā Mīrzā ‘Alī-Aşḡar ‘Atīqačī. Other patrons and dealers he produced Safavid-style works for in this period include Prince Arfa‘-al-Dawla, ‘Abd-Allāh Khan Raḡīmzāda, Rabenou, and others less well known (Mīrbahā, pp. 117-26). In 1297/1918 he married ‘Azīza Ḳānom, by whom he had one son, Parvīz. He was an opium addict.



Behzād continued to work in the Safavid revival style, as did many of his contemporaries, to respond to the rising demand for Persian miniatures by foreigners. In 1314 Š./1935, he traveled to Paris and lived there for thirteen months. There he studied whatever Oriental and Islamic manuscripts he could find in the Louvre and Musée Guimet. This period was decisive in the formation of a newer, more personal style, by which Behzād is mainly known. It is a simplified version of the Safavid style, sometimes easel painting size, in which certain elements of Western painting and esthetics are incorporated more or less successfully. His most important work on his return from Europe was the creation of fifty miniatures for an illustrated copy of ‘Omar Kayyām published by Ḥ.-‘A. Esfandiārī (see bibl.), who had supported him for a number of years, as ‘Alī Jalālī in Tehran had done before him. In 1325 Š./1946 he became an employee of the Office of Archeological Works (Edāra-ye Bāstān-šenāsī) and subsequently taught at the High Schools of Fine Arts (Honarestān-e Honarhā-ye Zibā-ye Pesarān o Doḡtarān). He participated in many exhibitions at home and abroad (often of a semipolitical or official nature) and presented a one-man retrospective exhibition at the Īrān-e Bāstān Museum in Tehran on the occasion of the millenary of Ebn Sīnā. In 1333 Š./1954 a selection of his works was on display in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Tehran.

At the age of sixty-five he was voted a special pension by the Parliament (1338 Š./1959) and in 1347 Š./1968, three months before his death he was awarded the honorary title of *ostād* (master) by the High School of Decorative Arts.

A popular figure with Iranian writers, poets, and collectors, Behzād was perhaps the chief representative and advocate of the traditional school of painting in Iran in the 14th/20th century, in spite of his claims of having developed a true Iranian national style comparable to modern Western art.

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