



BEHZĀD, KAMĀL-AL-DĪN

BEHZĀD, KAMĀL-AL-DĪN, master painter, proverbial for his skill, active in Herat during the reign of the Timurid Ḥosayn Bāyqarā (875-912/1470-1506). Behzād's name has become synonymous with the high level of artistic skill displayed by the painters of this period, although the precise nature of his personal contribution is a matter of conjecture. Several manuscript illustrations and numerous single paintings have been ascribed to his hand but only a few of these are widely accepted as his work. Foremost are the illustrations in a *Būstān* manuscript of Sa'dī preserved in the National Library of Egypt in Cairo.

The most reliable sources of information are probably the persons directly connected with Herat such as the historian K̄vāndamīr, the Mughal ruler Bābor, and the historian Mīrzā Ḥaydar Dūglāt. Authors connected with the Safavid dynasty such as Dūst-Moḥammad, Qāzī Aḥmad Qomī, and Eskandar Beg Monšī are also generally reliable. Less credence should be given to statements by Ottoman or Mughal authors whose understanding of Behzād was distorted by the considerable mythology that evolved around him and his work.

No author gives a coherent biography of Behzād, but certain facts about his life can be gleaned from the first two groups of sources. The Herat authors stress that Behzād was employed first by Mīr 'Alī-Šīr Navā'ī and then by Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā. In both instances Behzād worked as a subordinate of Rūḥ-Allāh Mīrak Naqqāš, who directed the workshop first of Mīr 'Alī-Šīr and then of Sultan Ḥosayn. Dūst-Moḥammad and Qāzī Aḥmad provide further details



about both Behzād and Mīrak Naqqāš. Qāzī Aḥmad stresses the close personal ties between the two, stating that after Behzād was orphaned as a youth he was reared and trained by Mīrak. Dūst-Moḥammad adds that Mīrak's full name was Amīr Rūḥ-Allāh and that he belonged to a family of *sayyeds* known as bowmakers, although Mīrak himself was particularly renowned as a calligrapher. No author suggests that Behzād and Mīrak were related or mentions how the two became acquainted. Behzād evidently had at least two siblings because their descendants are said to have been his students. The course of Behzād's life after the demise of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā in 1506 is poorly documented. Bābor links him with the patronage of Moḥammad Šaybānī (Šaybak) Khan, the ruler of Herat between 1507 and 1510.

Behzād probably spent the last years of his life in Tabrīz, where he was employed at the Safavid court. He must have moved there with his close relatives because his nephew, the calligrapher Rostam-ʿAlī, is known to have been trained at Tabrīz, and the same is implied of his grandnephews Moḥebb-ʿAlī and Moẓaffar-ʿAlī, both of whom were painters.

The date and circumstances surrounding Behzād's move to Tabrīz are unknown. A decree in the name of Shah Esmāʿīl and dated to 928/1522 appointing Behzād to head his manuscript workshop is often cited as evidence of Behzād's connection with that ruler. However, that document is preserved in a copy of K̄vādamīr's *Nāma-ye nāmī* (Bib. Nat. Ms Suppl. Pers. 1842), a collection of examples of epistolary style dated on the basis of a chronogram to 925/1519. This chronological discrepancy calls into question the authenticity of the decree. Furthermore, Safavid authors such as Dūst-Moḥammad, Eskandar Beg, and Qāzī Aḥmad Qomī specify that Behzād was employed by Shah Ṭahmāsb but make no mention of a link to Shah Esmāʿīl. Qāzī Aḥmad specifies that Behzād arrived in Tabrīz at a time when Shah Ṭahmāsb's library was already established, and its director, Solṭān-Moḥammad, was instructing the ruler in painting. Aside from the decree, the most commonly cited evidence for Behzād's association with Shah Esmāʿīl is an anecdote in *Manāqeb-e honarvarān* composed by the Ottoman scholar Moṣṭafā-ʿAlī of Gallipoli in 995/1587. He describes how Behzād and the calligrapher Šāh Maḥmūd Nīšāpūrī accompanied Shah Esmāʿīl to the battlefield at Čālderān and were hidden by him in a cave because he feared for their safety in the event of an Ottoman victory. This anecdote is coupled with prophecies of the Ottoman victory, which casts doubt on its historicity. Other statements by Moṣṭafā-ʿAlī demonstrate that for him Behzād was a mythic figure to be invoked in vague



superlatives.

Little is known of Behzād's activities in Tabrīz at the Safavid court. Qāzī Aḥmad mentions a volume of Neẓāmī's *Ḳamsa* copied by Šāh Maḥmūd Nīšāpūrī that was illustrated by Behzād. Dūst-Moḥammad adds that Behzād died in Ṭahmāsb's service and was buried in Tabrīz alongside Shaikh Kamāl Ḳojandī. A chronogram gives the date of Behzād's death as 935/1535-36.

Evaluations of Behzād's importance as a painter also show a considerable range of opinion. Ḳvāndamīr's *Ḳolāṣat al-aḳbār* composed in 905/1499-1500, which describes events until 875/1471, gives a glimpse of Behzād's status in Herat. He mentions Behzād's support first by Mīr 'Alī-Šīr and then Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā and praises his work. However, he does not stress Behzād's superiority over his contemporaries. Indeed his list of painters begins with Mīrak Naqqāš, who thus is probably the leading artist of the time, and his greatest praise is reserved for Behzād's contemporary Qāsem-'Alī. Statements by Mīrzā Ḥaydar Dūglāt and Bābor also demonstrate that during the 9th/15th century at Herat Behzād was regarded as only one of several skilled painters active in the circles of 'Alī-Šīr and Sultan Ḥosayn. Some evidently preferred the work of Šāh Moẓaffar or Qāsem-'Alī to that of Behzād.

The evaluation of Behzād as an artist of superlative achievement first appears during the Safavid period. Typically, authors praise him in glowing but very general terms and compare his skill to that of Mānī, the paragon of painting in Persian literature. In the revised version of his historical text, *Ḥabīb al-sīar*, completed in 930/1524, Ḳvāndamīr is more lavish in his praise of Behzād, whom he compares to Mānī and says that his skill surpasses that of all other artists. Behzād is also linked to Mānī and extolled as the "model of painters" in the decree mentioned above ascribed to Shah Esmā'īl which carries a date of 928/1522. Other Safavid authors echo these sentiments.

The paintings of Behzād. Behzād's illustrations for a *Būstān* of Sa'dī made for the library of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā, with a text colophon of 893/1488, provide an indication of the nature of his accomplishments. The manuscript contains a double-page frontispiece and four illustrations. Behzād's signatures are either incorporated into architectural inscriptions or placed inconspicuously on an object in the painting. Two of the paintings are dated to 894/1488-89. All of the paintings contain text panels that have been carefully integrated into the overall scheme of the pages suggesting that Behzād and the calligrapher, Solṭān-'Alī Kāteb, must have worked closely together. The paint-



ings are noteworthy for their carefully balanced compositions that achieve a clarity of spatial definition unusual for Persian painting. The figures, although created as idealized types rather than idiosyncratic individuals, often convey a sense of mood and personality more subtle and expressive than is customary in Persian manuscripts. Moreover, the paintings show the precise drawing and control in execution that is the hallmark of 9th/15th-century Herat painting.

Similar stylistic traits are evident in paintings contained in several other manuscripts produced in Herat during the last quarter of the 9th/15th century. I. Stchoukine has compiled a record of the opinions of various scholars on this question. Manuscripts frequently linked to Behzād are a copy of the *Zafar-nāma* of Yazdī dated to 872/1468 (in the Johns Hopkins University Library), the 888/1483 manuscript of ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manteq al-ṭayr* in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, the 890/1485 copy of ‘Alī-Šīr Navā’ī’s *Ḳamsa* divided between the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the John Rylands Library, Manchester, and two copies of Neẓāmī’s *Ḳamsa* in the British Library, Add. 25900 where paintings were added to a text copied in 846/1442, and Or. 6810 dated to 900/1495.

During the 10th/16th century collectors were particularly anxious to include paintings by Behzād in their *moraqqa’as* or albums. Both Ḳvāndamīr and Qāzī Aḥmad mention albums of this kind. A further example is provided by an anthology of calligraphic specimens dated to 930/1524 now in the Freer Gallery, Washington (no. 44.48). It opens with two “heirlooms,” a page of calligraphy by the mid-9th/15th-century calligrapher Shaikh Maḥmūd, and a single painting by Behzād who is extolled as “the sun of the zenith of skill” in the manuscript’s preface. This *šamsa* or circular painting shows two figures—a youth and an old man—in a landscape. The youth wears a type of turban usually associated with the Uzbeks, so that this painting may have been produced at Herat during the interlude of Uzbek domination (913-16/1507-10). Another painting associated with Behzād’s later years is preserved in an album prepared for the Mughal ruler Jahāngīr. It shows two fighting camels and their keepers in a broadly conceived hillside covered with stones, a detail that becomes a mannerism in painters active in Herat and Bukhara during the first half of the 10th/16th century. An old man watches the scene from the upper left. An inscription on the painting states that Behzād executed it during his seventieth year. Unfortunately his birth date is unknown. The painting’s execution places it within the 10th/16th century but the circumstances that led to its creation are unknown.

The traits of precision in pattern, calligraphy, and design is an important



legacy of Behzād's style and is clearly evident in the work of Šaykzāda, a painter active in Herat, Tabrīz, and Bukhara during the first half of the 10th/16th century. The Ottoman historian Moṣṭafā-'Alī states that Šaykzāda was a student of Behzād. From Šaykzāda and his contemporaries this style passed to the painters of Bukhara where it became increasingly rigid and lifeless.

Paintings signed by or attributed to Behzād were also an important source of inspiration for artists in Mughal India. Even though Bābor, the founder of the dynasty, did not display great personal enthusiasm for Behzād's work, his successors came to view the latter as the epitome of the Persian tradition. Several of the manuscripts now thought to contain paintings by Behzād were owned by the Mughal emperors Akbar, Jahāngīr, and Šāh-Jahān. An examination of Mughal painting shows that some compositions by Behzād were used as models by artists at the Mughal court. Particularly important are the Baltimore *Zafar-nāma*, the British Library NeẓāmīOr. 6810, and the Rothschild Collection *Golestān* of 991/1486.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources: Ẓahīr-al-Dīn Moḥammad Bābor, *Bābor-nāma*, tr. A. S. Beveridge, London, 1922, pp. 272, 291, 329.

Dūst-Moḥammad b. Solaymān Heravī, *A Treatise on Painters and Calligraphists*, Lahore, 1936, p. 29. Eskandar Beg, I, p. 174.

Nūr-al-Dīn Moḥammad Jahāngīr, *Tūzok-e jahāngīrī* II, p. 116.

Ḳvāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-sīar* (Tehran) IV, p. 362.

Idem, *Faṣl-ī az Ḳolāṣat al-aḳbār*, Kabul, 1345 Š./1966, pp. 63-64.

Idem, *Makārem al-aḳlāq*, ed. T. Ganjei, Cambridge, 1979, p. x.

Moṣṭafā-'Alī, *Hattatların ve kitab sanatçılarının destanları (Menakib-i Hunervarān)*, ed. M. Curbur, Ankara, 1982, pp. 21, 73, 112, 114, 116, 118.



Qāzī Aḥmad, *Golestān-e honar*, pp. 87, 100, 133-37, 141; tr. Minorsky, pp. 135, 147, 159, 179-81, 183, 186.

M. Qazvīnī and L. Bouvat, “Deux documents inédits relatifs à Behzad,” *Revue du monde musulman* 26, 1914, pp. 14-160.

Secondary sources: T. W. Arnold, *Bihzad and His Paintings in the Zafar-namah Ms.*, London, 1930.

L. Binyon, V. S. Wilkinson, and B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, London, 1933, pp. 81-92, 105-06, 109-12, 114-16, 186, 190-91, nos. 77, 78, 81-84, 88, 89, 94.

A. Sakisian, *La miniature persane*, Paris, 1929, pp. 62-80, 103-05, and passim.

I. Stchoukine, *Miniatures persanes*, Paris, 1954, pp. 19-27, 68-86, pls. 72-73, 76-88.

(Priscilla Soucek)