



EBRĀHĪM ṬEHRĀNĪ

EBRĀHĪM ṬEHRĀNĪ, also known as *Mīrzā ‘Amū*, a calligrapher specializing in the *nasta‘līq* script. One of the principal students of *Mīrzā Ġolām-Rezā Eṣfahānī* (d. 1307/1889-90), he was active during the reign of *Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah Qājār* (r. 1264-1313/1848-96). Although some albums of his calligraphy are also known, *Ebrāhīm* is chiefly remembered as the designer of architectural inscriptions for religious structures in Tehran, Ray, and Qom. Dated examples of his work range from 1291/1874 to 1308/1890-91.

Ebrāhīm’s career provides insight into the role of calligraphy in architecture during the reign of *Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah* as well as into broader questions of this period’s architectural patronage. He worked for the Shah as well as for other high court officials and participated in the decoration of the *Shah ‘Abd-al-‘Azīm* complex and the shrine of *Ebn Bābawayh/Bābūya*, both in Ray, the shrine of *Fāṭema* in Qom, and the *Sepahsālār madrasa* in Tehran (*Bayānī, Košnevisān* I, pp. 18-19; *Rāhjīrī*, pp. 26-27).

Inscriptions designed by *Ebrāhīm Ṭehrānī* exemplify the increasing prominence of *nasta‘līq* script in architectural epigraphy during the Qajar period (*Hillenbrandt*, p. 358). At Qom he prepared an inscription for the north *ayvān* of the *ṣaḥn-e ‘aṭīq* of the shrine of *Fāṭema*. Its text is a Persian poem with an internal date of 1301/1883-84, which commemorates *Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah’s* financing of repairs to this *ayvān* and its *moqarnas* to embellish the sanctuary courtyard (*Modarresī*, I, pp. 73-74, pl. 42; *Fayẓ*, I, pp. 510-12, 514). Inscriptions on silver door panels in the shrine of *Fāṭema* at Qom dated to 1310/1892-93 and 1314/1896-97, which *Mahdī Bayānī* credits to *Ebrāhīm Ṭehrānī*, are



apparently by a different calligrapher named Mīrzā Moḥammad-Ebrāhīm Fayz Naqqāš-bāšī Qomī (Bayānī, *Košnevīsān* I, no. 32; Fayz, I, pp. 660-63).

Both Ebrāhīm's earliest known architectural inscription dated to 1291/1874 and his latest dated to 1308/1890-91 are found on buildings belonging to the shrine complex of Shah 'Abd-al-'Azīm in Ray, the burial site of several Alids, which was the object of benefactions by Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah and his high officials (Karīmān, I, pp. 384-99; Moṣṭafawī, I, pp. 148-61, 291-94, 373-75). Ebrāhīm's first inscription, described by Mehdī Bayānī as his masterpiece, was on the *ayvān* of the shrine of Ḥamza b. Mūsā al-Kāẓem, a structure of Safavid origin which Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah refurbished several times. He had redecorated its dome in 1273/1856-57 and repaired the pierced metal screen (*ẓarīḥ*) around its cenotaph in 1283/1866-67. Then in 1291/1874, he ordered its *ayvān* to be decorated with mirror-work (*ā'īna-kārī*). This project was entrusted to one of his key officials, Dūst Moḥammad Khan Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek, who was overseer of royal workshops as well as treasurer and head of the mint (Moṣṭafawī, I, p. 161; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* I, pp. 493-500). Finally, in 1304/1886-87, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah ordered the construction of a shrine over the graves of two Alids, Ṭāher and his son Moṭahhar, descendants of the fourth imam, 'Alī b. Ḥosayn. Ebrāhīm Ṭehrānī provided inscriptions for the entrance portal of this structure (Karīmān, I, pp. 397-98; Moṣṭafawī, I, p. 161; Bayānī, *Košnevīsān* I, p. 19).

A series of Koranic excerpts executed by Ebrāhīm Ṭehrānī in *nasta'liq* script surrounds the courtyard portico of the Ebn Bābūya shrine. The main structure dates from the period of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah Qājār, but it has later additions. Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah financed repairs of a nearby tomb-tower from the Saljuq period known as the Borj-e Ṭoḡrol (q.v.) in 1301/1883-84, and Ebrāhīm's inscription may be of similar date. Ebrāhīm may also have had a personal interest in this sanctuary, which served as the burial place of his teacher, Ġolām-Rezā Eṣfahānī (Karīmān, I, pp. 424-26; Moṣṭafawī, I, p. 243; Rāhjīrī, p. 26).

Ebrāhīm Ṭehrānī and Ġolām-Rezā Eṣfahānī collaborated in preparing *nasta'liq* inscriptions for the Sepahsālār Mosque-Madrassa complex in Tehran. Their work is contained in tile revetments dated to 1302/1884-85 prepared by the tile-makers Mahdī and Ṣādeq Kāšānī. Eṣfahānī's calligraphy is found on the complex's entrance portal located on its western side. Ebrāhīm's signature appears on the eastern façade of its courtyard, just below a roof-top pavilion or *goldasta* (Saḥāb, p. 40, n. 1, p. 46, no. 1; Moṣṭafawī, I, p. 97).



It is noteworthy that in both the Ebn Bābūya shrine and the Sepahsālār complex Ebrāhīm uses *nasta'liq* calligraphy to execute religious texts in Arabic. Since the Safavid period *nasta'liq* has been used in architectural epigraphy to transcribe Persian poetry and is hence often arranged in a series of cartouches encapsulating each verse or hemistich, and a similar scheme is also used for Arabic poetry. Citations from the Qur'ān, Hadith, or foundation inscriptions were, however, customarily written in *tolṭ* (for examples see Honarfar, *Esfahān*, pp. 685-700). Ebrāhīm Ṭehrānī's use of *nasta'liq* thus represents a broadening of the scope of its application to architecture.

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