



# FORGERIES I. INTRODUCTION

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**FORGERIES** of art objects and manuscripts.

## i. INTRODUCTION

Forgeries have had a long and varied history, occurring in such diverse fields as genealogies, official documents and letters, title deeds, false literary attributions, and manuscripts and paintings.

*Fabricated genealogies.* Early in the Islamic era, Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī (see [BĪRŪNĪ](#), [ABŪ RAYḤĀN](#)) described in his *al-Aṭār al-bāqīa* (pp. 36-42, tr. Sachau, pp. 43-51) how emergent Islamic rulers of Persia had forged their lineage and invented connections with previous dynasties in order to affirm their own legitimacy (Bosworth, pp. 51-62). Centuries later, the Safavids (1501-1694) continued the same practice by fabricating an expanded genealogy. This fabrication first appeared in a revised version of Ebn Bazzāz's (q.v.) *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā'*, the hagiographic account of Shaikh Ṣafī-al-Dīn Ardabīlī, the progenitor of the Safavids (1254-1334). According to this version, the dynasty could claim descent from the Prophet himself by tracing back its descent to Mūsā al-Kāẓem, the seventh Shi'ite imam (Kasrawī, pp. 65-66; Savory, pp. 3-4).

*Forged documents.* While unwarranted dynastic claims increased the aura of a ruler, a faked association with a powerful monarch could also project power and prestige for the claimant. In May 1403, Msgr. John, the Archbishop of Solṭānīya, bluffed his way into the court of Charles VI of France (r. 1380-1422)



while posing as an envoy from Tamerlane, whose victory over the Ottoman Sultan Bāyazīd I at Ankara in 1402 had made him highly popular in Christian Europe. From Paris, the Archbishop went to England, Venice, Hungary and Constantinople, at each stage gathering letters of recommendation and ambassadorial missions for his next visit. He was ultimately rewarded with the title of “Archbishop of the Entire Orient,” bestowed on him by the pope (Kehren, pp. 45-52). His main device for winning fame and fortune was a forged letter supposedly from Tamerlane with a translation by John himself. The authenticity of this letter, kept at the French royal archives and now preserved at the National archives in Paris (Archives nationale, AE/III/204) has only been questioned recently (Soudavar, forthcoming).

*Pseudepigraphy.* The urge to create literary forgeries, i.e., works attributed to famous writers or established authorities but not by them, can stem from many sources and underlying reasons. The desire to serve an ideology, or to mock or confound experts or, in modern times, to secure a publisher, can all serve as contributing factors. In the modern period documents have sometimes been fabricated to give substance to conspiracy theories, as in the case of the “Dolgorukov Memoirs” (q.v.) which, in spite of being a blatant forgery, has been reprinted several times and translated into Arabic (MacEoin, p. 171). In the pre-Mongol era, the fear of religious persecution perhaps caused controversial ideas to be expressed through works falsely attributed to prestigious scholars of the past. Such may be the case of the second part of *Naṣīḥat al-molūk* attributed to the famous Moḥammad Ġazālī, which rests on ideas and concepts diametrically opposed to those expressed in uncontested works of the author (Homāī’s introduction to Ġazālī, pp. 72-80; Crone, p. 168). However, this kind of forgery and interpolation, discussed in detail in entries on the texts concerned, lies outside the scope of this article.

*Forged title deeds.* The examples cited so far have been concerned mostly with promotion and fostering of social status or expression of politico-religious ideas. In most other instances, however, financial gain provided the sole motive. In the chaotic aftermath of the Mongol invasions, for example, ownership of land became a matter of dispute and contention. With the return of relative calm and prosperity came renewed settlements which could be reclaimed by forged titles. A notorious instance was the Nāz Ḳātūn fiasco and the so-called *Nāz Ḳātūnī* title deeds. The legal and financial imbroglio, which flared up twice, was an outcome of the dubious claims of Amir Čobān to many properties stretching from Qazvīn to Hamadān and Ḳaraḳān which had



supposedly belonged to Nāz Kātūn, the daughter of the amir of Kurdistan. At one stage in this episode, some two hundred documents containing property deeds in her name were allegedly discovered in an old sack when a house was being built. The ramifications of the ensuing changes in property and estate rights provided the peasants of the region with a legal excuse to reject the claims of their existing landlords to the ownership of the lands, and property prices plummeted. The matter was only resolved when Amir Čobān was financially compensated elsewhere and renounced his claims to the lands in the region (*Ḥabīb al-sīar* [Tehran] III, pp. 207-8).

*Forgeries of bibliographic details.* There is a direct supply and demand relationship between forgery and collectors' requirements, particularly those of newly founded libraries. Major libraries never lasted for long in Persian lands; they were often burnt, sacked or looted. But each destruction was followed by the rise to power of a learned vizier or a cultured patron in quest of a new library. The renewed demand for books rekindled forgery. Forgery in books rarely involved an outright creation. The preferred method was to enhance the value of existing manuscripts through a change of authorship or provenance by altering or fabricating colophons on an existing manuscript, or changing ownership notations.

The addition of a signature allegedly by the famous calligrapher Solṭān-'Alī Mašhadī (d. 926/1519) on a sumptuous manuscript of the Turkish *dīvān* of Solṭān-Ḥosayn Bāyqarā was detected by Shah Jahān (r. 1037-68/1628-57) even though a recent sale catalog (*Sotheby's* 1979) failed to point out the discrepancy. Indeed, Shah Jahān had noted on the back of the manuscript, "Although it is inscribed with the name of Mollā Solṭān-'Alī, it is certainly not the Mollā's handwriting, and by all appearances the calligraphy is by the grandfather of Mollā 'Abd-al-Raḥīm" (Soudavar 1992, p. 120).

Much harder to detect was the alteration in the colophon of an early copy of Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī's commentary on Avicenna's *al-Ešārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*. Originally dated 778/1377, the forger had masterfully changed the date to 678/1279 and had tried to conceal his alterations through an elaborate smoke screen. The alterations involved minute scratching of the letter 'ayn of the Arabic word *sab'a me'a* (seven hundred) and the addition of two dots to render *seta me'a* (six hundred), in combination with extensive smudging and smearing in order to divert attention from the main intent (Soudavar, forthcoming).



Books on theology such as the above manuscript constituted the core of a library in the Islamic era and were in high demand. Equally prized were astronomical and astrological works, as the tradition of consulting horoscopes remained strong throughout Persian history. One of the most popular works in this field was ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Ṣūfī’s (291-376/903-86; q.v.) *Ketāb šowar al-kawākeb al-tābeta*, an important copy of which is at the Bodleian Library, Oxford (MS Marsh 144). A Latin inscription by Christianus Ravius, written in 1644 at Constantinople, states that “he supplied the missing parts of the text after having compared it with a more recent copy of the same work,” (Wellesz, pp. 1-2 ). As well as this Latin inscription, there is an inscription added below the colophon which purports to represent the signature of the copier and illustrator of the manuscript. It is dated 400/1009. The signature and date have been accepted by some scholars (but see Brockelmann, *GAL* (Supplement) I, p. 863) as authentic, although stylistically, it belongs to the twelfth century (Soudavar, forthcoming).

*Calligraphy and forgery.* The favorite format for collecting calligraphy and painting in the post Mongol era was the *moraqqa’*, an album in which items of painting or calligraphy were inserted within elaborately decorated pages. In India, the emperor Jahāngīr set a style for *moraqqa’* which was subsequently followed by his son Šāh-Jahān. In their *moraqqa’*s, two pages of painting alternated with two pages of calligraphy by the celebrated Mīr ‘Alī Heravī (d. 951/1544-5, q.v.). As the Mughal imperial *moraqqa’* production expanded, demand for works by Mīr ‘Alī soared and forgers saw an opportunity to fill this demand by producing fakes or adding a “Mīr ‘Alī” signature to existing calligraphy pieces. Although no systematic study of Mīr ‘Alī’s oeuvre has been undertaken, the sheer volume of calligraphy pieces bearing his signature suggests caution in accepting their authenticity. Mīr ‘Alī had begun his career in Herat and spent his later years in Bukhara; his work therefore had to be imported into India. The forger’s task was facilitated by the fact that students of calligraphy repeatedly copied works by renowned masters. Some, like Mīr ‘Alī’s own pupil, Maḥmūd b. Eshāq Šehābī Sīavošānī, unabashedly imitated his work and signature prompting a rebuke from Mīr ‘Alī (Bayānī, *Ḳošnevīsān*, pp. 877-78). Others, like the later master Mīr ‘Emād (see [‘EMĀD ḤASANĪ, MĪR](#)), included their own signature after that of Mīr ‘Alī (Soudavar, 1992, p. 495); in these instances, all that the forger needed to do was to excise the second signature.

While forging pieces of calligraphy was a relatively easy and inexpensive



business, the creation of a whole album required much investment in paper, gold sprinkling and illumination. Yet when the demand was high and talent abundant, such an enterprise was feasible. A case in point is a large formatted album now dispersed among several collections including this author's and the Pozzi collection in the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva (Robinson, items 573-90, pp. 367-77 considered authentic). Richly decorated and beautifully set on gold sprinkled and/or marbled paper, it includes "specimens" of almost all the great sixteenth century masters of *nasta'liq* calligraphy. Although some pieces may be genuine, the majority are not; for a careful investigation would show that the ink and its flow, as well as the paper of most inset pieces, are the same even though signed by supposedly different masters. The style of decoration and the emphasis on sixteenth century artists suggest an early seventeenth century Persian production, either for the local market or for the Ottoman where *nasta'liq* specimens were in high demand.

*Painting and Forgery.* Forgery in painting followed the same path as in calligraphy. At first, signatures of great artists, or spurious attributions, were added to existing paintings in order to enhance their value. But when the market warranted, entire new paintings were created. Responding to a strong demand in the first half of the sixteenth century, a Tabrizī atelier was supplying both the local and the Ottoman market with illustrated manuscripts. Its favorite mode of operation was to add paintings to existing plain manuscripts. The symbol of Safavid religious militancy, the special headgear called *tāj-e ḥaydarī*, was displayed in paintings for the local market but suppressed in those destined for export. As Timurid Herat was held in high esteem by the Ottomans, the non-Safavid works were invariably made with a linkage to Solṭān-Ḥosayn Bāyqarā or a member of his retinue (Soudavar, 1992, p. 118).

For a variety of reasons, the work of the famous painter Reżā 'Abbāsī (d. 1044/1635) proved a blessing for forgers. Firstly, his fame attained such a high level that his works were eagerly sought. Secondly, he signed almost all of his works thus creating a brand-name. Thirdly, a great number of his followers copied his style, leaving behind a large number of practice sheets and imitations to which the forgers could add his signature (Soudavar, 1992, pp. 261-64). The corpus of works bearing Reżā's signature, whether authentic or false, is enormous. Many scholars have attempted to weed out the forgeries, but often the blinding effect of a signature has meant that second rate works are falsely attributed to him. A tinted drawing at the Brooklyn Museum,



referred to as “A Bearded Man and a Cavalier,” has been recently published as an authentic work by Reżā ‘Abbāsī (Canby, p. 135), even though the *nasta‘liq* style of the signatory sentence is different and more mature than his, and the drawing is clearly the work of a forger who had previously copied a painting by Reżā in the same tinted drawing format (Soudavar, 1992, p. 277). Another drawing in the same publication, referred to as “A Youth and a Poet,” (Canby, p. 57), was considered genuine on the basis of Reżā’s signature and the strength of penmanship. But unlike his genuine signature which is usually prominently displayed, the signature here is squeezed into a narrow space in a different calligraphic style, hesitant in execution to the extent that the *alef* of Reżā had to be repeated, and in an ink watered down in comparison with that of the lines in the drawing. The penmanship, though strong at first sight, reveals weaknesses on closer scrutiny. The strokes are bold but uncontrolled. As a result, the silhouette of the bearded poet is anatomically inconsistent: the upper body is elongated while his legs and thighs are short and out of proportion. His left hand is placed high and at such an angle that it does not properly align with the imaginary forearm within the sleeve. In contrast, Reżā had a studied, or perhaps innate, sense of anatomy that even in highly stylized compositions guided his strokes in the creation of well-balanced harmonious figures.

*Incongruent reconstructions.* At the turn of this century the market for Persian paintings and illustrated manuscripts shifted to Europe. Fueled by strong competition among some of the most famous and powerful collectors such as the Rothschilds, and the jewelers Cartier and Vever, Persian paintings commanded a high price despite abundant supply. To further enhance the value of some pieces, they were dismembered and recombined with others. The Paris dealer Georges Demotte for example used the margins of a sumptuous *Farhang-e jahāngīrī* manuscript to embellish the presentation of his stock of Persian and Mughal paintings (Falk, p. 171). The fact that the collectors were mostly interested in the visual aspects of the paintings and uninterested or unaware of their underlying cultural context led to strange and at times calamitous results. The magnificent “great Mongol *Šāh-nāma*” (see “[DEMOTTE](#)” [ŠĀH-NĀMA](#)) was dismembered and its pages sold individually. Moreover, pages with paintings on both sides were split and, in the process, the surrounding text of some miniatures were damaged. To remedy the problem, a plain page of text was layered out in the size of the painting which was then inset there. The incongruent result displayed a painting from an episode of the *Šāh-nāma* from the reign of Manūčehr



surrounded by a text from a later section on Kay ̤osrow (Soudavar, 1992, pp. 190-95). Here, and in many other instances, it is hard to draw a line between deceit and forgery and cultural vandalism.

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