



FORGERIES IV. OF ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS

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Throughout the ages, manuscripts in Arabic script have been forged or tampered with for a variety of reasons. For example, in order to enhance the value of a manuscript, alterations are made to it to prove its antiquity. A dedication is fabricated, the date altered (for antedating the copy) or even an entire colophon with spurious information is added to a manuscript previously without any date, name of copyist or mention of place-name. An example of providing new colophons is a *Dīvān* of Kāqānī now in the British Library (Or. 7942; Meredith-Owens, p. 53; Storey/de Blois V/2, pp. 386-87). The date of this important early manuscript is given as 664 A.H., and 594 A.H., in different places, leading to much confusion and some conjecture among scholars (Storey/de Blois V/2, p. 387, footnote 1). However, according to Mojtabā Mīnovī (1957, p. 457) the manuscript did not have the gilded medallion with an inscription and the date 594 when it belonged to the famous library of Farhād Mīrzā Mo'tamed-al-Dawla. This addition was made later in Istanbul from where the manuscript was sent to London. Another example of partial fabrication for enhancing the value of a manuscript is the copy of the astronomical works of 'Alī b. Moḥammad Qūšcī Samarqandī (d. 879/1474-5) in the Schefer collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Supplément



persan 1393) displaying a fine illuminated *šamsa* frontpiece with a dedicatory note to the “library of Moḥammad [Meḥmed] II.” Unfortunately, it is written on 19th century European paper, while the rest of the manuscript does belong genuinely to the time of Meḥmed II (848-50/1444-46 and 855-86/1451-81), or at the latest, to the reign of Bāyazīd II (886-918/1481-1512).

The urge to discover a lost work is another tempting challenge for the well-informed and seasoned forger. As illustrated manuscripts fetch higher prices, pictures are often added to incomplete texts which are then completed and put on the market. In more crude and blatant cases of forgery, illustrations are painted over the text, creating clear lacunae in the text, thereby making the task of detection relatively easy. Another way of increasing the market price of a book is by presenting it as an autograph or at least as an author’s own copy (as for example in the case of Fārābī’s *Mabādī’ ārā’ ahl al-madīna al-fāzela* discussed below), or as a copy written by some famous calligrapher (like Mīr ‘Alī and others). Many copies are described as “the *dīvān* of some poet by his own hand,” but there are very few autograph copies of Persian *dīvāns* or *kollīyāts*. The specialist is able to detect this kind of forgery by a close inspection of the calligraphic features or the idiosyncrasies of the hand. Seals (*mohrs*), or stamped figures on the bindings, as well as old European (with watermarks) or oriental (with various precise specifications) papers are particularly difficult to imitate. The forger must use scraps from other damaged books for making an acceptable old binding (except for lacquer bindings). On the other hand, the neverending search for finely-executed illustrated Persian manuscripts by collectors world-wide, as well as the need for necessary preservation work, has led to many over-restorations, alterations and even forgeries through the centuries to the present. But, in the case of these highly sophisticated fakes, the forger requires exact models in order to avoid telltale anachronisms and inconsistencies which would inevitably raise questions about the authenticity of the manuscript. A careful codicological study is thus an essential first step in dealing with newly ‘discovered’ finds. It must also be borne in mind that traditional paper is almost impossible to imitate and formulae for traditional ink, gold, and color are difficult to reproduce.

The purpose of some famous ancient forgeries was to establish the antiquity of important documents confirming some political, religious, or ideological status or even linguistic contentions. For example, there is a medieval account of a forged treaty between the Prophet and the Jews of Ḳaybar (Yāqūt, *Odabā’* I, pp.



247-48; Frye, 1974, pp. 106-7), and a modern account of another supposed agreement (*'ahd-nāma*) between 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb and some forty Christian representatives in 40 A.H. (Qazvīnī, 1928, pp. 131-41). An amusing example of a linguistic forgery is related in Abū 'Obayd Jūzjānī's supplement to Avicenna's autobiography recounting how Avicenna had composed three difficult odes and three letters in the style of famous belles-lettrists in order to dupe and rebuke a philologist who had been dismissive of him in the past (Arberry, pp. 20-21; Grohlman, pp. 68-73). Some well-known documents are related to the foundation of a town, or a sanctuary, or to the origin of a ruler's dynasty, etc. In these cases the spurious document may have acquired strong cultural importance as part of a gradual invention of a tradition (e.g. the supposed letter from the Prophet to Kōsraw II, see Frye, 1974, pp. 107-8).

Apart from the examples given above, medieval literature abounds with stories about forgeries, although the term 'forgery' itself may sometimes be a misnomer when dealing with a traditional culture in which imitation was not only the highest form of compliment but also valued as an art in itself. In fraud as in medieval magic, a distinction was made between black and white or licit or illicit categories. Some fraudulent practices were always condemned, as in the case of the astrologer Dānīālī, who inserted fabrications in a *Fāl-nāma* (q.v.) supposedly written by the prophet Dānīāl (see [DĀNĪĀL-E NABĪ](#); Rosenthal, pp. 99-100 for a list of sources).

The most often quoted example of 'benign' forgery is told about the famous calligrapher Ebn al-Bawwāb reproducing, when in charge of the library of the Buyid Bahā'al-Dawla in Shiraz, a missing section (*joz'*) of the Qur'ān originally written by the famous vizier and calligrapher, Ebn Moqla. It describes how he set about making the document look so old and genuine that it could not be distinguished from the other sections (Rice, pp. 7-8; see also p. 29 for a list of five manuscripts falsely attributed to Ebn al-Bawwāb himself).

Variants of the same story are repeated to this day. In a rueful footnote on alterations and plagiarism in his edition of *Čahār maqāla*, Moḥammad Qazvīnī quoted an eminent Persian scholar boasting about his father being unique not only in all sciences and virtues (*jamt'-e 'olūm wa faẓā'el*), but also in having a peculiar gift in which he was unsurpassed, namely that whenever he was given an ancient manuscript with pages missing from any of its parts, he could deftly, in an evening or two, write the missing sections and append it to the book so that even experts on the subject would not be able to distinguish the reconstructed lacunae from the original parts (Neẓāmī 'Arūzī, pp. 172-73).



Qazvīnī's comments are one of the earliest published comments in this century on the question of forgery in Persian studies, whether done for financial gain or not, and on the chaos it brings to the world of scholarship. In a widely discussed article about forgeries of Persian manuscripts, Mojtabā Mīnovī (Mīnovī, 1957, p. 456) juxtaposed Qazvīnī's comments with a direct quotation of a marginalia written by Ḥājj Ḥosayn Āqā Malek, the famous bibliophile, at the end of a copy of a manuscript of a short treatise by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī in his library. Ḥājj Ḥosayn Āqā pointed out that the "the lines in kufic script in this tract are the work of the late Ṣadr-al-Afāzel, and this type of practice (*'amalīyāt*) is very often encountered in books [originating] from him it was purchased from his son Majd-al-Dīn."

The role of this important family of scholars and talented calligraphers, to which should be added Majd-al-Dīn's son, Faḵr-al-Dīn Naṣīrī Amīnī, in relation to a number of forged manuscripts, most notably the two illustrated manuscripts of Kaykāvūs b. Eskandar's *Andarz-nāma* (q.v.) and the *Dīvān* of Amīr Mo'ezzī (see list of forgeries below) remains unclear. Biographical accounts of all three members of the family stress their great erudition and unworldliness (Bāmdād, *Rejāl* III, p. 181; Mošār, *Mo'allefīn* IV, col. 793-94; V, cols. 132-33; Rāhjīrī Gilānī). But in a filial tribute to his father, Faḵr-al-Dīn Naṣīrī himself pointed out that his father's talents were exploited by unscrupulous profiteers who made a fortune by abusing his good nature, and that his father would provide them with all kinds of calligraphy (although with his name and date included) unaware of their ultimate fraudulent intentions. In a footnote to the same account Naṣīrī also referred vaguely to a cache of documents which one of the profiteers had managed to commission his father to write but did not go into detail (Naṣīrī, 1357, p. 237).

The published articles by Richard Nelson Frye and Mojtabā Mīnovī, however, provide itemized lists of forged books and their possible provenance. In *The Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology* (1960), devoted mainly to questions of forgery in Persian art in general and the *Andarz-nāma* in particular, Frye stated that he bought the forged illustrated manuscript of the *Dīvān* of Amīr Mo'ezzī, dated 551/1156, from Naṣīrī for the Houghton Library at Harvard (Frye 1977, p. A/16). In a footnote (p. A/18, footnote 1) in the same published lecture he listed other manuscripts owned by Naṣīrī at the time. The same list of books appear again in a later publication by Frye as examples of recent forgeries (Frye, 1974, p. 109). They include *Resālas* by Avicenna supposedly copied by 'Omar Ḳayyām



in 475/1082; *Ketāb-al-Edrīs*, allegedly written during the reign of ‘Azod-al-Dawla, ca 372/982; the manuscript of the *Robā’īyāt* of ‘Omar Kayyām published in Moscow in 1959; as well as a manuscript in kufic script of Fārābī’s *Mabāde’ āra’ ahl al-madīna al-fāẓela* (discussed below).

In a further article on forgeries, written in 1342 Š/1964, Mīnovī too supplied a list of forgeries which had appeared in the market “in the last twenty years” and “sold for vast sums of money” (p. 238). Some items on his list are identical with those mentioned by Frye and include (pp. 238-40) the following:

The already mentioned illustrated manuscript of *Andarz-nāma* which had been sold in 1953 in two halves, to two different buyers. The question of the authenticity of the manuscript was, as already mentioned, the main theme of the Fourth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology, April 24-May 3, 1960. Even at this late stage, and in spite of strong literary, historical and philological evidence presented by some participants, at least one expert in fine arts still maintained that the manuscript might be genuine (Grabar, p. A/65).

The *Me’rāj-nāma*, attributed to Avicenna and dated 584/1188-89, and supposedly in Faḡr-al-Dīn Rāzī’s hand. The manuscript was in the collection of Maḥdī Bayānī. A facsimile edition was published in Tehran by *Anjoman-e dūstdārān-e ketāb*.

Fārābī’s *Mabāde’ āra’ ahl al-madīna al-fāẓela*. According to Mīnovī (1957, p. 455), there was some publicity at the International Congress of Orientalists held in Cambridge in 1954 about the existence of an autograph of this manuscript. Some photographs of the manuscript were presented and the price was set at ten thousand pounds sterling. Mīnovī concluded his report by expressing cautious skepticism about its authenticity. There is also a full account of this manuscript by Richard Walzer, who studied it for six months and with the help of Samuel Miklos Stern came to realize that it was a forgery (Walzer, p. 25-26). The manuscript, supposedly finished in 314/926, contained an extensive list of previous owners, stretching from the Buyid ruler Faḡr-al-Dawla to the famous Qajar minister Yaḥyā Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla. Its present whereabouts are unknown.

The *Dīvān* of Qaṭrān, supposedly dating from 529/1134 and in the hand of the poet Anwarī. This is another instance of an important manuscript appearing on the market and being accepted as genuine by established scholars before



disappearing again once its authenticity began to be questioned. It was first described by Maḥdī Bayānī, who examined it when it belonged to the private library of Jaʿfar Solṭān-al-Qorāʾī (Bayānī, p. 465). Mīnovī attributed it categorically to the same atelier which forged the notorious *Andarz-nāma* (Mīnovī, 1964, p. 238). Recent western scholarship still appears to be unaware of Mīnovī's article (Storey/de Blois, V/1, pp. 216-17; J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Anwarī" *EIr.* II/2, p. 141).

Ṣāḥeb b. ʿAbbād's *Resāla fi'l-hedāya wa'l-żalāla*, ed. Ḥ-ʿA. Maḥfūz, Tehran 1374/1955. This edition is listed without any comments by Claude Cahen and Charles Pellat in their article on "Ibn ʿAbbād" (*EI2* III, p. 672), but Mīnovī considered the original manuscript on which the edition was based to be a forgery (Mīnovī, 1964, p. 238).

The *Robāʿīyāt* of ʿOmar Ḳayyām. Mīnovī mentions several forged manuscripts of the *Robāʿīyāt*, including the following two manuscripts: a manuscript originally belonging to ʿAbbās Eqbāl Āštīānī (see bibliography) and now in Cambridge University Library (Or. 1274, dated Rajab 604/1208; ed. M. ʿAbbāsī, Tehran, 1338 Š./1959; facsimile ed., Moscow, 1959; Storey/de Blois, V/2, pp. 367, 370, 373); secondly, the forged manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (Beatty 303, supposedly dating from 658/1259-60, ed. and tr. A. J. Arberry as *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam*, London, 1949; Storey/de Blois, V/2, pp. 367, 371).

For further examples of alleged forgeries of illustrated manuscripts, see [FORGERIES iii](#).

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