



## ḤABIB-ALLĀH SĀVAJĪ

**ḤABIB-ALLĀH SĀVAJĪ**, one of the more conservative artists active during the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I (995-1039/1587-1628; [Figure 1](#)). He signed his art and drawings as Ḥabib, Ḥabib-Allāh, or Mašhadi Ḥabib-Allāh. All we know about him, besides his paintings, is the brief note by his contemporary Qāzi Aḥmad, who, writing in 1005/1596, referred to him as a masterful artist distinguished among his peers (tr., p. 191). “Maulānā Habibulla of Sava lived in Qom. For the skill of his hands he was one at whom men point their fingers and with regard to art he became a ravisher of the souls of his contemporaries. Every day he makes further progress.” In a later recession in 1015/1606 Qāzi Aḥmad added, “Navvāb Ḥosayn-khan Šāmlū, governor of Qom, had attached him to his person when he went to Herat, but the felicitous Prince took him away from the khan, and now he is in the capital, Isfahan, employed by the court department (*sarkār-i humāyūn*) as a painter”

Until recently scholars (see Schmitz, 1997, pp. 114-15) had mistaken Ḥabib-Allāh’s patron Ḥosayn Khan Šāmlū, the governor of Qom (d. 1027/1618), with [Solṭān] Ḥo-sayn Khan Šāmlū, the governor of Qazvin (d. 988/1580), thus confusing the artistic milieu of the painter (Schmitz, 1997, pp. 114-15). In Moḥarram 1007/August-September 1598, while he was in Herat which he had recaptured, Shah ‘Abbās appointed the first mentioned Ḥosayn Khan as governor (*ḥākem*) of that city and the governor general (*amir al-omarā*, q.v.) of Khorasan before leaving for the capital (Eskandar Beg, I, p. 574, 576, tr. Savory, II, pp. 760, 762; Jalāl-al-Din Monajjem, p. 184). It was probably during the next royal trip to Herat in the spring of 1009/1601 that Shah ‘Abbās sequestered the



artist and took him to Isfahan. Thus Ḥabib-Allāh probably spent at least two years in Herat. Ḥabib-Allāh's family ties were apparently to Sāva, a city near Qom. The epithet Maš-hadi before his name most probably only indicates that he had made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reżā in Mašhad.

Ḥabib-Allāh is also known from several signed paintings, including: a miniature showing an assembly of birds, added to a copy of Farid-al-Din 'Aṭṭār's *Manteq al-ṭayr* of 1483, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (63.210.11; see *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Autumn 1978, frontispiece and p. 3); a miniature showing the weighing of melons and a man plowing with two oxen, added to an undated copy of 'Abd-Allāh Hātefi's *Temor-nāma*, also known as *Zafar-nāma-ye ti-muri* (Sotheby's, London, 17 December 1969, lot 284, fol. 1v); an album page with a painting of a caparisoned camel and a bearded man holding a spindle (Sotheby's, London, 26 April 1990, lot, 106); a drawing with colored wash of a youth pulling an exercise bow, in the Art and History Trust Collection (Soudavar, p. 226, no. 89); a painting of a young man holding a gun, in the Staatlich Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst (no. I.4568, fol. 11a; Robinson, 1965, pl. 59); a drawing of a seated young woman holding a pear, in the collection of Basil W. Robinson, London (Robinson, 1965, pl. 57); a painting of a young hunter loading a matchlock, in the Topkapi Saray Library, Istanbul (H.2165, fol. 54v; Swietochowski, 2000, fig. 2); a painting of a seated lady in an orange dress, in the Topkapi Saray Library, Istanbul (H.2165, fol. 54v; Swietochowski, 2000, fig. 3); a painting of a chained dromedary camel, in the Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm (NM/1917/385; Swietochowski, 2000, fig. 7); and a painting of a stallion, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Swietochowski, 2000, fig. 1).

Comparisons with the signed miniatures of Ḥabib-Allāh allow other groups of miniatures to be attributed to him. First, besides the miniature showing the assembly of birds, three more Safavid paintings in the same copy of *Manteq al-ṭayr* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art seem to have been painted by Ḥabib-Allāh. This can be demonstrated by comparing the representation of figures and faces in the four paintings. For example, the face of the astonished huntsman, with his weak, dot-shaped eyes, drooping mustache and a day's beard growth in the signed miniature (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Autumn 1978, p. 3) is very similar to the figure second from the right in the miniature showing Shaikh Ṣan'ān with the dying Christian maiden (Swietochowski, 1972, p. 52, fig. 14). This type of figure and another one in the



scene with Shaikh Şan'ān, a beardless youth whose head appears on the horizon, are frequently encountered in a group of twenty-six miniatures in a copy of the *Şāh-nāma* made for Hōsayn Khan Şāmlu in Herat in 1600 (Reżā 'Abbāsi Museum, Tehran; Schmitz, 1981, pp. 163-66, pls. 45, 47-50, 52-53, 54-55, 57, 59-66, 71-72, 74, 77, 82-83). The calligrapher of this *Şāh-nāma*, Moḥammad-Mo'men b. Moḥammad-Qāsem with the pen name (*taḳalloş*) Aşaḥḥ Kermāni, had also copied a *Nozhat-nāma-ye 'alā'i* of Şahmardān b. Abi'l-Ḳayrfor Hōsayn Khan Şāmlu fourteen months earlier in Qom (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Persian Ms. 255). Two miniatures in this manuscript are attributable to Ḥabib-Allāh, as the comparison of landscapes and animal depiction in the two manuscripts demonstrate (Schmitz, 1981, p. 161, pls. 42-43). Five album leaves with paintings and drawings in the style of Ḥabib-Allāh are in one of the Reed Albums in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (Schmitz, 1997, M.386.1, 4, 10, 11, and 12). The finest of these show a seated courtier with his pet falcon (fig. M.386.1). A related Reed Album folio has an inscription saying that it was made in the library (*ketāb-kāna*) of Hōsayn Khan Şāmlu, the governor of Herat, which indicates that the album was assembled for Ḥabib-Allāh's patron (M.386.3; Schmitz, 1997, p. 124, fig. 177). Lastly, there are other dispersed album leaves that may also be the work of Ḥabib-Allāh, such as the one showing a youth wearing a striped robe and the special *qezelbāş* turban of Khorasan and holding a small cup to his lips (Sotheby's, London, 3 May 2001, lot 57).

Some paintings by Ḥabib-Allāh, including the album folios in the Staatlich Museen zu Berlin, the seated lady in orange dress in the Topkapi Saray Library, and the paintings in the Morgan Library, feature extensive and complicated tooling on gold and silver clothing and accouterments. The seated courtier with his pet falcon in the Morgan Library (fig. M.386.1), for example, has pricking on the gold lapels of the coat — parallel rows, apparently applied with a minute wheel on the left and freehand on the right; when struck by light their sheens are subtly different. Pricking is also used on the gold and silver gloves, the skullcap, and the knives. This technique is not used by contemporary artists in Isfahan or by other artists in Herat, and it suggests that Ḥabib-Allāh was trained as a gilder and had worked in several mediums.



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