



JALĀYER, ESMĀ'IL KHAN

JALĀYER, ESMĀ'IL KHAN, a prominent painter of the Qajar era who lived during the reign of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96). He was particularly noted for his work in two popular though different genres of Qajar paintings of the period, *irāni-sāzi* (concentrating on Iranian subjects, drawing on facial features, make-up, costume, and relatively unaffected by European influences) and *ṭabi'at-sāzi* (concentrating on fauna and flora in a European naturalistic mode, aiming at verisimilitude).

Life. He was the son of Ḥāji Moḥammad Khan Jalāyer Kalāti from an ancient and eminent family of Khorasan (Hedāyat, *Majma' al-foṣaḥā'* IV, p. 429; *Ḍokā'*, p. 662) but there is no precise information about the dates of his birth and death or place of burial (for further information about his son and other descendants and his own lineage see Fatḥi, *Rāhnemā-ye ketāb*, pp. 655-56; *Ḍokā'*, p. 662). Moreover, only a few of his paintings bear a date: one is a portrait of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah in watercolor, dated Rabī' II, 1279 A.H./1862 C.E., others include a depiction of a scene from the battle of Herat (1856; see [HERAT. vi](#)) drawn by Esmā'il Jalāyer to complete work originally begun by an earlier famous painter, Moḥammad-Ḥasan Afšār, on a pen-box (for further details, see below). The date inscribed on the box is 8 Ša'bān 1296/17 May 1878 (Robinson, *Muqarnas*, pp. 131-46). Further information about his work and apprenticeship can be gleaned from accounts given by two of his contemporaries, Ḳalil Khan Ṭaqafī (A'lam-al-Dawla) and Dust-Moḥammad Khan (Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek). He was a student at the Dār-al-fonun (q.v.; Ṭaqafī, p. 163) during 'Aliqoli Mirzā E'tezād-al-Salṭana's (q.v., 1822-80) long



directorship of the college (1857-80). He was taught painting there by Monsieur Constant (Maḥbubi Ardakāni, I, pp. 283, 329, 331) and Mirzā 'Ali-Akbar Khan Kāšāni (Mozayyan-al-Dawla). He graduated as one of the top-ranking students (*Irān* newspaper, No. 55), his work attracting the attention and patronage of the Shah as well as some of his courtiers including 'Ali-Aṣḡar Khan Atābak-e A'zam (q.v.), and Dust-Moḥammad Khan (Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek). As well as at the Dār-al-fonun itself, Jalāyer taught and worked at two other ateliers, one in the Atābak Park (*Pārk-e Atābak*), and the other in the public quarters (*biruni*, q.v.) of the Ferdows Garden (*bāḡ-e ferdows*), residence of Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek (Fathī, *Rāhnamā-ye ketāb*, p. 655). He must have continued with his artistic activities at least until 1307/1889 when reportedly the fifteen-year old Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek was taking lessons from him at his workshop in the Ferdows Garden (Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek, *Yaḡmā* 12, p. 74).

Esmā'il Jalāyer was a most fastidious man with a pleasing countenance and a fondness for witty anecdotes and repartees. He led a frugal life and was a habitual smoker of opium. Because of his family background (his father belonged to the Ḍahabiya [q.v.] Order of Sufis; Ḍokā', p. 662) as well as his own deep personal faith, many of his paintings represent religious themes and subjects, including the Prophet and his family and companions and those of the founders and luminaries of Sufi sects and dervishes.

Works. He was skilled in different techniques and branches of painting. His watercolors, pen-and-ink, and oil drawings, his work in portraiture and landscape, and his paintings on lacquered boxes and pen-cases, can all be regarded as masterpieces in their own right. However, his critical eye and perennial quest for perfection meant that once he detected the slightest flaw in one his canvasses, he would tear it up, and this explains why so few of his works have survived (Fathī *Rāhnamā-ye ketāb*, pp. 654-55). His work may be divided into different groups on the basis of their subject matter and style:

Portraits of royalty and notables. The list includes Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, Mirzā Ḥosayn Khan Sepahsālār, 'Ali-Aṣḡar Khan (Atābak-e A'zam), and other courtiers and men of eminence. Oil, watercolor and pen-and-ink using the technique of *noqṭa-pardāzi*, a method that uses almost imperceptible dots to induce a chiaroscuro [*sāya rowšan*] effect while creating a meticulously detailed and realistic likeness of the subject. The portraits depict the sitters in different moods and bring out their personal traits; be it pensive, cheerful, or magnanimous, with a dignified and commanding aura. Those of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah himself include an undated but signed pen-and-ink drawing of the



monarch on horseback in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Tehran, as well as a watercolor of the Shah seated on a chair in full regal attire with a bejeweled belt and sword and bearing the Sun decoration on his chest, with the inscription, “Esmā‘il Jalāyer; the month of Rabi‘ II of the year 1279.”

Portraits of notables include a 90 x 70 cm. oil portrait of Mirzā Ḥosayn Khan Sepahsālar with the signature “Work of the painter to the Exalted Government of Iran, Esmā‘il, son of the late Ḥājj Zamān Khan Jalāyer.” The subject is depicted astride a finely drawn horse with a garden and some rustic huts in the background.

There is also an oil painting of Mirzā ‘Ali-Aṣḡar Khan Atābak (Amin-al-Solṭān), sitting on a chair, and wearing a jewel-studded medallion depicting the picture of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah. The room with its furniture and decorations are drawn in some detail. Colorful fruit trees fill the outer space and there is also an inscription in the *nast‘aliq* style (see [CALLIGRAPHY](#)) in black ink with white margins containing a line from Ḥāfeẓ, “If the grace of the Holy Ghost grants his aid anew/Others can achieve what the Messiah was accustomed to do” (*Fayẓ-e ruḡ ol-qodos ar bāz madad farmāyad/digarān ham bekonand ānča Masiḡā mikard*). In the background that displays a garden, there is a lion with a sword under an image of the sun, with the single word *zamāmdāri* (rule, sovereignty) inscribed on its sheath. In the foreground there is another piece of writing stating that “this single verse of Hafez has been inscribed by copying the handwriting of His Most Exalted Excellency Amin-al-Solṭān, may one be sacrificed for him!” This portrait too depicts the same person.

Paintings with religious and mystical subjects and themes. As already pointed out, these include images of the prophets and religious and mystical luminaries, and are mostly in watercolor or pen-an-ink, but occasionally also in oil. In some cases the result is a fusion of Persian traditional painting and European naturalistic style. Sometimes, as in the oil painting on canvas of Nur-‘Ali Šāh as a young dervish, presently in the Decorative Arts Museum of Tehran, despite the very Persian way the face is made up, and the Sufi garb donned by the subject, it is the European naturalistic aspect of the style that catches the eye ([Figure 1](#)). The young mystic has his long hair scattered over his shoulders, and sits in the middle of a garden, holding an ornate walking stick with one hand and the chain of a *kaškul* (a dervish’s begging bowl) in the other. This and other portraits of Nur-‘Ali Šāh by the painter have been copied on many a carpet from Kerman and in all sizes (Dokā’, p. 664).



Two other portraits of Nur-'Ali Šāh deserve mention. One, in the Golestān Palace (q.v.) collection, has an autograph, “drawn by the humble Esmā'il,” and another, in the private collection of Amir Bahman Šamsām, also shows the young Sufi with all the trappings of a dervish (see *Camb. Hist. Iran VII*, pl. 37). It is also signed.

An album (*moraqqa*) comprising of pictures of leading Sufi luminaries and masters belonging to the library of Golestān Palace, signed “Esmā'il Jalāyer ebn al-Ḥāji Zamān Ḳan,” and dated 1286 A.H. with idealized depictions of Bāyazīd Bestāmi, Bābā Ṭāher, Awḥadi (qq.v.), Šams of Tabriz, Nur-'Ali Šāh, Moštāq of Kerman, and Ma'šum-'Ali Šāh; as well as two paintings of flowers and grapes (Ātābāy, p. 386).

A painting inspired by the story of Yusof and Zolaykā (Joseph and the Potiphar's wife), in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and exhibited in the famous Burlington House exhibition of 1931, though misdated there (Robinson, *Camb. Hist. Iran VII*, p. 887, n. 57) with a group of Zolaykā's female companions in Persian costumes sipping tea by a samovar. Yusof and Zolaykā stand amongst them with the former accepting a cup offered to him by Zolaykā. Other details include a young woman smoking a water pipe (*ḡalyān*, q.v.), and another playing a stringed instrument (*tār*). On the upper part of the painting there is a brief inscription and signature in nasta'liq with the name Esmā'il and an often repeated tag on Persian artifacts to the effect that the work should be considered a memento to commemorate its maker (“*Esmā'il; ḡaraž naqšist k'az mā bāz mānad.*”)

There is a painting with the approximate dimensions of 220 x120 cm. in the Decorative Arts Museum of Tehran depicting Abraham's sacrifice of his son, surrounded by angels, one of whom holds the sacrificial ram (Figure 2). It is painted in the *siāh qalam* manner, a method using mostly black watercolor with tiny touches of white here and there. Traditionally, in the city of Isfahan, they used soot and other products to make little grains that were then ground and mixed with water. Sometimes oil paint was also used. The technique produced a good quality texture unaffected by humidity and could evoke an atmosphere imbued with spirituality.

A horizontally rectangular painting exists in the collection of Mr. Adib Borumand, depicting Imam 'Ali, his sons Imam Ḥasan and Ḥosayn, as well as one of the most celebrated Companions of the Prophet, Salmān-e Fārsi. The painting also contains images of cherubs in the European style.



Paintings with a variety of subjects. A painting approximately 50 x 80 cm., commissioned by the merchant Ḥāji Mirzā ‘Abd-al-Wahhāb and now in the Decorative Arts Museum of Tehran, copies using a brush, the calligraphy of the famous calligrapher Āqā Mirzā Ġolām-Rezā of a verse from the poet Sa‘dī (for the text see *Ḍokā’*, p. 663), with scenes from a traditional coffee-house, a festive gathering of women musicians, and other scenes including the athletes of a *zurkāna* (the traditional Persian gymnasium). It too bears the signature “the work of Esmā‘il Jalāyer” in a fine nasta‘liq hand and is dated 1284 A.H.

A pen-box that was completed by the painter has already been referred to above. It had begun as the work of the celebrated painter Moḥammad Beg Afšar of Urmia (sometimes referred to as “the mute master painter,” *Naqāšbāši-e lāl*) who showed the unfinished work to the French traveler Xavier Hommaire de Hell (q.v.) in Tabriz on November 15, 1847 (see Khalili, Robinson et al, *Lacquer of the Islamic Lands*, p. 149, for a long extract from Hommaire de Hell who provides a detailed description of the encounter and the illustrations on the pen-box). The box was exhibited in Cairo in 1935 (Wiet, *Exposition d’art persan*, p. 87) and appeared twice at Sotheby’s auctions in London (9 October 1978, lot no. 187; and 12 October 2000, lot no. 89). There is a long inscription by Jalāyer in nasta‘liq script on the base clarifying which parts were the original work of “*Naqāšbāši-e lāl*” and which were Jalāyer’s own. More comprehensive lists and descriptions of his paintings are to be found in the works by Mohammad-‘Ali Karimzāda-Tabrizi, ‘Abbās Sarmadi and Yaḥyā *Ḍokā’*, cited in the bibliography.

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