



KAMĀL-AL-MOLK, MOḤAMMAD ĠAFFĀRI III. WORKS

iii. Works

Genres and quantity of works. A meticulous artist with a naturalistic obsession, Kamāl-al-Molk was not a prolific painter (Qarābegiān, pp. 81-92). His available works in collections and catalogues and those mentioned in various lists amount to about 122 known paintings produced over a span of 50 years, stretching from his earliest known dated painting at the turn of 1880s, when he reproduced a portrait of Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana circa 1880 and a portrait of Crown Prince Nāṣer-al-Din Mirzā in 1881, both from their photographs (Kamāl-al-Molk, p. 28; Zoka, 1997, p. 7; the latter portrait is printed in Sohayli-Ḳvānsāri, p. 247), to his last works in the early 1930s (some remained unfinished due to his deteriorating vision). Kamāl-al-Molk's works must have exceeded 122 known works, and some have mentioned as many as 150 works without producing a list of his 150 paintings (see below). Kamāl-al-Molk's works are mainly in the genres of portraits of courtiers and officials (44 paintings), landscapes (37 paintings), social genres (18 paintings), and royal palaces (6 paintings). He also produced a number of portraits of friends and colleagues and studies of nude models, and he also copied the works of classical masters when he was in Florence and Paris (about 13 paintings). His works include a canvas of Karbalā Square, which constitutes his only work on



an urban theme (Figure 10). He produced no works on religious and historical subjects, and only a few still-lives (see Table 8 below).

Table 1. Frequency of Works by Genres

Kamāl-al-Molk's works may be divided into three periods: before his trip to Europe (1880-97), during his studies and works in Florence and Paris (1897-1901), and after his return from Europe (1901-32). Some art critiques—from his loyal students and admirers to some of those who are critical of his works—maintain that most of Kamāl-al-Molk's works before his studies in European museums may be considered “mediocre,” but that they flourished after his return from Europe (Āštiāni, p. 16; Pākbāz, pp. 243-44; Aghdashlou, p. 231). Pākbāz believes that even during the first period Kamāl-al-Molk's works gradually developed from a weaker technique in reflecting nature to a more mature one, enabling him to make a careful photographic rendering of the natural models (Pākbāz, p. 243).

Assessment of works. Evaluating his own works, Kamāl-al-Molk observed that he regarded *Ḥawẓkāna-ye Šāḥebqerāniya*, Hall of Mirrors (*Ṭālār-e ā'ina*; see Figure 2), his own self-portrait, and Karbalā Square (*Meydān-e Karbalā*; see Figures 1 and 10) as his masterpieces. He adds: “the painting I made of Karbalā Square resembles those of the Rembrandt School” (Kamāl-al-Molk, pp. 36-37). On another occasion, he also mentioned *Takiya-ye Dawlat* (Figure 3), Landscapes of Zānus Valley (Figure 6), *Ābšār Doqolu* (Figure 7), *Rammāl* (Figure 8), and *Lār* landscape as his favorite works. He indicated his desire to have photographs taken of some of his portraits, including those of Nāṣer-al-Molk, Mošir-al-Dawla, Woṭuq-al-Dawla (Figure 5), Šani'-al-Dawla, and Atābak (Amin-al-Solṭan), and a landscape showing Tehran to the Bibi Šahr-bānu mountain as seen from the roof of Šāḥebqerābiya Palace (a letter from Kamāl-al-Molk to Mirzā 'Ali Khan Maḥmudi, in Sohayli-K'ānsāri, pp. 140-41).

Esmā'il Āštiāni, Kamāl-al-Molk's student and colleague, believes that it was during the latter period of his life, when he established the Academy of Fine Arts, that the quality of his works flourished. In his view, the following works are Kamāl-al-Molk's masterpieces. For their composition: “The Baghdadi fortune-teller” (*Fālgir-e Baḡdādi*), “The Baghdadi goldsmith” (*Zargar-e Baḡdādi*; see Figure 9), The Villager's cottage (*Kāna-ye dehāti*), and “The Hall of Mirrors.” As portraits: those of Sardār As'ad (Figure 4), Ḥājj Sayyed Naṣr-Allah Taqavi, and three of the master's self-portraits. As landscapes: “Moḡānak garden” (*Bāḡ-e Moḡānak*), “Shemiran sunset and the Alborz mountain” (*Ġorub-e*



Šemirān va kuh-e Alborz). Watercolors: The portrait of Mawlāna Mirzā Hādī Khan Kōšnevis at work, and Kamāl-al-Molk's self-portrait (Āštiāni, pp. 16-18).

Ru'in Pākbāz, an ardent admirer of Kamāl-al-Molk, believes that his most accomplished work immediately after his return from Europe is "Goldsmith and his apprentice," which shows the elegance, power, and skill that he acquired in Europe, revealing the influence of Rembrandt. Following this work, Pākbāz believes Kamāl-al-Molk produced two powerful paintings that constitute the culmination of his career: "Jewish fortune-teller" and "Karbala Square" (Pākbāz, pp. 244-45).

In an assessment of Kamāl-al-Molk's works, Idin Aghdashlou notes that at the beginning of his work he showed affinity with early Qajar painting, for instance in *Takkiya-ye Dawlat* (Figure 3). In some of his early works a close relation with Šanī'-al-Molk's style is traceable, for instance in "Royal Musicians," in which the figures are simply aligned next to each other on a flat plane. He soon developed a deep understanding of the luminosity, tonality, and intensity in the use of color that is manifested in many Persian landscapes and gardens, royal edifices, and halls, where a pleasant and delicate feeling of color is presented. In all likelihood, part of his understanding of the richness of color is traceable to the works of such early 19th-century masters as Mehr-'Ali and Mirzā Bābā (Aghdashlou, p. 231).

Aghdashlou observes that themes in Kamāl-al-Molk's works are limited, he did not execute religious or epic paintings, and that what he painted varied during the different periods of his life. When the painting is a courtly one, says Aghdashlou, it naturally depicts such things as figures of kings, princes, dignitaries, musicians, and the royal palaces. It is towards the end of this period that Kamāl-al-Molk shows interest also in painting social types, such as "Uncle Šādeq Širāzi" (*'Amu Šādeq Širāzi*) and "Used clothes peddlers" (*Kohna-foruṣhā*). With two exceptions, he made no portraits of women. He produced mediocre and less accomplished paintings as well, e.g., "Cat and the canary cage" (*Gorba va qafas-e qanāri*) and the copy portrait of "Beggars: mother and daughter" (*Mādar o doḡtar-e gadā*). However, after returning from Europe, Kamāl-al-Molk produced beautiful, lively landscapes with poetical atmosphere and color. Some of the works he has created in this period are worth mentioning: portraits of the Qajar 'Azod-al-Molk, Sardār As'ad Baḡtiāri, and Ḥājī Naṣr-Allah Taqavi. He shows little interest in urban scenes, the only work of the kind being Karbala Square (*Meydān-e Karbalā*; Aghdashlou, p. 231).



The following seven tables present a list of 122 paintings, constructed from approximately 73 paintings of Kamāl-al-Molk as recalled by the artist himself with additional works from Sohayli-Ḳvānsāri's catalogue of 75 Kamāl-al-Molk's paintings, published in *Kamāl-e honar* (pp. 213-366). Also consulted are a list of 102 works prepared by Karimzādeh Tabrizi (III, pp. 1052-58), and a list of 37 dated and 11 undated works, as well as photographs of 6 works in color, presented in *Maktab-e Kamāl-al-Molk* (pp. 10-11, 23-35). It should be noted that the number of works by Kamāl-al-Molk must have exceed 122 works as listed in the following seven tables (for an estimate of 150 works by Kamāl-al-Molk, see Karimzādeh Tabrizi, III, p. 1052, although he introduces only 102 works in his list). The works are rearranged here by genre.

[Table 2. Paintings of Palaces](#)

[Table 3. Portraits: Nāṣer-al-Din Shah Period](#)

[Table 4. Portraits: Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah and Aḥmad Shah Periods](#)

[Table 5. Landscapes \(Part 1, Part 2\)](#)

[Table 6. Works in the Social genres](#)

[Table 7. Works in Florence and Paris \(1897-1900\)](#)

[Table 8. Other Works](#)

Final remarks. Kamāl-al-Molk was aiming to develop a national school of European naturalistic art, much as his intellectual peers were aspiring to westernize the country and to promote the Persian language and pre-Islamic Iran in search of an authentic national cultural identity. His themes of the common man and popular subjects sometimes tended towards the “self-orientalizing.” In the works of followers of more modest talent, Kamāl-al-Molk's style became anecdotal and derivative, even verging on kitsch—developments which were the ambiguous result of pseudo-modernization and production for the tourist trade.

Nevertheless, with his charismatic personage and romantic image as a revolutionary hero and a great modernizer at a time of national decline, Kamāl-al-Molk remains a towering figure in the history and mythology of Persian art from Mani to Behzād and Reẓā ‘Abbāsi, and is popularly perceived as the father of modern Persian Painting.



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