



ḲO'I, MIRZĀ 'ALIQOLI

ḲO'I, MIRZĀ 'ALIQOLI (b. Ḳoy, ca. 1230/1815; d. Tehran, ca. 1272/1856), the most prolific illustrator of Persian lithographed books in the Qajar period. 'Aliqoli most likely received his education in Tabriz, where [lithography](#) was introduced around 1829. He may have been around 30 years of age in 1264/1847, when he published an edition of the *Ḳamsa-ye Neẓāmi* (Figure 1), proving him to be the supreme master of his day in lithographic illustration (Robinson; Marzolph, 1997; Idem, 2001, pp. 31-34).





Figure 1. Colophon of the *Ḳamsa* of Neẓāmi; Tehran, 1264/1848; copyist 'Ali-Asḡar Tafreši; lithographer Moḡammad-Reẓā'; painter Mirzā 'Ali-qoli ḲŌ'ī.

Soon after the beginning of Nāṣer-al-din Shah's reign (r. 1848-96), 'Aliqoli apparently followed the court to Tehran. In the 1267/1850 edition of *Qānun-e neẓām*, a book used for teaching military drill at the *Dār al-Fonun*, he signed as *farrāš-e qebla-ye 'ālam* (chamberlain to the Pivot of the Universe, i.e., the king); in the 1268/1851 edition of Sa'di's *Kolliyāt*, he introduced himself as *banda-ye dargāh* (servant to the court); and in the 1270-74/1853-57 edition of MirḲ^vānd's *Rawẓat al-ṣafā'* as well as the military manual *Mašq-e tup* (1271/1854), he stated that he was *kādem-e madrasa-ye Dār al-fonun* (servant [i.e., teacher] at Dār al-Fonun); in *Rawẓat al-ṣafā'* he also presented himself as painter (*naqqāš*). 'Aliqoli's latest signed works, *Alf layla wa layla* and *Ṭufān al-bokā' fi maqātel al-šohadā'*, are dated 1272/1855. The only additional information available about him so far is the fact that a son of his continued to practice the profession of an artist: an illustration in the 1286/1869 edition of the *Mātamkada* by Qorbān b. Ramaẓān Bidel contains the signature of a certain Mirzā Esmā'il b. Mirzā 'Aliqoli ḲŌ'ī ('Anāṣeri).

Some 35 books have been identified as containing 'Aliqoli's signed artwork. The genres they cover comprise, above all, popular narratives, classical literature, and narrative works of a Shi'i religious nature. Of both the *Ḳamsa-ye Neẓāmi* and the *Kolliyāt-e Sā'di* he illustrated three different editions. Of *Ṭufān al-bokā'*, composed by Mirzā Ebrāhim b. Moḡammad-Bāqer Jawhari (d. 1253/1837), he illustrated more than ten editions, including four whose text was printed from movable type (Buḍari, 2011).

In chronological order, 'Aliqoli's signed and dated artwork comprises the illustrations to the following books: 1263/1846: *Baḳtiār-nāma*, *Nuṣāfarin Gawhartāj*; 1264/1847: *'Ajā'eb al-maḳluqāt* (Kāzeruni, 2004; Torābi, 2014), *Ḳamsa-ye Neẓāmi* (Robinson), *Ḳosrow-e divzād*; 1265/1848: *Majāles al-mottaqin*, *Moṣibat-nāma*, *Ṭufān al-bokā'* (Tanāvoli, pp. 59, 74-89); 1267/1850: *Qānun-e neẓām*, *Šāh-nāma-ye Ferdawsi* (Šafi-neẓād, 1995; Marzolph, 2003; Idem, 2011); 1268/1851: *Asrār al-šahāda*, *Čehel ṭuṭi*, *Jang-nāma-ye Moḡammad Ḥanafīya*, *Kolliyāt-e Sā'di* (two editions, the second one finalized posthumously in 1291/1874); 1269/1852: *Divān-e Ḥāfeẓ*, *Ḥamla-ye Ḥaydariya*, *Kolliyāt-e Sā'di*, *Ṭufān al-bokā'*; 1270/1853: *Golestān-e Eram*, *Ḳamsa-ye Neẓāmi* (two editions), *Rawẓat al-ṣafā'* (finalized in 1274/1857), *Ṭufān al-bokā'*; 1271/1854: *Mašq-e tup*,



Ṭāqdis, *Ṭufān al-bokā'* (two eds., one of them together with Mirzā Hādi); 1272/1855: *Alf layla wa layla* (together with Mirzā Ḥasan and Mirzā Reżā Tabrizi; Şafi-neżād, 2004), *Ṭufān al-bokā'* (three eds.).

In addition to several undated items bearing his signature, the illustrations of more than 20 books may be attributed to 'Aliqoli by way of stylistic features, such as, most prominently, the 1267/1850 edition of the *Aḵbār-nāma* of Şādeq, pen name Dorri. Altogether, he produced more than 2,000 illustrations, varying in size from stamp format up to a full folio page. He also prepared a large number of intricate illuminations on chapter headings and final pages, including the headings for the early years of the *Ruznāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya*, plus more than a thousand miniature decorative and ornamental drawings on the margins of the *Ḳamsa-ye Neżāmi* (1264/1847), the *Kolliyāt* of Sa'di (1268-69/1851-52), and the *Divān-e Ḥāfeż* (1269/1852).

'Aliqoli executed his signature in a large variety of formats, almost never duplicating a format he had used previously. The specific execution of these signatures demonstrates the artist's growing self-consciousness as they develop from a somewhat diffident manner in his early works into prominently placed artful compositions in his later ones.

'Aliqoli must have profited from a solid traditional education in the graphic arts, since already his earliest work displays a delicate and refined style. Moḥammad-'Ali Karimzāda (1991, p. 397) regards the artist's work as unadorned but appealing (referring to him as *sāda-kār*, *koş-dast*), and Basil Robinson has adequately praised him as the "pioneer among artists who devoted their talents to the printed book" in the early Qajar period. Robinson characterized the artist's style in the 1264/1847 edition of *Ḳamsa* as stiff and naïve, yet at the same time effective and sometimes striking. For books like the *Ḳamsa*, the *Şāh-nāma*, or *'Ajā'eb al-maḵluqāt*, it appears likely that he followed earlier models from manuscript illustration that probably were available to him in the royal library. Many other books, particularly those compiled by contemporary authors, were illustrated by him for the first time ever. A working sheet for two illustrations published in *Ṭufān al-bokā'* reveals aspects of 'Aliqoli's method of designing and copying (Karimzāda, 2002; Buḍari, 2009). In the long run, 'Aliqoli's work was highly influential, as most of the later artists who illustrated lithographed books in the Qajar period more or less copied his work.

Stylistic analysis of 'Aliqoli's production shows that he was well versed in the



iconographical vocabulary of classical Persian painting. Moreover, it reveals individual characteristics of his work that allow its identification even when it is not signed. 'Aliqoli exercised great care in the highly stylized minute representation of human expression, both faces and gestures. Beautiful persons are always portrayed in three-quarters profile so as to stress the beauty of the evenly rounded face, whereas unattractive-looking persons, particularly old women, are stereotypically portrayed in full profile. The mathematical precision evident in 'Aliqoli's drawings of perfectly oval heads and faces allows a clear identification against the style of other contemporary artists, such as the round shapes practiced by Ostād Sattār or the somewhat ill-proportioned shapes drawn by Mirzā Ḥasan. 'Aliqoli devotes particular attention to the hair and beard, which are often done in single parallel lines. While the faces of persons are traditionally rendered in a stereotypical manner, emotion is expressed by auxiliary means such as gestures, particularly the gesture of bewilderment and confusion known as *angošt-e taḥayyor* (amazement finger), in which the index finger of the right hand is held against the lips. In order to express agony as well as imminent or actual death, he depicts details of exposed teeth and stuck out tongues. To avoid leaving blank space in the background of illustrations, the renderings of landscapes are typically filled with silhouettes of tiny birds in flight. Besides, he also shows a preference for a particular kind of meandering ornamental lines in decoration. A comprehensive assessment of the 'Aliqoli's work by Ulrich Marzolph and Roxana Zenhari will be forthcoming.

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