



# SANGLĀK, MOḤAMMAD-‘ALI

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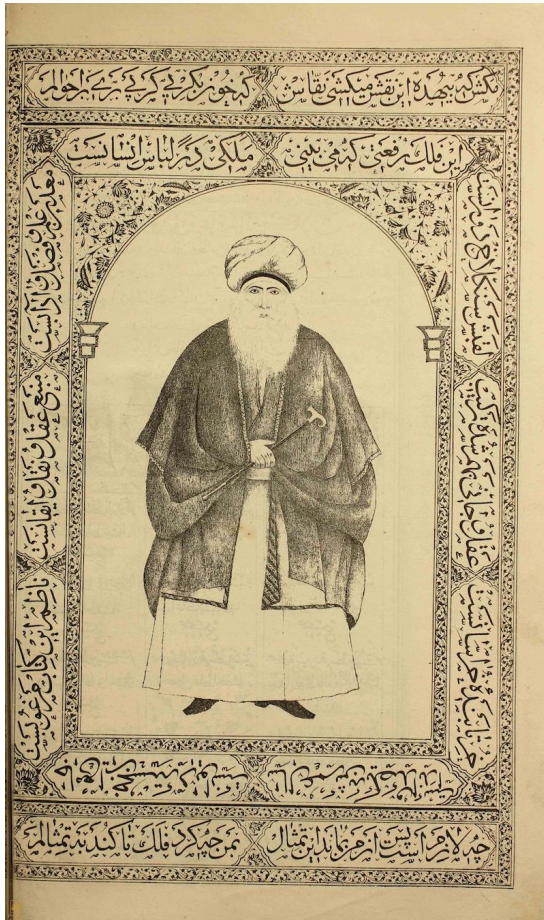


Figure 1. Portrait of Sanglāk in the 1874 lithograph of *Tadkerat al-kaṭṭātin*, page 26. The surrounding poem celebrates him; e.g., “he is a king in mortal’s garb ... the years of his life are up to 100.” (*Sāzmān-e Asnād va Ketābkāna-ye Melli-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslāmi-ye Irān*, which gives a tentative birth date of 1184/1770-71; MS available at <http://dl.nlai.ir/UI/331a63f0-2d77-4bd7-8c08-69e01136837a/catalogue.aspx>)

**SANGLĀK, MIRZĀ MOḤAMMAD-‘ALI ḲORĀSĀNI** (□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□□□, b. Qučān, Khorasan, date unknown; d. Tabriz, 17 Ṣafar 1294/ 3 March 1877, [Figure 1](#)), celebrated calligrapher and stone carver of the 19th century, as well as poet and author. Sanglāk’s professional career spanned the reigns of



three Qajar monarchs, namely, Fath-‘Ali Shah, Moḥammad Shah, and Nāṣer-al-Din Shah. According to the preface (dibāĉa) to his *Taḍkerat al-kaṭṭāṭin*, Sanglāk lived as a dervish and spent much of his time traveling, with long sojourns in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. He also traveled to Central Asia, Afghanistan and India, where he met with and instructed many calligraphers, gaining a considerable following as a result. He left behind numerous examples of his calligraphy that he produced during these trips.

Mirzā Sanglāk was a master of the nasta‘liq and šekasta scripts. His most famous and perhaps finest artistic contribution is an inscribed slab of carved marble of about 3.70 by 1.25 m., the entire surface of which is covered with Arabic and Persian poems and the epithets of the contemporary Ottoman monarch inscribed in fine nasta‘liq script. The stone was originally intended for the tomb of the Prophet Moḥammad in Medina, and took Mirzā Sanglāk eight years to complete while he was in Egypt (Qazvini, p. 108; Kārang, p. 73). He apparently had hoped to have it sent to Medina through the good offices of the Ottoman Empire, but the financial support that he expected did not materialize, and he refused to sell it for the prices he was offered. He eventually managed to bring it to Tabriz with the financial support of Mirzā Ja‘far Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla and Mirzā ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm Khan, the Persian consul in Tbilisi. In Tabriz, it was eventually placed on a wall in the tomb of Sayyed Ebrāhīm, near the grave of Mirzā Sanglāk. Mirzā Sanglāk is also the author of a number of other epigraphic works in nasta‘liq script, several of which were dedicated to the Moḥammad-‘Ali Pasha Mosque in Cairo. His major literary achievement is *Emteḥān al-fozalā’*, also known as *Taḍkerat al-kaṭṭāṭin*, a two-volume biographical dictionary of calligraphers written in a bombastic style that is filled with obscure Persian and Arabic vocabulary (Qazvini, p. 107; Bayāni, p. 799). It was first published by the author in an exquisitely lithographed edition, with the calligraphy of Moḥammad-‘Ali b. Jalil Tabrizi and illumination by Mirzā Moḥammad-‘Ali Moḍahheb of Isfahan (2 vols., Tabriz, 1874). He also authored a number of lesser known books, the most notable of which are *Borj-e jawāher* and *Dorj-e zawāher* (two collections of poems that were bound together in one book and published in Cairo in 1856; Mošār, III, Cols. 367-8) and *Majma‘ al-awṣāf* (a collection of poems about him by others; see Bayāni, p. 799).

*Taḍkerat al-kaṭṭāṭin* is one of a handful of biographical dictionaries of calligraphers written in the 19th century. The book is divided into the following four sections: ancient and modern calligraphers, the account of the



author’s travels, his pupils, and finally Ottoman calligraphers. Although the travel section and the account of his pupils are undoubtedly from the pen of Mirzā Sanglāk himself, Mehdi Bayāni, having compared this book with the one by Moḥammad-Şāleḥ b. Abu Torāb Eşfahāni, has concluded that much of the material included in *Taḍkerat al-kaṭṭātin* had been directly taken from the former work and concealed under a blanket of florid language filled with impertinent and even uncouth vocabulary (Bayāni, pp. 799-800; for an example see Qazvini, p. 107). Moḥammad Qazvini, who described Sanglāk as a fine calligrapher indulging in silly self-flattery (he referred to himself as *Āftāb-e Ḳorāsān* “the Sun of Ḳhorasan” and *Dānā-ye Irān* “the Sage of Iran”), considered this book devoid of any historical merit (Qazvini, pp. 106-7; Storey, p. 1077).

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