PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

E. A. Rezvan

ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS OF KARL FABERGÉ. III: BIOGRAPHICAL WORKS AND PORTRAITS (PART 2)

Before moving to the subject of this article, I would like to return to my “Oriental manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. II: rāgamālā miniatures of the Album (muraqqā’) (part two),” published in Manuscrit Orientalia, VII/3, September 2001, pp. 39–45. I noted there (p. 41) that one of the miniatures in the Album (Plate 4) is evidently also part of a rāgamālā series. I was, however, unable to identify it. I am sincerely grateful to Prof. R. W. Skelton for commenting on my conclusion. I quote here from a letter I received from him after the publication of my article:

“You are right that this appears to refer to a Ragini, namely Jogi Asavari, which is presumably a mixed Raga found in the Deccan. In his index, Ebeling (p. 302) has ‘Yoga, Asavari’ which he cites as being in Ragamalas 70 and 71 described on pp. 194–5, though in his descriptions for those two sets he mentions ‘Asavari’ only and does not illustrate their iconography or say whether they are really inscribed as ‘Jogi (or Jogi) Asavari’. It would require a thorough search of the literature on Ragas to determine the truth of this — so far I have only consulted books by Waldschmidt and Kaufmann without finding Jogi (or Yogi) Asavari. Certainly your plates 1, 3 & 4 are all in 18th century Deccani (probably Hyderabad) style as are Ebeling’s Ragamalas 70 & 71. I have a theory about these 18th century Hyderabad sets that the iconography was almost certainly introduced from the North (eg. sets from Delhi or Awadh) but that the Hyderabad painters may not have had a full set of examples to follow. They obviously knew the names of the Ragas and Raginis followed in the North Indian plains and presumably made guesses about the subject matter of drawings (cartoons) found in their portfolios, which were copied and substituted for the missing compositions. In at least one of the sets published by O.C. Gungoly, Persian inscriptions describing the paintings were added and then translated for him in the belief that they were genuine Raga dhyanas”.

We now turn to the subject at hand. Karl Fabergé’s collection of Eastern manuscripts includes a copy of yet another biographical work held in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies collection of Eastern manuscripts (call number C 1684) [1]. This work, entitled Manāqīb-i Murtażawī, treats the life and virtues (al-

manāqīb) of ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib. It was written by Amīr Muhammad Ṣalih al-Ḥusayn al-Tirmidhī who bore literary pseudonyms (takhallus) Kashfī, Subḥānī, and Sūjan (d. 1650 or 1651). A poet, literary figure and calligrapher, he occupied high posts in the court of the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān (1592–1666; r. 1628–1657). In 1646, he was appointed keeper (dārgāh) of the court library. Amīr Muhammad hailed from the lineage that gave the Muslim world Shaykh Ni’matallah Wali, the famed poet renowned for his piety. As the son of a noted calligrapher and poet, Mīr ’Abdallāh Tirmidhī, who bore the takhallus Waṣfī and was also known as Mushkin Qalām (d. 1616), Amīr Muhammad was distinguished by his fine hand, and especially his beautiful nasta’liq.

Both of the main works by Kashfī that have come down to us deal with the early history of Islam and the biographies of noted figures from that period. Manāqīb-i Murtażawī [2] is a Shi’ī and Şūfi interpretation of the life of ‘Alī. His another unfinished work, written in prose and poetry, Ijāz-i Mustafawī, details the biographies of the Prophet, the "Rightly-guided" caliphs, and the early imāms. The parallel titles, common sources, and similar approach to the material reveals a single conception behind both works.

Manāqīb-i Murtażawī consists of 12 chapters and testifies to the author’s outstanding knowledge of the sources on the early history of Islam that were most widespread in India during his time. It also displays his close familiarity with the works of such renowned poets as ‘Āṭār, Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, Khwāja Muhammad Gūrū Darāz, Khwāja Mu’in ad-Dīn Chishti, Sana’ī, Niẓāmī, and, of course, his glorious ancestor, Ni’matallah Wali, as well as many other Şūfi poets [3].

Manuscript C 1684 in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies was copied in Indian ink in a lovely shikasta-nasta’liq and nashk on glossy crème-coloured paper of Eastern origin. It contains 127 folios. The folio dimensions are 17.2×27.6 cm; 15 lines. The text is enclosed in a blue-black-gold border; text dimensions are 11.5×21.8 cm. Red ink was used for chapter (bāb) divisions and smaller divisions. A number of proper names and quotes are highlighted with red dotted overlines. Quotes in Arabic are copied in nashk. The hāfiz — pagination “holders” — consist of the first word on the next page and are placed in the lower left corner of each even page.

© E. A. Rezvan, 2002