

Two Rare Large-Size Qajar Paintings from a Private Collection in Lahore

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Abstract: Present abstract is about two rare large size paintings, each possibly forming a front and back cover of a bookbinding belonging to Early Qajar Period or, what is more probable, a pair of portrait paintings of two Qajar Emperors used as a wall hanging side by side. These paintings are at present in a private collection in Lahore. Both are of the same format and size each measure 44.5 x 30 cm. One of the folios (Painting I) contains a portrait of the founder of the Qajar dynasty i.e. Sultan Fateh Ali Shah (1797 - 1834) along with some of his family members including two crown-wearing ladies. The second folio or Painting II shows the portrait figure of his nephew and successor Qajar Sultan Muhammad Shah (1834-1848). Like predecessors, this King is also shown surrounded by a group of people – all male- either his courtiers or family members. Both the kings are identifiable with their names inscribed each in the form of *tughra* set inside a medallion with outlines in relief. Although the name of the artist is not known but there is no doubt that both have been rendered by one and the same artist. The paintings have been rendered on a base of thick cardboard with rounded corners. The actual paintings are done in a mixed media of plaster or gypsum (gesso) mixed with oil colors and finally varnished/ lacquered. The colors are dusky and dark due to the application of varnish. Back side of both paintings are plain but painted in brick-red color and varnished/lacquered. These paintings are definitely made in a technique that, though introduced during late Safavid Period, was popularized during the Zand period (1779 - 1797) and early Qajar Period (1797 - 1848).

On stylistic grounds, both these paintings are datable between 1797 to 1848. Apparently, these are examples of book-binding of early Qajar Period which was famous, among other things, for painted and tooled book-bindings prepared on *papier mache*, plaster base or gesso work, painted in oil colors and varnished/lacquered. But this is not sure. Alternately, these can be regarded as a pair of portrait paintings of two kings, painted with an identical frame but meant for hanging side by side in a royal room or court as was the custom of the Qajar court. In any case, for us, importance of these folios lies in the fact that Qajar paintings, like the two under study, to the best of my knowledge, have surfaced for the first time in any collection - public or private - in Pakistan. The Qajar Paintings have their origin in the later days of the Safavid art but flourished during the cultural shock of Europeanization and a counter movement of resistance for the survival and revival of indigenous elements in art and culture of Iran - a dualism which still continues in present day Iran.

Keywords: Cultural Dualism, Iran, Europeanization, Lacquered Painting, Mixed Media, Qajar Period, Resistance Movement, Safavid, Tooled book-binding, Varnished Painting, Zand Period.

Introduction

The two paintings under discussion belong to a private collection in Lahore. The owner obtained it some 43 years back from a private dealer in Peshawar. Although these cannot be dated precisely, but the present writer has no hesitation in attributing them to the School of Painting of

Qajar dynasty that ruled Iran from 1797 to 1925 from their newly founded capital Tehran. These paintings are rare in their own right, as well as, to the best of my knowledge, for belonging to a school of art that is seldom, if ever, represented in any collection - public or private, in this country. Both paintings are of the same size (44.5

x 30 cm) and are made on one side of a thick wasli made by gluing several layers of thin paper one above the other. Each painting has been rendered on the front side of the sheet in dusky colors while the backside is plain but finished with brick-red color paint. At the end the surface has been burnished in typical Qajar¹ fashion of the 19th century. On this account, I am tempted to regard these paintings as belonging to a front and back-cover of some Qajar manuscript. However, there is no evidence of a spine or a flap of a book binding. Alternately, these might have formed a pair of portrait paintings of two senior most members of the Qajar family and used as wall-hanging to be displayed side by side. The personalities in these paintings are easily identifiable, with the help of two Persian inscriptions, as Qajar Sultan Fateh Ali Shah (Plate I) - the founder, and his nephew and immediate successor Sultan Muhammad Shah (Plate II) who ruled Iran from 1797 to 1834 and 1834 to 1848 respectively.

Here below the two paintings individually and separately described.

Painting I (Plate I)

This is the portrait of Fateh Ali Shah, the founder emperor of the Qajar dynasty. His identity is confirmed by a Persian inscription scribed in the shape of a *tughra* set inside a five-lobed cartouche with its boundary, being in plaster of Paris, set in high relief. The *tughra* (Plate IV a) reads as:

“Qajar Fateh Ali Shah Sultan” (قاچار فتیحے شاه)
(سلطان)

¹ This family title is written 'Qachar' (قاچار) but in Iran pronounces as Qajar (قاچار). I have retained the latter form.

² It has since been destroyed but a copy is preserved in the Indian Office Library and Records, London.

Trans: Fateh Ali Shah, the Qajar Sultan or Ruler.

This Qajar Sultan ruled Iran for a pretty long period of thirty-seven years (1797-1834). He is shown seated crossed-legged near the head-rest (or back-rest) leaving the front portion of the throne empty. His body is turned to his left whereas his gaze is fixed his right as he is looking out of the picture-frame. As is known from some of his portraits, like the one by Mihr Ali together with his moustaches, covers more than half of his face leaving his lips framing his small mouth hardly visible. On his head, he wears a bejeweled crown with a single aigrette/plume (Plate XVI a). Details of his dress are not clearly visible due to bad state of preservation of this painting, but it is almost identical as seen in his oil on canvas portrait by Mihr Ali (Plate X a) as already referred to above. Especially, see his shoulder trimmings, broad armlets and bracelets and the bejeweled swords placed in front of him.

On both sides of the King-on-throne are standing nine members of the royal family - including two ladies. Both the ladies are on 'our right' and three male figures on the opposite side wear bejeweled crenellated crowns. The two ladies occupy the highest position in the hierarchy on the right side. Under them are shown standing two male figures - both bearded like Qajar kings/princes and both wearing rolled up turbans with spirally ribbons of different colors as seen worn by sons of Fateh Ali Shah in the fresco painting by Abdullah Khan made in 1813 formerly in the Nigaristan Palace, Tehran² (Plate XII). On the opposite side. i.e. on the right side of the king are five male figures arranged in three tiers each wearing a crenellated crown. The three male figures at the bottom tier

See B.W Robinson in: R. W. Ferrier (editor), The Arts of Persia. New Haven and London, 1989, Chapter 14: Painting in the Post-Safavid Period, p. 228, Pl. 5.

also wear crenellated crowns like those of two ladies on the opposite side.

Painting II (Plate II)

This portrait is also identified with an inscription in a *tughra* (Plate IV b) as

“Qajar Muhammad Shah Sultan” (قاجار محمد شاه سلطان)

Trans: Muhammad Shah, the Qajar Sultan / Ruler.

He ruled Iran for fourteen years between 1834 and 1848.

Like in Painting I, in this work too, the king is seated cross-legged on the throne near its back-rest. Like-wise, the front portion of the throne is empty. The body of the king is turned slightly towards our right whereas his gaze is fixed in the opposite direction as he may be looking out of picture-frame - a mode, as already pointed out, hitherto was considered un-modest for royal personages. His face is round and his mouth small, his face covered with heavy set of black moustaches and his beard is short and rounded unlike the long beard of his predecessor in previous Painting (Plate XVI). His crown comprises a bejeweled turban with a single aigrette or plume and a large round and heavy diamond-studded attachment on the right side of the crown. This crown is slightly different in style than that of Fateh Ali Shah which is crenellated. Initially there appears to be some design on it, details of which are now blurred and almost obliterated.

On the left side of the king are four male figures arranged in a hierarchical order (Plate II). The two in the upper tier are standing while the other two in the lower tier are seated. The standing male figures - one bearded and the other clean shaved, wear traditional long gowns or *choghas* and black caps with one end of it slightly tilted like *kaj kulah* i.e. tilted turban - a symbol of

arrogance. In one case, the cap has been completely chipped off exposing the base of white lime/gypsum or plaster of Paris on top of which the painting was made. One figure with black cap wears a black cloak while the bearded figure wears a flowered gown of different colour.

The other two figures near the lower end of the throne are shown seated with gowns covering their feet. They are wearing a totally different head-dress. Each of it comprises a high white turban wrapped round a drum-like skull-cap (*kulla*). The turbans are further wrapped with bands of colorful cloth which run upward in spiral-like formation. Their seated position indicates them to be personage of some high rank or social order as compared to the two figures standing above them.

On the right-hand side of the king are also four figures - all standing male, and again in two tiers. Near the head of the throne is an isolated figure with folded arm and looking towards 'his right'. Like his counterpart on the opposite side, he looks quite young with trimmed moustaches. He wears a typical but similar tilted Qajar cap but with a flap which falls over the lap of his neck and covers both of his shoulders. Below him are three more figures standing in one row - all standing and wearing similar tilted black caps, black beards and moustaches (Plate XVII b). The central one of the three figures, wears a colored gown whereas the flanking figures wear black gowns. Like the king, all the eight figures gaze towards their right side and hence out of the picture-plan. All the eight figures appear to belong to the royal family, with the five bearded figures near the bottom of the picture frame - two seated and three standing appears to be the senior ones and the other three being the junior members of the same family. Their head-dresses also reflect their social status in the court. A huge fresco of the time of Fateh Ali Shah (1797-1834) in the Hall of Nigaristan, Tehran, made by Abdullah Khan in about 1813 (Plate XII), is interesting for our purpose (Robinson, 1989: 228, pl. 5). It is a huge

mural titled: 'Presentation of the Ambassadors at the Audience Hall of Nigaristan Palace, Tehran' and shows Fateh Ali Shah enthroned in the midst of his court and attended by a group of his sons and a number of foreign ambassadors - the whole comprised no fewer than 118 life-size figures (Robinson, 1989: 228). Most of the figures of his sons wear high vertical turbans like those worn by three figures in our Painting II and on the analogy of the figures in the fresco may possibly be identified as the sons of the king on the throne - all being senior to those who wear different type of head-dress. Some of the figures of the princes in the Nigaristan fresco are shown wearing similar turbans but with different colors and some are of altogether different designs and colors.

Both Paintings Compared

When we see the two paintings together, we observe several similarities as well as differences. Both (Plates I - II) have identical format and size i.e. 44.5 x 30 cm. Both have round corners and a thick border on four sides. Both have a similar setting i.e. inside of a room with dark color curtains rolled up over a window in European fashion (Plate V) as seen in a Safavid period painting now in Nigaristan Palace Museum, Tehran³ or in an almost contemporary painting of Fateh Ali Shah (1797-1834)⁴. A bejeweled throne is placed in the center of the room on which the king is shown seated cross-legged at the farthest end (Plate XVII a & b). On either side of the king are arranged a number of figures - all male in one case and male and female in the other case - all standing in hierarchical tiers. Near the head of the king there is a four-lobed cartouche (Plate IV a-b) each containing the name, in Persian script, of

the Qajar Emperor it represents. The blank space in front of the throne and between the flanking figures is occupied by a foot-rest for reaching the throne (Plate XVII c & d). Besides, in front of the foot-rest there is a large-sized settee in black color, the purpose of which is not clear.

The background of both paintings, including floor, is also treated identically. On the ground are scattered bunches of flowers in pink and black colors with twigs in black. In some cases, these can be identified as pink roses. But identity in other cases is difficult in the present state of preservation of the paintings.

Like the front, the reverse sides of both paintings are also identical (Plate III a & b). But, these are painted in brick-red and varnished. However, the surface is plain and without any figural, floral or geometrical pattern. There is no border.

As at present, in the center of upper edge of each painting there is perforation further strengthened with an iron ring (*challa*) with a cord - obviously for suspension. This perforation, iron ring and cord are seemingly latter additions adopted for suspending the paintings against a wall.

The front and backsides of both paintings have been given a final coat of varnish. On this account one is tempted to propose that perhaps the two folios were meant to be used as front and back-side cover of some manuscript with inner sides left plain. However, absence of a spine and flap and any mark of tooling goes against this idea. Alternately, these were probably prepared as a pair of large size miniature paintings with portraits of the first two rulers of the Qajar family

³ This Isfahani painting, entitled 'A Lady in Persian Dress standing on a Terrace' is dated between 1650-80. See: R. W. Ferrier (ed.), *The Arts of Persia*. London, 1989, p. 222, Pl. 39.

⁴ This painting is entitled: 'Rustam and Tehmina'. See R. W. Ferrier (ed.), *The Arts of Persia*.

London, 1989, p. 228, Pl. 7 230. The throne on which Rustam shown reclining, although square in plan, is similar as in our painting with a tri-lobed back-rest in the back and a foot-rest in front.

and were meant to be hung side by side on a wall in some room. Qajar period is well-known for such wall-displays with large canvases and fresco paintings⁵. However, both these options are open to further discussion and hence need further deliberations - in a different forum though.

In each case, the central figure is flanked by certain number of figures. In one case, there are only male figures whereas in the other case, these include two female figures and three male figures – all wearing gilded and bejeweled crowns on their heads (Plate XVIII a & b). The number and gender of these flanking figures, however, differ in two paintings. In case of painting depicting 'Fateh Ali Shah' - for convenience we will call it in this paper as: Painting No. I, the total number of the figures, including the main central figure, is 10 whereas in case of the painting with portrait of 'Muhammad Shah', hereafter we will call it Painting No. II, the number of total figures, including the figure of the Emperor, is 9. In Painting II, all figures are male (Plate XVIII b) whereas in Painting I two of these are only male figures, whereas the figures are crown-wearing ladies as well. In the latter case, beside the two crowned female figures three male figures on the opposite side are also shown wearing similar bejeweled crowns. In Painting II, on the other hand, all are male figures and none wears a crown (Plate IX a & b).

Both central figures in these paintings are shown each wearing a large crown beset with jewels and aigrettes or plumes. Otherwise all male figures in both paintings, wear three different types of headdress. These are:

1. Bejeweled crowns (Plate XVIII a & b)
2. Black caps with tilted or slanting tops (*kaj-kulah*)⁶ (Plate IX b). And finally
3. A tall rolled up cap or turban of white cloth with multi-colored bands or streaks wrapped around it in the form of a spiral (Plate IX a).

Beside headdress almost all figures - male and female - wear full-length sleeved or half sleeved gowns or tunics often held tight by a broad belt at the hip. Invariably these gowns are black from top to toe but in a few cases the fabric of the gowns appears to be of different material and color - mostly of pinkish tinge.

In general plan, the non-figural decorative lay-out is identical in both cases. Each frame shows a broad border or a rim on all the four sides, a window in the background with heavy folds of curtain rolled up in European fashion, a centrally placed throne, with a headrest on one side and a foot-rest and a large settee on the opposite side. The throne with six crooked feet or legs is heavily bejeweled. As already explained above, in both pictures, the background is sprinkled with clusters of pink rose-buds and twigs on red background. The royal figures on the throne are also placed identically near the upper end of the throne - both are seated cross-legged with face turned to right but the figure is shown with a gaze turned left going out of the picture frame. The only difference in the two paintings is the number and nature of flanking figures which vary considerably from one another.

The principal figure in each case is the king himself shown seated crossed-legged at the

⁵ For example, see "A Young Prince on a Horseback attacked by a Dragon", size 190 x 92 cm., Dated late 18th century. By Muhammad Sadiq (S. J. Falak, Qajar Paintings - Persian Oil Paintings of the 18th

and 19th Centuries. London, 1972, p.59, coloured plate. 4).

⁶ The adjective *kaj kulahi* means "tilted cap or turban" but in day-today parlance stands for arrogance and pride.

farthest end of the throne fitted with a back-rest in the shape of three-lobed arch. Both the thrones are of identical shape - in plan and elevation i.e. oblong having protective low walls on three sides with back-rest on the fourth and a narrow opening along the opposite shorter side. In front of this opening, in each case, is a foot-rest for facilitating the king to ascend the throne resting on six crooked legs. The thrones are similar as seen in a portrait painting of Fateh Ali Shah now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford⁷. The only difference is that the six-legged thrones in our paintings are oblong in shape whereas the throne in the Bodleian Library painting is square and has four crooked legs. The couple standing on the right side of the Emperor wear similar crenellated crown as shown in our Painting I. The sides of thrones, the two back-rests and two foot-rests are all heavily bejeweled with pearls and diamonds. Both the kings have heavy set bodies, round faces, sparkling eyes with set gaze looking towards right - a characteristic of paintings of the Qajar kings considered un-modest for kings of earlier periods. Their beards and moustaches are thick and stark black in color. Each of the king wears a heavily bejeweled crown in the shape of heavy turban. Both the crowns and dresses worn by the kings are bedecked with "bands of ornaments formed by the diamond, pearl, emerald and ruby belt, bracelets and trimmings on the coat" and medal as seen in a Qajar oil painting on canvas illustrated by Sheila R. Canby⁸.

Both the kings, in our paintings, are shown seated each on an oblong throne with six legs and a back-rest in the form of a tri-lobe. On this throne the kings are shown seated cross-legged. To the best of my knowledge, in paintings normally Qajar kings are shown either standing in a balcony or seated cross-legged on a carpet spread on floor in a balcony. In one case, in a Qajar painting by Shirin, made in 1840, the King Khusrau is shown seated on a chair of European design, rather than on a throne or floor (Falak, 1972, Plate No. 46.). Sultan Fateh Ali Shah was very fond of getting himself painted in standing or seated postures in a balcony on a terrace with trellis railing behind (Falak, 1972)⁹. In one painting, made in 1810, now in Bodleian Library, Oxford, King Fateh Ali Shah is shown seated cross-legged on an exactly similar throne but of a square rather than oblong shape as in our paintings. The foot-rest as well as the low walls on three sides of the throne are similarly poised (Falak, 1972: pl.2)¹⁰.

The crowns worn by the two emperors in our paintings are slightly different from the ones normally seen in most of the Qajar paintings. In the latter, the crowns are light round plus of crenellated form. In our case the crowns are of heavier type - round in shape with single plume or aigrette and a large round sun-flower type ornament set on the west side of the face. Beside this, there is a striking similarity between the two types. In all examples, known from published

⁷ The Bodleian painting is titled: Fateh Ali Shah Receiving Tributes. It is dated circa 1810. See R. W. Robinson, A Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Paintings in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, 1958, pl. 1198.

⁸ This painting on canvas is entitled: "Qajar Prince and Attendant". It measures 183 x 91.5 cm and is dated circa 1820 or a little later. See, Sheila R. Canby, Persian Painting, British Museum London, 1993, p. 120. fig. 81.

⁹ Figs. 12, 13, 14, 15 where the king is always shown seated or standing on a terrace with a thick carpet under his feet or resting against a large round pillow (*gol takiya*) at his back.

¹⁰ "King Hormuzd IV with Attendants", by Mirza Baba, dated 1789-90), No. 46 ("Portrait of King Khusrau", dated circa 1840) and No. 50 (L Lady smoking a qalian" dated during the period of Muhammad Shah - 1834-1848.

sources, Qajar kings are shown wearing a sort of crenellated crowns fully embellished with pearls and diamonds and each heightened with a set of three plumes as can be seen in some paintings of this period as illustrated by Falak (1972)¹¹ and Robinson (1958: pl. 1198).

In both paintings, in the center-top near the head of the emperor, there is a cartouche each containing a Persian inscription giving the name of the individual presented in the paintings. The two inscriptions read as follow:

Painting No. I: “Qachar Fateh Ali Shah Sultan”

Painting No. II: “Qachar Muhammad Shah Sultan”.

However, in Painting I, the name Fateh Ali has been wrongly scribed as “Fatai-ali” (فتايعلى) instead of “Fateh Ali” (فتاحعلى). This looks strange. In several other examples among known paintings this name is correctly written. But writing oriental names with a wrong orthography is not totally absent among Qajar paintings. Thus, we see the word/proper name Taj (تاج), meaning crown, is wrongly written as taj (Falak, 1972: pl. 17)¹² with ‘toai’ (ط) instead of ‘tai’ (ت). Similarly, another proper female name Khanas Khanum is written as Khanan (خنن يا خن) (Falak, 1972: pl.

43)¹³, the word Shaikh (شيخ) is readable as Jam’a (جامع) or Sha Hammad (شاه حماد) (Falak, 1972: pl.61)¹⁴, the name Azra is written with ‘zai (عزرا) instead of ‘zal’ (عزرا).

Technique

Our paintings have been made each on one side of a *wasli* made by pressing several layers of thin papers one above the other so that it looks and behave like a hardboard. As was the case with Zand (1779 - 1797) (Robinson, 1989: 225)¹⁵ and Qajar (1797-1925) art works, the two paintings under discussion were also prepared with a “thin layer of coating of fine plaster, or gesso¹⁶, on which the design was painted in the miniature style of the period, and the whole was then lacquered or varnished over” a thin layer of plaster or gesso¹⁷. Above this prepared surface was made the painting in oil colors. Some parts of the paintings along with the outer edge of both medallions containing inscriptions, are also in low relief. After the painting was completed, it was covered with a layer of lacquer or varnish. As the plaster or gypsum layer was dried up there developed cracks in the painting - both on the obverse and reverse sides.

Use of plaster of Paris and/or gesso as well as

¹¹ frontispiece, figs.12 (turban with a single aigrette), 13-16 (all of King Fateh Ali Shah) and colored plates nos. 8 (A Prince with Attendant, Late 18th century) and 9 (A King seated on Terrace, Period of Fateh Ali Shah - 1797-1834) and No. 46 (King Khusrau), etc.

¹² A Girl in Outdoor Costume holding an Apple, Period of Fateh Ali Shah.

¹³ A Girl Acrobat balancing on a Knife, circa 1840.

¹⁴ King (mid. 19th cent.) with a Prince.

¹⁵ There is a brief interlude of some sixty-one years between the end of Nadir Khan's rule (1747) and the ascendancy of the Qajars under Fateh Ali Shah (1797). During this brief period, Karim Khan, a scion of Zand family ruled the country. He was a great builder and a

patron of art. European influence penetrated in Persia London first under his rule.

¹⁶ Gesso comprises ground gypsum (sometimes plaster of Paris) mixed with oil and glue for use as a surface for painting, gilding, etc. This technique goes back to the late fifteenth century (See: B. W. Robinsin in R. W. Ferrier (editor), The Arts of Persia. op. cit. Cahpter 14: Painting in the Post Safavid Period: p. 225-231).

¹⁷ For The Art of Book under the Safavid, Zands and Qajar see Chapter 15: The Arts of the Book by Barbar Brend, pp.241-242 and for lacquer work during Qajar Period see Chapter 16: Lacquer Work by L. Diba, pp. 243-253, both in: R. W. Ferrier (editor), The Arts of Persia. op. cit.

lacquering and varnish in these paintings should not surprise us. Several of the Qajar paintings were prepared on *papier mache* which were covered with a thin layer of plaster of Paris or gesso. On this surface the painting was prepared with oil colors. With the help of gesso sometimes designs and certain motifs are made in low relief. Due to the application of varnish, with the passage of time, these paintings usually become opaque and dark - as in our case.

Date

Our two paintings have not been signed by any artist of the Qajar period. Since these paintings belong to the first two rulers - Fateh Ali Shah (1797-1834) and his nephew-successor Muhammad Shah (1834-1848), it is evident that the paintings were commissioned by either of the two emperors - more probably during the reign of the latter i.e. Muhammad Shah or even his son Nasir-ud Din (1848-1896). I derive strength for this date from one fact i.e. the presentation of the two crowns. On the one hand, the crowns worn by figures in our paintings not only differ from the crenellated crowns usually worn by Qajar rulers as shown in different paintings¹⁸ but the two differ from each other as well.

The adornment of their coats is almost similar to one as shown by a Qajar Prince as in a painting on canvas in oil titled: "A Qajar Prince and His Attendant", size 183 x 91.5 cm, dated 1820 or

later (Pl. XIII a) (Canby, 1993: 120.pl.81). However, as regards their crowns, the one worn by Fateh Ali Shah, the founder of the dynasty, is similar to the one worn by him in a painting by Mihr Ali (Falak, 1972: pl. 15; Ferrier, 1989: 224, pl. 1), now in Nigaristan Museum, Tehran (Pl. X a), the one worn by his successor Muhammad Shah is totally different both in shape and decoration. In one respect, it certainly appears to be superior to one worn by his predecessor Fateh Ali Shah. In respect of its larger and more impressive aigrette or plume. By showing Muhammad Shah wearing a different type of crown, with a larger plume, the artist has tended to show him as the ruling king sitting in the company of his courtiers. On the contrary, Sultan Fateh Ali Shah is shown surrounded by the members of his royal family which - among others include two females and three male members - all wearing crowns of usual crenellated form - all purporting them to be princes and princesses of the royal family of Sultan Fateh Ali¹⁹. By this, the artist has shown part of the larger family of Fateh Ali Shah of which Muhammad Shah was certainly a part²⁰. The present author rules out the possibility of the third Qajar King Nasir-ud Din (1848 - 1896) to be the sponsor of these paintings - or the period during which these were executed, on the ground that his period was marred and marked by a xenophobia of excessive Europeanization in the

¹⁸ For types or variations of crowns worn by and during the reign of Qajar rulers see: Falak, 1972, Pl 8: A Prince with an Attendant, Late 18th cent.; Pl.9, A King seated on a Terrace, Period of Fateh Ali Shah; Pl. 12, Portrait of Fateh Ali Shah, circa 1797-1834; Pl. 815, Portrait of Fateh Ali Shah by Mihr Ali, 1813; Pl.16, Portrait of Fateh Ali Shah, seated, a painted during his own period; pl.19, Crown worn by A Girl playing a Drum, by Abu'al Qasim, 1813; Pls. 41-42, Crown worn by Josef, son of Jacob - the prophets, both executed during the period of Muhammad Shah; Pl. 46, Portrait of King Khusrau;

Pl.61, Crowns worn by king Jamshid and a Prince, mid. 19th cent., etc.

¹⁹ The crowns worn by these women and men are similar as worn by Prince Abbas Mirza, one of the sons of Fateh Ali as painted as *eglonise* (behind the glass) by Mihr Ali. (See Ferrier, p. 229-30, pl. 9).

²⁰ Fateh Ai is reported to have about 100 sons and certainly more than one wife but the one who succeeded him after his death was his nephew Muhammad Shah.

field of art and craft. He was so much influenced by the European art and culture, that he established in the capital city Tehran a College of Art (*Darul Funun*) with the “express purpose of training painters in the European style” (Ferrier 1989: 231). He himself learnt the art of photography and became a very gifted photographer. Later on, he sent one of his artists for training in printing in an Art School of London. Ismail Jallair was one his best artists whose style is individual but markedly different. A well-known piece that Jallair produced under European influence, is the Mirror Case “tinged with a sort of gentle melancholy” (Ferrier, :231. pl. 12). Two of his works under European influence have been illustrated by Ferrier (all this dated 1854) and Ladies round a Samavar in V and A Museum, - both by prepared during the reign of Nasirud Din (1848-1895).

History and Art of the Qajars

No Qajar painting has so far been documented in any of the collections - public or private, in Pakistan. No university or college in this country teaches the history and art of this period. Therefore, there is very little awareness about this class of paintings in this country. It will, therefore, not be out of place if we discuss here, albeit briefly, the history of Qajars and discuss some salient features of Qajar paintings and see how the two newly discovered paintings under our discussion fit in this class of art work. First their history.

Brief History

Between the fall of the Safavid and rise of the Qizalbash-Qajar dynasties, there is a short interlude of eventful rule of Nadir Shah, more popularly known Nadir Khan Afghani belonging

to the Afshar clan of the Qizalbash in Afghanistan. He rose to power in 1729, declared himself as king of Afghanistan and Iran in 1736, raided Indian and destroyed Delhi in 1739. He plundered Delhi ruthlessly and carried away with him the riches of India including the famous Peacock Throne of Shahjahan. He made Mashhad his capital and donated some 400 manuscripts looted from India to the Shrine of Imam Raza in the city of Mashhad. These may have created an impact/influence on Persian painters.

Within a decade of Nadir Khan’s murder, another tribal chief from Western Persia, named Karim Khan Zand, started to rise to power with the support of the remnants of the Safavid dynasty tried to eliminate the rival Bakhtiari and Qizalbash clans (Canby, 1993: 117-118). He shifted capital from Mashhad to Shiraz and ruled from his new capital. Also, he tried to heal the wounds of the Iranians inflicted by the by Afghans under Nadir Khan. He was killed in 1779.

the early death of Karim Khan Zand lead to another short period of chaos and instability for Iran. His weak successors were harshly dealt with and eliminated by a Qajar scion name Agha (Aqa) Muhammad who had personal reasons to take revenge from the Zands²¹. But he had had hardly settled himself in power when he was also murdered in 1796. In 1797, he was succeeded by his nephew Fateh Ali Khan who was able to put the Qajar dynasty on a firm footing for a long time to come.

The Qajars ruled over Iran for about 128 years (1797-1925) with four ruler following one after another namely Fateh Ali Khan (1797-1834), Muhammad Shah (1834-1848), Nasir-ud Din (1848- 1896) and Muzaffarud Din (1896-1907).

²¹ Earlier, father of Agha Muhammad was murdered and he himself he was castrated and imprisoned by

Karim Khan Zand. For this reason he has usually been described by historians as sadist king.

His rule was followed by a political and constitutional struggle in place of monarchical rule. This state of affairs ended in 1925 with the end of the Qajar dynasty and the beginning of a constitutional rule.

The founder of the dynasty, Fateh Ali Shah, ruled for about 37 years and the dynasty took a firm root. He is said to have more than hundred sons but, as he himself had succeeded his uncle, when he died he too was succeeded by his nephew Muhammad Shah, son of Abbas - probably Shah Abbas Kuchak who is depicted in a painting of mid. 19th century (Falak, 1972: 61, pl. 61). His period was of relative calm. But the Iran under the Qajars suffered under a new menace - the rising power of Europe - particularly, the Russian interest in Central Asia (particularly in Georgia and Armenia) and British interest in the Persian Gulf. Iran, not only lost Georgia (Girjistan) and part of Armenia but was obliged to give several trade concessions to Russians to the detriment of Iranian economy (Canby, 1993: 118; Robinson 1989: 231). He was succeeded by his grandson Muhammad Shah in 1834. The latter ruled until 1848. "Although he attempted to liberalize the country, but he too was manipulated by Russian ambition and British regional aims connected with maintaining primacy in the Persian Gulf and control in India (Canby, 1993: 118). This interference in the form of economic penetration and cultural influence, escalated to the maximum during the reign of his successor Nasir-ud Din (1848 - 1896). "The Shah himself travelled to Europe in 1873 and on two later occasions, noting with fascination all manner of technological innovations, not to mention the exotic tastes and mores of the Europeans" (Canby, 1993: 118). But despite timely realization of adverse effects of these interferences, the king nonetheless "welcomed the introduction of European ideas and commodities. "However, for this excessive xenophobic as well as simple economic reasons,

resentment against the flood of European goods and European opportunists into Iran grew among the clergy and urban merchants" (Canby, 1993: 118). With his successor's (1896-1907), spendthrift tendencies further aggravated this situation which finally resulted in the birth of a constitutional movement in 1906 for an elected National Assembly in 1907 enabling Iran to join the modern world. The Qajar family, however, continued to rule up till 1925.

It may be interesting to note that whereas on the one hand Qajar rulers inclined themselves towards western civilization - particularly the art of painting, decorative arts, printing and photography, to the late 20th Century Western eyes, Qajar paintings often appear odd and sometimes downright funny (Canby, 1993: 123). For example, the famous scholar on Islamic Art of Persia, A. J. Arberry dismissed Qajar art of the 18th century as dull, repetitive and without any quality (Arberry, 2001: 144). "By the end of sixteenth century" writes Arberry, "miniature painting had lost most of its vitality, the only original contribution being made by Riza-yi 'Abbasi, the outstanding painter at Shah Abbas's capital, Isfahan. His dominating influence lasted right through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Seventeenth-century painting, is however, on the whole dull, and repetitive. By the eighteenth century all quality was lost" (Arberry, 2001: 144). On the contrary, some of the Persian scholars not only disagree with this Western obsession but, instead, for Persian art in general demonstrate "a continuity from the Late Safavid period to the Qajar style" (Canby, 1993: 119). Many Qajar oil paintings have survived from the period of Fateh Ali Shah (1797 - 1834) and later including some from the brief Zand period (1757-1779) and the chaos (1779 - 1797) that followed them till the rise of the Qajar Dynasty in 1797.

Qajar Art

Two main factors influenced Persian artists

between 1630 and 1722:

1. The work of Riza-i-Abbasi) and European art such as Lady watching a dog drink wine by Afzal - a pupil of Riza-i-Abbasi (Canby, 1993: 103, pl. 168).
2. The influence of European painting had led the Persian artists to slacken the public moral standards and obliged them to render nude figures and erotic possess increased throughout the 17th century (Canby, 1993: 103).

Albums, lacquered book-bindings, mirrors cases, and boxes are known to have been abundantly made during this period. Illustrated historical manuscripts and single page portraits were also produced for a range of patrons, in a style consistent with that of Muhammad Ali and his contemporaries (Canby, 1993: 119). The Qajar paintings are often shaped like an arch in order to fit inside a room of arched-shaped background on the wall (Plate X b). While paintings with innumerable depictions of dancers (Plate XII b-c), revelers were mostly likely intended for coffee houses and perhaps also for private dwellings, on the other hand, paintings with portraits of princes (Plate XI a & b) and historical scenes would have adorned the walls of private palaces. The shading on the figures' faces and hands show awareness of modeling. Shading and attempts at perspective appear in works with stubbornly two-dimensional passages but it was acceptable to their patrons (Canby, 1993: 123). Attractive though such portraits are, the static frontality of the figures lends little insight into the character (Canby, 1993: 121). As one would expect, drawings of the same period provided artists with a greater opportunity for spontaneity and originality, as in a painting entitled Dog attacking a Wolf (Canby, 1993: 121).

Characteristic Qajar features like the king's direct gaze, one foot resting on the other, and the figures

pressed together - may well represent a mannerism characteristic to the kings. But earlier, king's lost gaze was considered as a lack of modesty that was unthinkable before Qajar times (Canby, 1993: 123). The deep red velvet, settee, bright yellow wall and opaque windows, as seen in most of the Qajar paintings, may reflect Shah's Europeanizing taste (Canby, 1993: 123). The Europeanizing tendency proliferated increasingly towards the end of the seventeenth century that was maintained and developed by the sons and grandsons of the originators of the style" such as the artist Muhammad Ali, and were produced for a range of patrons in a style consistent of Muhammad Zaman (Canby, 1993: 119). European motifs and compositions remained in favor through the 18th and 19th centuries (Plate XIV a-b, and Plate XV a-b).

The most renowned artists of the Qajar period are: Mirza Baba, Muhammad Sadiq, Mihr Ali, Abu'l Qasim, Muhammad Hasan, Sayyad Mirza, Shirin, the Painter (Falak, 1972: 25-54), etc.

Beside these, following names also occur in history: Najaf Ali, Muhammad Baqir, Muhammad Ali son of Muhammad Zaman, Khanezada Ismail, Mihr Ali and Shafi Abbasi (Canby, 1993).

The largest single collection of Qajar Paintings under one roof is the Amery Collection acquired by two Amery Brothers in the beginning of the 20th century. In 1969 it was acquired by Her Majesty Queen Farah Pahlavi of Iran who brought it to Tehran. It comprises 63 oil paintings belonging to the 18th and 19th Century. This collection has been catalogued by S.J. Falak. The author admits: "The photography of Qajar paintings is not easy to perfect" (Falak, 1972: 5).

Among other collections, the most significant one is the Tiflis Collection in The State Museum of Tiflis, in Georgia. Some other smaller collections can be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum,

London, the British Museum, London, the India Office Library, London, the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad (Russia), and a few individual collections such as Mrs. A. H. Ebtehaj, Mr. Manuchehr Sani and Mr. Rabbani of Iran (Falak, 1972: 5).

The genres such as oil painting, introduced in the seventeenth century and the decoration of lacquer boxes, pen cases, book-bindings, still life and landscapes remained current in the eighteen century, even if they were produced in smaller number than in the nineteen century" (Plates XIV - XVII).

While the excessive use of shading sometimes endows these works with a dusky/dark quality, they do display an impressive understanding of the play of light of (coming from a single source) on three dimensional forms (Canby, 1993: 119).

In sum: Most of the ingredients of the Qajar style were available in the 18th century, but it took the stability of three long reigns - those of Fateh Ali Shah, Muhammad Shah and Nasir-ud Din Shah (1797 - 1896) to stimulate the last efflorescence of Persian painting.

The third Qajar King Nasir-ud Din Shah (1848-1896) (Plate XVI b) was highly enthusiastic about the things European, including visual arts and photography. He established a technical College (*Darul Funun*) in Tehran, the Qajar capital and brought instructor from Europe to teach, among other things, photography that had already been introduced in Qajar court (Canby,

1993: 123). He himself was a good photographer. Besides, he also sent one of his court-artists to Europe to learn printing art in England.

The Persians adopted some aspects of foreign style that appealed to them and grafted them on to their own tradition (Canby, 1993: 124). Still-life, portraits, historical events and Christian scenes, in the form of vignettes, sometimes share the surfaces of a single pen box, mirror case or *samavar*.

In Qajar paintings, kings are not shown as idealized individuals. Instead, they are there as recognizable personalities. But, one could not expect an aesthetic that began long before the first illustrated manuscript to disappear entirely in one century (Canby, 1993: 123). In the hands of the most gifted artists of the day, the combination of the old and new bore fruit in the form of a distinctive but wholly Persian style of painting (Canby, 1993: 124).

Two main factors influenced Persian artists between 1630 and 1722:

1. The work of Riza-(i-Abbasi) and European art such as Lady watching a dog drink wine by Afzal - a pupil of Riza-i-Abbasi (Canby, 1993: 103, pl. 168).
2. The influence of European painting had led the Persian artists to slacken the public moral standards and obliged them to render nude figures and erotic possess increased throughout the 17th century (Canby, 1993: 103.).

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Plate I: Front Full View of Sultan Fateh Ali Shah Qajar (797-1834)



Plate II : Front Full View of Sultan Muhammed Ali Shah Qajar (1834-1848)



(a)



(b)

Plate III a b: Back Sides of the Two: Painting I and Painting II



Plate IV a & b: Two *Tughras* in Painting I and Painting II



(a)



(b)

Plate V a & b: Upper Halves of the two Paintings showing Sultan Fateh Ali Shah Qajar and Muhammad Shah Qajar with their *tughras* and rolled-up curtain in the background



(a)

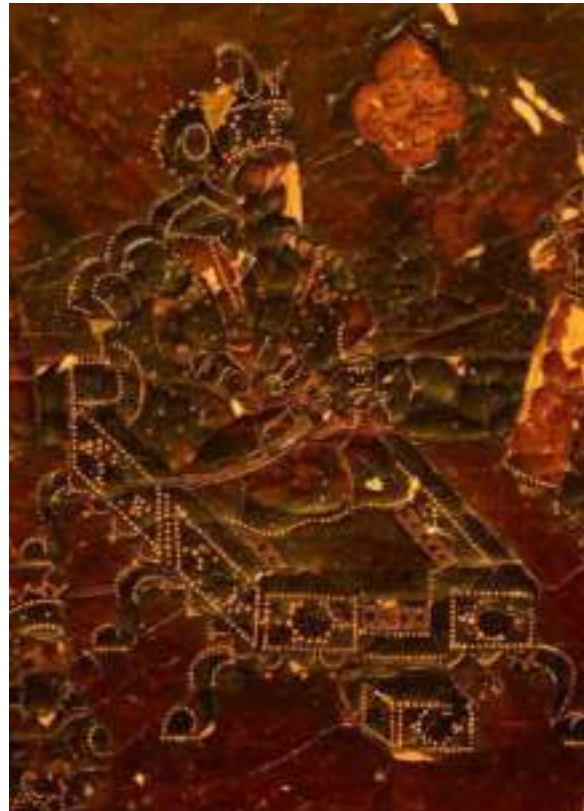


(b)

Plate VI a & b: Details of the crowns and Body Adornments of the two Kings



(a)



(b)

Plate VII a,b: Details of the central Figures in Painting I and II



(c)



(d)

Plate VII c & d: details of the empty thrones and the settle in the lower of each of the two paintings



Plate VIII a & b: Male and Female figures wearing crowns in Painting I



(a)



(b)

Plate IX a & b: Male Figures Wearing different styles of Head Dresses in Painting II



Plate X a: Details of the Face and Crown of the Portrait of Suktan fateh Ali Qajar (1797-1834) by Mihr Ali



Plate X b: A Prince Serving Wine. Identified with a Persian Inscriptuon as a' a l Hazarat muhammed Shahi.e the Hind ruler



(a)



(b)

Plate XI a & b: Two courtesans (top) and Two Young Princes (bottom) each group with an attendant



Plate XII a : Part of a Fresco Painting by Abdukllah Khan in Nigaristan Palace Tehran showing presentation of Ambassador. Figures wear a number of head gears of different styles travelling during Qajar Period (1797-1925)



(b)



(c)

Plate XII b & c : a Female Acrobat balancing on the point of a knife. She s identified as Khanas (خنن یا خنس)
(or Khanan Khatoon) (خنن خاتون). With details of her head

Plate XIII: a prince with an Attendant. A Qajar painting of late 18th century



(a)



(b)

Plate XIV a & b: two Qajar paintings in European Fashion.

a: A landscape of the period of sultan Muhammed Shah (1834-1848)

b: Still Life signed by Mirza Baba (1793-94)



Plate XV a : Mother with a child. Qajar Painting of the period of Fateh Ali Shah (1797-1834)



Plate XV b: Ladies around a Samawar. Signed by Ismail Jalayir of the period of Nasir-ud-din Qajar (1848-1895)



Plate XVI a: a front cover of a Book Binding. Painted Lacquer work of Zand Period (1750-1778) British Library, London



Plate XVI b: Painted and Lacquered Casket. Signed by Nasrullah -al-Hussaini al Imami (1865-66). Nigaristan Museum Tehran



(a)



(b)



(c)

Plate XVII a, b, c: Three pen boxes

a: top left. Signed by Shah-e-Najaf 19th c. Museum of decorative arts

b: top right made for Nasir-ud-din Shah (1879-80), signed by Abbas sherazi. Museum of decorative arts Tehran

C: signed by Aaq Bazurg Sherazi (852-53), Museum of Decorative arts