Abolala Soudavar. Reassessing Early Safavid Art and History. Thirty-Five Years after Dickson & Welch 1981

Iván Szántó

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REFERENCES

Abolala Soudavar. Reassessing Early Safavid Art and History. Thirty-Five Years after Dickson & Welch 1981, Houston: Abolala Soudavar, 2016, 95 p. ISBN: 9781329976153

1   The volume consists of seven individual studies which are bound together by their strong reliance on *The Houghton Shahnameh* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981) by Martin Bernard Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch and the deference of the author to this two-volume work. While the author engages multiple problems in the respective chapters, his overarching concern is for "Dickson & Welch 1981": a seminal volume which Soudavar believes to have been unjustly marginalised, ignored, and/or criticised by subsequent scholarship. To disprove sceptics, he seeks to defend the book against its critics and demonstrate the usefulness of its methodology by applying it to new material, even though Soudavar is ready to contradict any of Dickson's and Welch's attributions if he disagrees with it. Through this new book, the reader can recognise traces of Soudavar's indebtedness to the two authors in his earlier studies, most notably in *The Saga of Abu-Saʿid Bahādor Khān: The Abu-Saʿidnāmé* (in *Oxford Studies In Islamic Art*, XII, 1996) and *Art of the Persian Courts* (New York, 1992) where he already emulated the task-sharing of art historian Welch and historian Dickson in "reading" the pictorial semantics of epic illustrations as allusions to real-life events. The articles of this book treat their subject in a similar manner, their main tasks being, on the one hand, correctly attributing certain problematic paintings, and, on the other hand, finding their historiographic context.

2   After the introductory remarks of chapter I, the case study in chapter II confirms Dickson's and Welch's attribution of two detached paintings (Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75 and 76) to Mīr Sayyed ʿAlī, invalidating Oleg Grabar's and Mika Natif's rejection of this attribution (see Grabar, Oleg, and Natif, Mika, "Two Safavid Paintings: An Essay in Interpretation", in *Muqarnas*, 18, 173-202). He suggests that even if the two paintings do not display lines from any poem, they might have been originally intended for the royal Nezāmī manuscript of Shah Ṭahmāsp I (London, British Library, OR. 2265) and their inclusion and eventual removal from the manuscript are explainable through the ever-changing political constellation during the shah's early rule. Chapters III and VI are similar in that both deal with a pair of signatures which are interpreted by certain critics of Dickson and Welch to hide one and the same person. In chapter III, Barbara Brend's intention to identify Mīrzā ʿAlī with ʿAbd al-Ṣamad is criticised (Brend, Barbara, "Another Career for Mīrzā ʿAlī", in: Newman, Andrew [ed.], *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003, 213-235). In chapter VI the indefensibility of a similar suggestion by Ebadollah Bahari (Bahari, Ebadollah, *Bihzād: Master of Persian Painting*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), with respect to Šaykh-Zāda and Maḥmūd-Moḏahheb, is argued for. The target of chapter IV is also Bahari and his dating of a *Panj Ganj* manuscript in his own collection which shows parallels with a dispersed royal Safavid *Dīvān* of Ḥāfeẓ formerly known as the Cartier Ḥāfeẓ. This chapter compares the later Safavid derivatives of early Safavid book production with the early-20th century forgeries of the same material. Chapter V continues to examine the Cartier *Dīvān* of Ḥāfeẓ, this time from a historical perspective, and goes on to identify some of the protagonists of the standoff between Shah Ṭahmāsp I and his brother Sām Mīrzā among the figures in the illustrations of this and other manuscripts of poetry. Finally, chapter VII returns to the question of early 20th-century forgers and their strategies, including the copying of authentic paintings kept by these forger groups for themselves, and shares valuable personal and family memories about the inner structure of ateliers and dealership in pre-revolutionary Iran.

AUTHORS

IVÁN SZÁNTÓ

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest & Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienne