



‘ABD-AL-VAHHĀB MO‘TAMAD- AL-DAWLA

‘ABD-AL-VAHHĀB MO‘TAMAD-AL-DAWLA, “NAŠĀṬ,” Qajar official and poet, born in 1759 into a family of well-known sayyeds in Isfahan, who were originally from Jahrom in Fārs. His grandfather ‘Abd-al-Vahhāb, being the governor of Isfahan, had left considerable wealth to his children. The young ‘Abd-al-Vahhāb was given a thorough traditional education, which included studies in Persian and Arabic literatures as well as theology, mathematics, and logic. He became an accomplished calligrapher, his specialty being *šekasta* style. He also became fluent in both Arabic and Turkish.

As a young man ‘Abd-al-Vahhāb began writing poetry and became interested in the *Bāzgašt* movement, which advocated a return to the style of the old masters in Persian poetry. He was one of the main proponents of this movement, and his house became “a gathering place for the poets and wits of Isfahan” (*Maǰma‘ al-foṣaḥā’* VI, p. 1054). It was at this period that he adopted the pen name of Našāṭ (Joy).

At the age of forty-three Našāṭ came to Tehran and joined the court of Fath-‘Alī Shah as a secretary. In 1224/1809-10, he was appointed the head of the royal chancellery, and he received the title of Mo‘tamad-al-dawla. Henceforth he was very often in the company of Fath-‘Alī Shah, composing and writing most of the correspondence of the king as well as many other deeds and treaties. Although Našāṭ was a man of property and means, he accumulated a debt of



thirty thousand *tūmāns* through being very generous and hospitable. This became a subject of frequent innuendoes and criticism by rival courtiers. Eventually Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah paid the debt all himself.

Apart from being a royal chancellor, Našāṭ performed several diplomatic missions. He accompanied a mission sent by Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah to Napoleon I and in 1233/1817-18 was sent to quell an insurrection in the province of Bākārz and the fortress of Ġōriān near Herat, which was led by the governor of these two towns, Bonyād Khan. Našāṭ while personally leading the army, was captured, but he was able to persuade Bonyād Khan to write a letter to Šojā‘-al-dawla, the governor of Khorasan, and ask for pardon. Thus the whole affair was resolved, and Našāṭ returned to Tehran. In 1237/1821-22 he successfully put down another rebellion in Afghanistan. In 1236/October, 1821 Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah, imitating European examples, established the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Našāṭ became the first foreign minister of Iran. He held this position for four years. According to Fasā‘ī (tr. Busse, pp. 172, 191), in 1240/1824-25 the office of chancellor was conferred upon Ḥājji Mīrzā Raḥīm Šīrāzi, “since the rank of Mīrzā ‘Abd-al-Vahhāb had grown beyond the title and task of chancellor of the empire. Because of his efficiency, he devoted his time to the handling of affairs which normally would have come within the competence of the prime minister. Out of his great humility, however, he did not call himself Prime Minister.” Mīrzā ‘Abd-al-Vahhāb died of consumption 5 Ḍu‘l-ḥejja 1244/8 June 1829 in Tehran. His death was commemorated in a chronogram which runs: “Našāṭ (Joy) has gone from the heart of the world.”

Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah had the works of Našāṭ collected and lithographed in one volume in 1281/1864-65 at Tehran. The volume is divided into five *bābs* or sections, which include all his poetry and prose. The major part of his prose works consists of the text of the official documents and correspondence. His other prose works include didactic pieces and short anecdotes, which are written in imitation of Sa‘dī’s *Golestān* in a very refined prose style interspersed with poetry.

The poetry of Našāṭ includes *qaṣīdas*, *tarkīb-bands*, *maṭnavīs*, and *ḡazals*. Though basically not a panegyrist, as a court poet he wrote several *qaṣīdas* praising Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah in a very exaggerated manner. His 250 *ḡazals* are his most significant contribution to Persian literature. Though he followed Sa‘dī and Ḥāfeẓ in writing lyrical poetry, his *ḡazals* have a freshness and a certain degree of originality both in language and in subject matter. Našāṭ, like some other poets of his time, was attracted to Sufism and associated with Sufis. This



has left its mark on his poetry, and most of his *gāzals* are tinged with Sufi sentiments.

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