



‘ĀLEMPUR, MOḤYI-AL-DIN

‘ĀLEMPUR, **Moḥyi-al-Din** (Muhiddin Olimpur/Olimov), Tajik journalist, photographer, and intellectual figure who was instrumental in strengthening cultural ties among Persianate societies (b. in a village of Šamtāč in the district of ‘Ayni, 2 March 1945; d., Dushanbe, 12 December 1995). He was raised in a farming family in the mountainous valley of Zarafšān, which is historically a secluded district but, due to the post-World War II prosperous years, it enjoyed some advantages of modern civilization, including a high school, from which ‘Ālempur graduated. Aspiring to become a painter, he left his home village to attend the art school in Dushanbe (1963-65), followed by three years of military service in the Siberian city of Omsk. He later on continued his education in Persian literature in an evening program at the State University of Tajikistan.

‘Ālempur began his professional career in 1968 as a layout designer for *Komsomoli Tojikiston* (now called *Javononi Tojikiston*) the newspaper of the republic’s youth organization (see [EDUCATION xxviii.](#)). In the same year, he held an exhibition of his photographs, *Gol-doktarān-e Tājik* “Tajik beauties” in Dushanbe. He gradually abandoned painting in favor of artistic photography. In 1972 he started his four-year career as a photojournalist at the Tajik News Agency. He worked most of the period 1979-86 in Afghanistan as a translator and reporter for the Soviet News Agency (Tass); his work appeared in the Soviet press, including *Izvestiya* and *Pravda*. ‘Ālempur’s major journalistic contribution, however, was to the Tajik press. In 1982 he began his life-long association with the weekly newspaper *Madaniyati Tojiskiston* (*Madaniyat-e*



Tājikestān “Culture of Tajikistan”), later renamed *Adabiyot va san’at* (*Adabiyāt o san’at* “Literature and art”), which became one of the most popular periodicals of the country. In 1986 he was awarded the Lāhuti Prize of the Union of Journalists of Tajikistan. His love for Afghanistan led him to mount a photographic exhibition in Kabul in 1988, entitled *Afġānestān az negāh-e dōst* “Afghanistan through the eyes of a friend.”

Beginning in the period of *glasnost*, which immediately preceded the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Tajik intellectuals were exploring new prospects for their small nation. ‘Ālempur found television and radio the most effective means to disseminate his belief that more bridges should be built between his nation and the Persian-speaking world outside of Soviet boundaries. Drawing on his experience in Afghanistan, he engineered the television program *Setārahā-ye Šarq* (1988-91), aimed at introducing the common history of Iranian peoples and classical Persian literature, but especially the contemporary pop culture of Afghanistan and Persia, which ‘Ālempur was so fond of. The program proved highly popular with the Tajik audience, and introduced ‘Ālempur as an effective interviewer and natural entertainer. Turning to the wider world of Persian culture was also a reaction to the growing localism of Tajik politics, which led to the tragic civil war among provinces shortly after the independence of Tajikistan (1991). ‘Ālempur did not officially join political parties, but held sympathy toward the pan-Iranist party *Ḥezb-e āryānā-ye bozorg* (interviews).

‘Ālempur was quick in seizing the pulse of the post-Soviet era. He practiced and promoted independent journalism, which was alien to Soviet Tajikistan. In 1992 he joined the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Persian Service as the Dushanbe reporter. Among his assignments were visits to Persia, where he interviewed poets, writers, artists, and scholars. His 1993 American journey resulted in fourteen interviews with members of the Persian, Afghan, and Bukharan diaspora, which were broadcast and eventually published in audiotapes by the BBC Persian Service under the title *From Dushanbe to Los Angeles*. ‘Ālempur proved effective in promoting a global-oriented, transnational, Persian-speaking culture. His activity in the society *Peyvand* aimed at the same goal.

In the atmosphere of terrorism and vengeance that followed the civil war, ‘Ālempur was shot dead on a cold evening in Dushanbe; his murderers have never been identified. Soon after his death, BBC initiated the establishment of the Mohieddin Alempur Foundation in Dushanbe in order to conserve his



unique archive of photographs and films, to catalogue his achievements for researchers, and to train future generations of independent journalists in Tajikistan. Two memorial volumes have been published in ‘Ālempur’s honor: Baqer Moin, ed., *Mohieddin Alempour: A Tajik Visionary / Muḥyi-al-Din ‘Ālempur: binešvar-e Tājik*, BBC, London, 1997; and Hamza Kamol (Kamāl), ed., *Joi ū dar dida bud (Jā-ye u dar dida bud*, a collection of articles on ‘Ālempur by his friends and colleagues), Dushanbe, 2001.

‘Ālempur remained the most published photographer of Tajikistan for nearly two decades. His subjects were natural beauties, young women, celebrities, and the economic and cultural life of his country; depictions of the masses and social protests appeared especially after the independence of Tajikistan. He published many articles, including interviews. As early as the early 1980s, long before it became fashionable, ‘Ālempur had de-Russianized his surname from Olimov to Olimpур, replacing the Russian “-ov” by the Persian *pur/pōr* (son), a word common in contemporary Persia but unprecedented in Tajikistan.

Works. (with Maqsud Hojimatov) *Čahorboği gulho (Čahārbāg-e golhā*; on flowers and plants), Dushanbe, 1979; *Rahnumoi suratgir (Rāhnemā-ye šuratgir*; a photographer’s handbook), Dushanbe, 1989; *Tušai čašm (Tuša-ye čašm*; journal of travel to France, Tunisia, and the Indian subcontinent), Dushanbe, 1990; *Az Dušanbe to Lus Anjeles: Safarguftahoi Muhiddini Olimpур (Az Došanba tā Los Ānjeles: safargoftahā-ye Moḥyi-al-Din ‘Ālempur)*, audio tapes, BBC Persian Service, London, 1994; *Išq far’yod kunad (Ešq faryād konad*; biography of the Persian popular singer Gugush Ātašin), Dushanbe, 1995; (ed.) *Murği oftob (Morğ-e āftāb*; a selection of poems of the Persian poet Nāder Nāderpur in Cyrillic script), Dushanbe, 1995; *Eron būi modar medihad/Irān bu-ye mādar midehad* (travelogue of Persia, in Tajik and Persian orthographies), ed. Ḥamza Kamāl, Dushanbe, 1997.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the memorial volumes cited in the article, this paper is based on communications with the subject’s friends and associates, including Ḥamza



Kamāl, chairman of Mohieddin Alempur Foundation, and Raḥim Mosalmāniān Qobādiāni, ‘Ālempur’s teacher at Tajik State University.