



DAKANĪ, SAYYED MĪR ‘ABD AL ḤAMĪD MA‘ŠŪM ‘ALISĀH

DAKANĪ, SAYYED MĪR ‘ABD-AL-ḤAMĪD MA‘ŠŪM-‘ALISĀH (ca. 1151-1211 or 1212/ca. 1738-97), the “renewer” (*mojadded*) of the Ne‘mat-Allāhī Sufi order in Persia and thus the initiatory ancestor of all present-day Ne‘mat-Allāhīs. He was born in Hyderabad (Deccan) to an aristocratic family that, like most of the governing elite of the province, was probably of Persian origin. Early in his youth he joined the followers of [Rezā-‘Alīšāh](#) (d. 1214/1799), *qoṭb* (leader) of the Ne‘mat-Allāhī order, who gave him the Sufi sobriquet Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh, by which he is commonly known (Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh, III, p. 170). In 1190/1776, supposedly on instructions received in a dream from both Imam ‘[Alī al-Rezā](#) and Šāh Ne‘mat-Allāh Walī (d. 834/1430-31), the eponymous founder of the order, Rezā-‘Alīšāh dispatched Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh to Persia to reestablish the order there after a hiatus of more than two centuries. In Ne‘mat-Allāhī tradition Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh is considered Rezā-‘Alīšāh’s successor as master of the entire order, but this belief is problematic, as Rezā-‘Alīšāh slightly outlived him, dying at the approximate age of 120 years. It appears rather that Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh became effectively independent of his master as soon as he left the Deccan and that his departure signaled the transfer of the entire order from India to Persia. After Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh’s departure Rezā-‘Alīšāh ceased training and initiating disciples, and the Ne‘mat-Allāhī order died out in the Deccan (Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh, III, p. 170).

Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh traveled to Persia by sea, probably landing at Būšeher, where he



may have spent some time before moving inland. It was in Shiraz that he began to propagate the Ne‘mat-Allāhī path, with apparently spectacular success; the estimate of 30,000 devotees in that city alone, recorded by Sir John Malcolm (II, p. 417), may be taken as a hyperbolic indication of the growth of the order. Most important among Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh’s followers recruited in Shiraz were Moštāq-‘Alīšāh, also a gifted musician; Mīrzā ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Fayẓ-‘Alīšāh, a prayer leader from Ṭabas; and Fayẓ-‘Alīšāh’s son Moḥammad-‘Alī Nūr-‘Alīšāh. The last named was to become Ma‘šĀjūm-‘Alīšāh’s principal lieutenant and successor, and it is said that he had already, in the first years at Shiraz, been assigned responsibility for administration of the order (Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh, III, p.171). Karīm Khan Zand (1163-93/1750-79) permitted Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh two or three years of more or less untrammelled activity in Shiraz before arresting him and then expelling him and his followers from the city. This move was probably instigated by the ‘*olamā*’, who sought to persuade Karīm Khan that the order represented a threat to his rule; nevertheless, Ne‘mat-Allāhī sources stress the maleficent role of Janī Hendī, an Indian alchemist attached to the court (Nūr-‘Alīšāh, 1348 Š./1970, p. 107).

The dervishes moved to Isfahan, where initially they enjoyed the favor of ‘Alī-Morād Khan Zand, a rival of Karīm Khan. He was particularly attached to Fayẓ-‘Alīšāh, whose knowledge of numerology he found impressive, and he built a hospice (*kānagāh*) for the Ne‘mat-Allāhīs, assigning them a daily stipend. Fayẓ-‘Alīšāh died in 1195/11780-81, however, and not long afterward Isfahan became as inhospitable as Shiraz had been. Urged on by the ‘*olamā*’, ‘Alī-Morād ordered the Ne‘mat-Allāhīs arrested, confined to the house of the *dārūgā* Rostam Khan, stripped of their possessions, and finally expelled from the city.

The Ne‘mat-Allāhīs set out on the road to Kāšān, intending to proceed thence to Mašhad, but while resting at Mūrča-kort they were attacked by a party of horsemen from Isfahan, who cut off their ears as trophies for ‘Alī-Morād Khan; the marauders also forced them to turn northward, in the direction of Tehran, which was outside Zand territory (Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh, III, p. 172). Āqā Moḥammad Khan Qājār had already been in contact with Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh during his confinement before the expulsion from Shiraz, a certain Mollā Ja‘far Šūštārī having acted as go-between (Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh, III, p. 173). Āqā Moḥammad Khan received the party kindly in Tehran and provided for the journey to Mašhad. In Mašhad, however, the

Ne‘mat-Allāhīs’ stay was cut short by the hostility of the *mojtahed* (theologian)



Mīrzā Mahdī Korāsānī, and Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh and his followers had moved on to Herat by about 1198/1783-84. In Herat Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh was able to resume his proselytizing without major opposition. Among his new disciples were Reżā-'Alīšāh Heravī, who accompanied him on all his remaining journeys, and such members of the local Shi'ite aristocracy as Fīrūz-al-Dīn Mīrzā. From Herat in the same year Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh sent Nūr-'Alīšāh and his other senior disciples back to Persia and himself continued on to "Kābol, Zābōl, and Hendūstān" (Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh, III, p. 173). How long his journey to India lasted and whether or not it included a visit to the Deccan is unknown.

After leaving India Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh visited the *'atabāt*, the shrine cities of Iraq, traveling either overland through Persia or by sea to Baṣra. He settled first in Najaf and then in Karbalā', no later than September 1792, when he was joined by Nūr-'Alīšāh, coming from Kermān via Shiraz (Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh, III, p. 173). With Moštāq-'Alīšāh, Nūr-'Alīšāh had been working to establish the order in Kermān, but he had fled after Moštāq-'Alīšāh was stoned to death in 1206/1792 (Wazīrī, pp. 348-50; Bāstānī Pārīzī, pp. 190-95, 204-08).

It may be imagined that the situation of the Ne'mat-Allāhīs in the *'atabāt* was perilous, given the concentration there of so many hostile externalist *'olamā'*; Ottoman authority limited the freedom of action of the *'olamā'*, however, thus enabling Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh to proselytize and even to gain recruits from among the *'olamā'* themselves, notably 'Abd-al-Ṣamad Hamadānī and Ebrāhīm Kō'ī (Šīrvānī, p. 224). Nonetheless, the climate in Karbalā' became increasingly threatening. Nūr-'Alīšāh was the first to leave, settling in Pol-e Dohāb after a brief stay in Baghdad. Then Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh himself left, intending to make a pilgrimage to Mašhad (Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh, III, p. 173). He made the fatal error of traveling by way of Kermānšāh, however, entering the city openly, despite the presence there of the virulently anti-Sufi *mojtahed* Moḥammad-'Alī Behbahānī, known as *ṣūfikoš* (Sufi killer). Why he did so is unknown, though Ne'mat-Allāhī lore has it that he had foreseen, and willingly accepted, his martyrdom at the hands of Behbahānī. He may have intended to join Nūr-'Alīšāh there, in order to continue the journey to Mašhad together; to strike north for Hamadān, where he had a fairly large and well-entrenched following; or even to meet with Behbahānī's son Āqā Maḥmūd, who at some point had become a Ne'mat-Allāhī initiate (Pourjavady and Wilson, p. 130). In any event Behbahānī had Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh arrested forthwith and proceeded to interrogate him on simple questions of jurisprudence. The answers are said to have been erroneous, but it is clear from the *Resāla-ye kayrātīya*, Behbahānī's account of the whole



affair, that the question of Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh’s guilt had been decided long before this confrontation (for extracts from this still unpublished work, see Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh, II, pp. 176-82; Nafīsī, II, pp. 43-44; Davānī, pp. 302-10). According to the account of Sayyed Moḥammad Kūhrūdī, a pupil and associate of Behbahānī, the three days that elapsed between the trial and the execution of Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh were intended not so much to afford him time to reflect and repent as to challenge him to make good on his alleged boast of being able to ascend to heaven; when he proved unable to do so, he was put to death (apud Davānī, p. 311). According to most sources, the body, in a weighted sack, was thrown into the Qarasū river outside Kermānšāh, so that there should be no tomb to attract veneration; it is also said, however, that Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh was buried where he was killed, in the ‘Arš-e Barīn garden at Kermānšāh (Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh, III, p. 174).

The stated grounds for Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh’s execution were his claim that his spiritual rank exempted him from the duty to pray; his encouragement of his followers to worship him personally; his free use of narcotics and alcohol; his misleading of the Muslims (*eḡwā-ye moslemīn*); his organizing his followers in Hamadān for insurrectionary purposes; pederasty; and general “licentiousness and immorality” (*fesq-o-fojūr*; Davānī, p. 313). This list of charges is implausibly long and wide-ranging. What is certain is that Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh embodied an ecstatic and antinomian religiosity that was anathema to the externalist ‘*olamā*’ of the time, not least because it might prove widely attractive and thus deprive them of the popular obedience they demanded. It is unlikely that Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh cherished dreams of political influence, as suggested by Nūr-‘Alīšāh’s warning to ‘Alī-Morād Khan, issued after the expulsion from Isfahan, that “welfare to the ruler depends on obedience to the *qoṭb*” (quoted in Pourjavady and Wilson, p. 117). For Behbahānī and his colleagues it was crucial at that early point in Qajar history that their prerogatives vis-à-vis the state be vindicated. Although Behbahānī had the support of Ḥājī Ebrāhīm Khan Šīrāzī, minister to Fath-‘Alī Shah (1212-50/1797-1834), and Moṣṭafāqolī Khan Zangana, governor of Kermānšāh, for the execution of Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh he took care to claim for himself the entire merit of the act as an exercise of clerical prerogative (see his letter to Fath-‘Alī Shah, quoted in Davānī, p. 309).

It has been suggested that Ma‘šūm-‘Alīšāh was unable to write Persian with ease (Pourjavady and Wilson, p. 129), and his literary legacy is certainly very meager. In addition to an unpublished treatise, *Anwār al-ḥekma* (see Dānešpažūh, I, p. 414), mention may be made of his recorded dicta, which are



elegant in style though unoriginal in content (Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh, III, pp. 184-86; Nūr-'Alīšāh, pp. 68-85). It is above all *Jannat al-weṣāl*, the voluminous work of Nūr-'Alīšāh, that must be regarded as the most substantial record of Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh's teachings.

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