



DEHDĀR ŠIRĀZI, 'EMĀD-AL-DIN

DEHDĀR ŠIRĀZI, 'EMĀD-al-DIN MAḤMUD Dehdār Kafrī Širāzi (دهدآر كاڤري شيرازي, fl. 984/1576), with the pen name (*takalloṣ*) 'Eyāni, the most prolific Persian author on lettrism (*'elm-e ḥoruf*) in the 10th/16th century, teacher of Shaikh Bahā'-al-Din 'Āmeli, known as Shaikh Bahā'i (d. 1030/1621), in the occult sciences (*'olum-e ḡariba*), and aspiring courtier in the reign of the Safavid Shah Esmā'il II (r. 984-85/1576-77). Despite, or because of, his status as an occultist authority, Maḥmud Dehdār has long been overshadowed by both his father, the famed astronomer-philosopher Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Kafrī (d. 942/1535), and his own son, Mo'in-al-Din Moḥammad Dehdār Širāzi (d. 1016/1607), *takalloṣ* Fāni, an émigré to India and author of mystical-philosophical works. Although the two Dehdārs are frequently confused in the sources, Maḥmud's oeuvre consists exclusively of works on occultism, while Moḥammad's appears to contain only passing references to the subject (Ešrāq, p. 337; Mehrvarz and Šufi, p. 77).

Life. Dehdārs were originally of Howayza (Ḥawiza) and Khuzistani Arab stock, but seem to have emigrated to Khafr in the Jahrom district south of Shiraz by the mid-9th/15th century at the latest, and then to Shiraz soon thereafter. The forebear responsible for this move presumably was Nur-al-Din Aḥmad Jahromi, father of Šams-al-Din Kafrī, also known as Šams-al-Din Jahromi (Mehrvarz and Šufi, p. 73). As a prominent scholarly family of the 10th/16th century, the Dehdārs adjusted smoothly to the Safavid takeover. Šams-al-Din



in particular reportedly enjoyed good relations with Shah Esmā'il I (r. 907-30/1501-24). Maḥmud Dehdār's adult life coincided with the reigns of Shah Ṭahmāsb I (r. 930-84/1524-76) and Ṭahmāsb's short-lived, controversial successor, Shah Esmā'il II (r. 984-85/1576-77), and he dedicated at least two works to the latter. In the preface to the first one, entitled *Zobdat al-asrār wa kolāṣat al-aḏkār*, presumably written in 984/1576, he significantly provides his intended royal patron a letrist proof for the ontological equivalency of Shah Esmā'il (I and II) and Imam 'Ali, a theme central to early Safavid imperial propaganda, and a prognostication of events up to the Islamic millennium (1592 CE; see, e.g., MS Majles 12653/3 fols. 716-74a). The second work, *Şefāt al-nofus fi tawḥid al-qoddus*, opens with praise of the Prophet Moḥammad, Imam 'Ali, and Shah Esmā'il II in quick succession.

Apart from the evidence of the *Zobdat al-asrār*, our only other concrete date for his life is a passing remark in the prologue of his seminal *Mafātiḥ al-maḡāliq*, to the effect that this work was completed in 976/1569. Maḥmud also prepared a summary version (*moḳtaṣar*) of this work, *Jawāme' al-fawā'ed*, for his son during the latter's sojourn in Bijapur; the preface contains a letrist analysis of the name 'Ali 'Ādelšāh, the ruler of Bijapur (r. 965-87/1558-79) and his son's patron. A remark immediately following has usually been taken as the evidence that Maḥmud himself spent some time in India (e.g., Mehrvarz and Şufi, p. 78; see, e.g., MS Melli 18712, fol. 2a), but it must, rather, be an indication that Maḥmud, still in Shiraz, wished to send the work to his émigré son, Moḥammad, who had arrived in the *Deccan* in 965/1558 and is not known to have returned to Iran. Moḥammad, a protégé of Mir Faḥ-Allāh Širāzi (d. 997/1589), a noted occultist, is reported to have been responsible for persuading his 'Ādelšāhi patron to lure his teacher to India with a large gift of money, thereby inaugurating a tradition of philosophical instruction in the Mughal Empire (Golč'in Ma'āni, II, p. 985; Rizvi, pp. 9-11).

The Shirazi occultist may thus be supposed to have been at the height of his powers in the 1560s and 1570s. The *Zobdat al-asrār* and *Şefāt al-nofus* aside, Maḥmud's connection to the Safavid court is further suggested by the fact that he was a student and associate of Shaikh Abu'l-Qāsem Moḥammad *Amri Širāzi* (d. 999/1590), who served as court poet under Shah Ṭahmāsb for thirty years; but Amri, a letrist and mystical poet with perceived *Isma'ili* leanings (Iranian Nizaris claim him as one of their own), was blinded by the shah in 973/1565 on suspicion of associating with the Noḳṭawiya, and executed by Shah 'Abbās in 1590 as a Noḳṭawi heretic (Awḥadi Balyāni, I, pp. 669-72, VI, pp. 4036-40;



Forṣat-al-Dawla Širāzi, p. 464; Nafisi, II, pp. 709, 807; Daftary, pp. 19-20). Wāleh Dāğestāni (I, p. 243) records a moving poem that Amri sent to Maḥmud just before his execution. The souring of Amri's relationship with the Safavid court suggests that something similar may well have happened to Maḥmud Dehdār, especially given his own status as a noted letrist, although he is not mentioned in any official Safavid court chronicles, despite his membership in a prominent scholarly family and enthusiastic embrace of *Imami* piety. In any event, Maḥmud presumably died in Shiraz and was laid to rest in the *Hāfeziya* cemetery (Mehrvarz and Şufi, pp. 66, 75).

Maḥmud Dehdār's status as the would-be court letrist to Esmā'il II and teacher of the influential religious leader Šayḫ-al-Eslām Bahā'-al-Din 'Āmeli (Mir-Jahāni Ṭabāṭabā'i, p. 100), besides being reputed to be the most powerful practicing occultist of the early Safavid period (see, e.g., *K'ānsāri*, VII, p. 58; Tonokāboni, pp. 291-95; Moḥaddeṭ Nuri, III, p. 420; Amin, p. 18), reflects the reputation of Shiraz, where he was raised and received his education, as a major center of occultist thought since the mid-7th/13th century. His father, Šams-al-Din, authored works on *jafr* (divination) and geomancy (*'elm-e raml*; Sa'atchian, pp. 53-54), and the celebrated Shirazi philosopher and theologian *Jalāl-al-Din Moḥammad Davāni* (d. 908/1502) wrote two important treatises on letrism and developed an explicitly letrist ideological platform for his *Aq Qoyunlu* patrons (Melvin-Koushki, pp. 247-61). As a student of Šadr-al-Din Daštaki (d. 903/1498), Šams-al-Din himself was an important mediator in the infamous Davāni-Daštaki philosophical controversy (Pourjavady, p. 40). In this, Davāni relied on his Isfahani predecessor Šā'en-al-Din Torka (d. 835/1432), a Shafi'i judge of *Isfahan* and Yazd, patroness of the Timurid *Eskandar Solṭān* (r. 812-17/1409-14), and the most important theoretical letrist of 9th/15th-century Iran. Together with his student and friend, the historian Šaraf-al-Din 'Ali Yazdi (d. 858/1454), dynastic historian to the Timurids, Ebn Torka was the chief disciple in the east of the great Tabrizi Kurdish occultist Sayyed Ḥosayn Aḳlāṭi (d. 799/1387), court physician to the Mamluk sultan Sayf-al-Din al-Zāher Barquq (r. 784-91, 792-801/1382-89, 1390-99) in Cairo and pivot of an extended network of letrist thinkers between Anatolia and Iran (Melvin-Koushki, pp. 47-50; Binbaş, pp. 114-22). Maḥmud Dehdār explicitly allies himself with this intellectual line and indeed claims to be the direct disciple of Aḳlāṭi himself. He is credited with a recension of Aḳlāṭi's *Daḳā'er al-asmā'* and wrote his own *Jawāher al-asrār* as a summary of that work. In contrast to the oeuvre of Ebn Torka but like that of Aḳlāṭi, Maḥmud's oeuvre is exclusively focused on the practical applications of the science in the form of letter magic (*simiā*) and



letter divination (*jafr*). Moreover, it is overtly Imami Shi'i in flavor, with a devotionalistic element that distinguishes it somewhat from the writings of Sunni lettrists like Ebn Torka. Yet the status of lettrism as the science of *welāyat* (holy authority, holiness), and hence the science of the **Imams** *par excellence* gives even Sunni lettrist writings a decidedly imamophilic cast (Melvin-Koushki, pp. 67-77, 315-17). Maḥmud simply nudges the genre further in the direction of Imami piety for the benefit of his Safavid patrons, avoiding the extremism of earlier Imami Shi'i lettrists such as Ḥāfeẓ Rajab Borsi (d. 813/1411), who in his *Ketāb mašāreq anwār al-yaqīn fī ḥaqā'eq asrār Amir al-Mo'menin* posits the twelve Imams as eternal principles and asserts the divinity of Imam 'Ali on a lettrist basis (Ja'fariān, p. 61; on this work see Lawson). Not surprisingly, after a century of neglect, the *Mašāreq* became a favorite object of commentary in Safavid Iran, precisely due to its extremist theological position, a fact that suggests a ready market for Maḥmud's more sober brand of Imami lettrism as well. A number of Maḥmud's works are indeed well attested in the manuscript (and **lithograph**) record, and a few have enjoyed popularity down to the present time. Chief among these is the *Mafātiḥ al-maḡāliq*, a sizable manual of applied lettrism almost similar to the *Šams al-ma'āref al-kobrā*, the ubiquitous grimoire by Aḥmad b. 'Ali Buni, a 7th/13th-century prolific Sufi author of works on the esoteric value of letters.

The reflexive scholarly elision of occultism from early modern Islamic intellectual and cultural history means that this author, one of the most influential and productive occultists of his time, is yet to be studied, nor have any of his writings been published in modern editions. Granted, part of the reason for his marginalization both in the Safavid period and since then is the presumed association between lettrism and the far better studied Noḡṭawiya, an association that damned his ill-starred teacher Amri. But this connection was just a polemical fiction routinely deployed against practicing lettrists in Iran by their enemies; in the previous century the disciples of Aḳlāṭi had been forced to defend themselves against similar charges of associating with the **Ḥorufiya** (a Muslim sect with antinomian and incarnationist doctrine), whom they regarded with scorn and hostility as anti-intellectual anarchists. Most egregiously, Ebn Torka was jailed, tortured, and exiled on the strength of just such accusation (Melvin-Koushki, pp. 55-57). An outstanding exponent of the same high lettrist tradition, Maḥmud certainly regarded the Noḡṭawis as Aḳlāṭi's disciples did the Ḥorufis. His son Moḥammad, for instance, dismisses them as an execrable subset of what he calls the mass of deficient naturalist-materialists (*jomhur-e ṭabi'iyin o nāqeṣān-e dahriān*), on a par with sophists,



libertines, and most of the infidels (*kafara*) of India, while locating lettrists like his father at the top of his intellectual-spiritual hierarchy (“Dorr al-Yatim” in *Rasā'el-e Dehdār*, p. 131; see also pp. 128, 130, 135, 137-41; Kiā, pp. 24-32). At the same time, overuse of the adjective Noḡṭawi, perhaps the most popular term of abuse in the 10th/16th-century Persianate world, rendered it rather hollow; even contemporary Judeo-Persian polemics feature this smear. Persophilia itself was implicated; the followers of Āḡar Kayvān (d. between 1609-18), for example, Maḡmud’s fellow Shirazi occultist and founder of the Zoroastrian *Illuminative* (*Ešrāqi*) School, closely grappled with characterizations of their doctrine as Noḡṭawi, far less dangerous an accusation in Akbar’s India (Sheffield). Maḡmud, for his part, probable accusations of Noḡṭavism notwithstanding, seems to have remained a staunch Aḡlāṭian to the end of his days.

Works. Maḡmud Dehdār was the author of at least 19 works, all in the field of applied lettrism and its ancillary disciplines. He wrote almost exclusively in Persian, although some works include expository passages in Arabic that testify to the author’s less than complete mastery of that language. These are in addition to the many prayers and invocations to various entities contained in his works, which are in Arabic. Moreover, most of his works include substantial verse portions, and some are entirely in verse; a *diwān* is also attributed to him under his pen name ‘Eyāni (for a partial list, see Mehrvarz and Šufi, pp. 77-80).

As noted above, Maḡmud’s principal work is his *Mafātiḥ al-maḡāliq*, completed in 976/1569; at least 28 full and four partial manuscript copies of this grimoire survive in Iran alone, and it has been printed in lithograph form multiple times. It consists of a prologue, 12 chapters, and an epilogue as follows:

- Prologue. On what is meant by the dot (*noḡṭa*) and the letter (*ḡarf*), and the secret of their applications based on mathematical principles (*qawā’ed-e ‘adadi*);
- Chap. 1: On the procedure for writing a comprehensive prognosticon (*jafr-e jāme*) and the rule for organizing it according to the celestial levels (*darajāt-e falaki*);
- Chap. 2: On the method of writing a concealed solar [prognosticon] (*kābia-ye šamsi*) and the rules governing it;



- Chap. 3: An explanation of the hidden lunar [prognosticon] (*kāfia-ye qamari*), and on certain principles governing *baṣṭ* and *taktīr*-based operations, and the letters;
- Chap. 4: On the procedure for deriving names from a 3×3 magic square (*lawḥ*);
- Chap. 5: An explanation of the nature and virtues of the magic square known as Solomon's seal (*kātam-e solaymāni*);
- Chap. 6: An explanation of the principles of invocation (*da'awāt*) by means of the divine names;
- Chap. 7: A discussion of the principles of invocation by means of the *fāteḥa*;
- Chap. 8: On the method of writing magic squares (*alwāḥ*);
- Chap. 9: On the categorization of the letters according to the mansions of the moon;
- Chap. 10: On the nature and quantity of numbers and talismans;
- Chap. 11: A discussion of the four viziers of Solomon;
- Chap. 12: On astrological elections (*eḳtiārāt*) and judgments (*ḥokmiyāt*) for operations;
- Epilogue: Further assorted points.

Almost as popular was his *Jawāher al-asrār*, a summary of Aḳlāṭi's *Dakā'er al-asmā'* in prose and verse; it includes a compilation of [Hadiths](#) credited to the Imams on the subject of the dot and the letter and a lettrist analysis of famous personages' names. A similarly Imami flavor is evident in the *Zobdat al-alwāḥ*, a prose work treating of magical operations based on the *moqatta'āt* and other subtle points (*nokāt-e ḡariba*) on the sciences of *jafr* and number, including procedures for deriving the names of angels and [jinn](#)s (*a'wān*) for the purpose of incantations (sg. *'azimat*); it features an unprecedented (according to the author) precise and effective form of lettrist invocation of the fourteen Infallibles (*čahārdah ma'šum*).

Works less well represented in the manuscript record include the following: (1) *Zobdat al-asrār wa ḳolāṣat al-aḳkār*, also known as *Kanz al-romuz*, on



astrological letter magic, including planetary invocations; almost certainly written in 984/1576, it contains a dedicatory preface for Shah Esmā'il II, largely devoted to a letrist analysis of his name and a prediction of events up to the Islamic millennium. (2) *Kašf al-asrār*, a mixed Persian and Arabic prose and verse on the science of letters, particularly the *bayyenāt* and *zabur* of divine names; the prologue attributes the science to the Imams and identifies their heirs as being in the first place Aklāṭi, Sa'd-al-Din Ḥamawi/Ḥamu'i (a Kobrawi mystic, d. 650/1253), Aḥmad Buni, *Ebn al-'Arabi* (d. 638/1240), and 'Afif-al-Din 'Abd Allāh Yamāni, whose works on the subject can only be understood by those who are committed to serving the House of the Prophet (*ḡolāmi-e ahl-e Bayt*). (3) *Jawāme' al-fawā'ed* (also known as *Jāme' al-fawā'ed fi ḥoṣul al-maqāṣed*), a treatise on the science of letters written by the author for his son Moḥammad, resident in India; it is in effect a summary of the author's *Mafātiḥ al-maḡāliq*. (4) *Sajanjal al-asmā'*, an approximately 4,000-line *matnawi* on the divine names, including three *monājāt-nāmas*, extracted from the *Jawāme' al-fawā'ed* and circulating independently. (5) *Ḥall al-romuz fi serr al-konuz*, a commentary on Sa'd-al-Din Ḥamuya's *Sajanjal al-alwāḥ* (i.e., *Sajanjal al-arwāḥ wa-noquṣ al-alwāḥ*) written in Shiraz for a distinguished friend visiting from Mosul. (6) *Şefāt al-nofus fi tawḥid al-qoddus*, presumably written in 984/1576, given its dedication to Shah Esmā'il II, on the soul and its status vis-à-vis body, mind, heart, and spirit, with discussion of the divine attributes and names as loci of divine self-manifestation (*tajalli*), and the status of angels as human faculties. (7) Two treatises both titled simply *Resāla dar jafr*, the first on letter divination (and possibly to be identified with a *Resāla dar jafr* attributed to Maḥmud Dehdār, printed in Kanpur in 1889), and the second a lengthier treatise on the same subject (and possibly titled *Meftāḥ al-esteḡrāj*) that cites the author's *Zobdat al-alwāḥ* and *Jawāher al-asrār*, as well as 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Beṣṭāmi's (d. 858/1454) *Ketāb al-dorrat al-nāşe'a*; it also copies one Ḥājj Ḥasan b. Ḥājjī 'Askar Tāwusi's quatrains on magic squares. (8) *Asrār al-noqta* (aka *Noqta*), an approximately 500-line poem on the *noqta* and *ḥoruf* and their numerological association with various divine names, with reference to the fourteen Infallibles. (9) *Jafr-e manẓum* (also known as *So'al az Jafr-e jāme'*), a 13-couplet poem on *jafr*, specifically the procedure for converting between units, tens, hundreds, and thousands. (10) *Şaḥifat al-nur*, a poem with different rhymes and meters; it opens with an examination of the *Surat fāteḥa*, after which the names and titles of the Infallibles are numerologically analyzed. (11) *Manẓuma dar jafr*, a poem in sixteen couplets on letter divination with short commentary, described as treating of a method for reverse-engineering an answer obtained through *jafr* to determine the original



question asked (*dar estekrāj-e so'āl az jawāb-e jafr men kalām-e 'Eyāni*). (12) *Estekrāj-e nām-e Mo'in-al-Din Moḥammad*, a letrist analysis of the name of the author's son and its associated divine name as derived through the technique of *rašf*, (extracting a name from a line of *taksir*), provided as an example for beginners. (13) *Konuz al-asmā'*, a 383-line *qaṣida* on the science of letters, a 104-line portion of which is usually but incorrectly attributed to Shaikh Bahā'i (commentary by Ḥasan Ḥasanzāda Āmoli, III, pp. 371-425, who judges the *Jawāher al-asrār* to be rather Maḥmud's own commentary on this poem). (14) *A'dād al-wafq*, a tract (*fā'eda*) on magic squares. (15) *Resāla dar 'elm-e a'dād*, on number theory. (16) *Ketāb al-dostur*, a collection (*diwān*) of 'Eyāni's poetry.

A number of other titles are attributed to Maḥmud Dehdār, presumably referring to works that have not survived, or representing alternative titles of his known works listed above, or simple misattributions. These titles are: *Meftāḥ al-estekrāj*, possibly to be identified with the longer *Resāla dar jafr*; *al-Maqṣad al-aqṣā*; *Gāyat al-emkān*; *Asrār-e del o jān*; and *Rawzat al-azhār* (Mošār, VI, p. 84). Taqī-al-Din Awḥadi Balyāni (fl. 1025/1615) further ascribes to him an *Ātār al-aṭwār* (VI, p. 4036; Ešrāq, p. 338). There also exists an untitled [stanzaic poem](#) (*moḳammas*) poem that may represent an extract from one of the author's known works. Reflecting the typical confusion of father and son, Moḥammad Dehdār's *Resāla tawḥid*, written for Mortazā Neẓāmšāh II (r. 1009-19/1600-10), is sometimes incorrectly attributed to Maḥmud, as are several other treatises by his son.

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