



HEKMAT, 'ALI-AŞĠAR

HEKMAT (Ḥekmat), **'ALI-AŞĠAR**, man of letters, university professor, cabinet minister, and the chief architect of the modernization of the educational system under Reza Shah, best remembered as a progressive and efficient minister of education (b. Shiraz 23 Ramaẓān 1310/10 April 1893; d. Tehran 1 Šahrivar 1359 Š./23 August 1980; [Figure 1](#)). Son of Aḥmad-'Ali Ḥešmat-al-Mamālek, he was born into a family of physicians and scholars of Shiraz. He began his education in Shiraz, where he studied traditional subjects, including Persian and Arabic (see education iv. and v.) at the Madrasa Maṣṣuriya, a main religious school in the city founded by Hekmat's maternal great-grandfather, Ġiāṭ-al-Din Maṣṣur Daštaki Širāzi (q.v.). In 1915, at the age of 22, he enrolled in the American College of Tehran (later renamed Alborz, q.v.), from which he graduated in 1918. During this period, he also studied Islamic law (*feqh*) with Mirzā Ṭāher Tonokāboni (Eqbāl Yaġmā'i, p. 413; Ḥasan-'Ali Hekmat, pp. 3-4).

CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATIONAL MODERNIZATION

Early educational career. Soon after his graduation from the American College, Hekmat was hired at the ministry of education (*Wezārat-e ma'āraf*), as the head of the personnel office in 1918. He was assigned to head the inspectorate office (*taftiś*) in 1924. In March 1925 he initiated the publication of an educational journal, *Ta'lim o tarbiat* (Instruction and Education), at the ministry. He successfully solicited articles from many of the literary and scholarly notables of the time, including Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizādeh, Badi'-al-Zamān Foruzānfār, and 'Abbās Eqbāl Āštiāni. The journal survived under a



new name, *Āmuzeš oparvareš*, until the eve of the 1979 Revolution (Şadr Hāsemi, *Jarā'ed o majallāt* I, p. 272, II, pp. 128-30; Taqizādeh, pp. 256-58, 263; Etteḥād, pp. 530-40).

It was in early 1920s that Hekmat met 'Ali-Akbar Dāvar (q.v.), a leading modernizer and minister of justice and finance under Reza Shah, who enlisted Hekmat in the newly-founded Radical Party (*Ḥezb-e rādikāl*). On the Party's ticket, Hekmat was elected to the Constitutional Assembly (*Majles-e mo'assesān*) in 1925, which was convened to install the Pahlavi dynasty. In 1929, the traditionalist circles in the ministry of education that disapproved of Hekmat's innovative ideas and his enthusiasm for change forced his departure from the post, but his friend and mentor, Dāvar, transferred him to the ministry of justice and shortly thereafter sent him to France on a state scholarship. He studied from 1931-32 at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he received a university certificate in literature (Eqbāl Yağmā'i, p. 413; Haşan-'Ali Ḥekmat, pp. 3-4). At the same time, he was charged with an exploratory mission to study European institutions of higher learning. His observations on the subject were sent to Dāvar on a regular basis (Eqbāl Yağmā'i, pp. 413-14; Hekmat, 1976, pp. 5-6; Haşan-'Ali Ḥekmat, pp. 3-4).

Hekmat was in London, "broke and despondent," when, in September of 1933, he learned from Dāvar that he had been appointed the acting minister of education (Ḥabib Yağmā'i, p. 47). In March 1935, as a reward for his hard work and impressive accomplishments, Reza Shah promoted him to the rank of full minister. It was in his capacity as the minister of education during 1933-38 that Hekmat left his indelible mark on the modernization of Persia. He was indefatigable in his advocacy of educational development and cultural rejuvenation of Persia, and his tenure can easily be considered the most constructive period in the history of that ministry. He was a leading advocate of creating modern facilities for pedagogical or artistic purposes such as the University of Tehran campus, the Natural Archeological Museum, the National Library building, the mausoleums of Ferdowsi, Hafez, and Sa'di, the Amjadiya Stadium, normal schools as well as scores of other modern schools (Ḥekmat, 1976, pp. 52-58, 289-365).

The University of Tehran. In a cabinet meeting presided over by Reza Shah in February 1934, where his ministers were discussing the need for the construction of major facilities in the capital city of Tehran, Hekmat stated that the main shortage in the capital was the absence of a university. The shah promptly instructed him to establish the University of Tehran in a modern



campus. Hekmat's detailed account of how the university was constructed and his difficulties in installing the first dissection hall at the medical school, opposed by the clergy, reveal the travails of those bent on modernizing Persia. He describes his efforts to locate and purchase a suitable site for the university and to arrange for the design of the campus by the architect André Godard (q.v.). On 15 Bahman 1313 Š./4 February 1935, the University was inaugurated with six faculties. To the four existing faculties of Medicine, Letters, Law (q.v.), and Sciences were added the two faculties of Engineering and Theology at Hekmat's suggestion. By Reza Shah's order Hekmat was appointed as the first rector of the University. He was instrumental in the expansion and development of the new institution until his dismissal from the ministry in 1938 (Hekmat, 1976, pp. 333-65).

Modern schools. Hekmat is also credited with the establishment of eight normal schools in Tehran, Tabriz, Kerman, Mašhad, Shiraz, Ahvaz, Režā'īya (formerly and now Urmia), and Korramābād as well as scores of modern elementary and secondary schools in Tehran and provincial towns (Hekmat, 1976, pp. 288-331).

Physical education and Boy Scouts. Hekmat supervised also the restructuring of the curriculum in Persian elementary and high schools and, following Reza Shah's order, made physical education a mandatory part of every school curriculum. In 1934 he reintroduced the defunct Boy Scouts in Persia and coined the Persian term *pišā-hang* for it. Meanwhile, to mobilize available resources for the development of physical education, he revitalized the dormant National Association of Physical Education (*Anjoman-e melli-e tarbiat-e badani*), among whose notable members were Dāvar, Horsayn 'Alā', Ebrāhim Ḥakimi, and Isā Šadiq. Hekmat also helped create a number of playgrounds and initiated the construction of the first modern 15,000-seat sports stadium in Tehran, the Amjadiya Stadium, in 1936 (Hekmat, 1976, pp. 75-82).

Commemoration of Ferdowsi, Avicenna, and Sa'di. In October 1934, Hekmat helped organize the millenary celebration of Ferdowsi (q.v.) that included the first international conference on Ferdowsi (Šadiq, II, pp. 201 ff.). He was also instrumental in organizing a conference to commemorate the works of Avicenna (q.v.) and another to celebrate the seven hundredth anniversary of the compilation of Sa'di's *Golestān* (q.v.; Ḥabīb Yağmā'i, pp. 48-49).

The Academy of Persian Language. The establishment of the Academy of Persian Language (*Farhangestān-e zabān-e Irān*, q.v.) in October 1936, which



aimed at developing Persian equivalents for modern ideas and concepts, was a plan championed by Moḥammad-'Ali Foruġi, the scholarly prime minister. The purpose was to temper the excesses of some nationalists and military zealots who were bent on 'purifying' Persian by erasing all Arabic words from it; Hekmat actively assisted Foruġi in launching the Academy (Hekmat, 1976, pp. 23-29; Şadiq, II, pp. 233 ff., IV, pp. 75 ff.; Siāsi, pp. 96-97).

Unveiling of women. Once Reza Shah decided to unveil Persian women, he placed Hekmat in charge of mapping out a plan of action, which included co-education in the first four years of elementary school and establishing a center (*kānun*) where speakers would be invited to address mixed audiences of both genders. The official inauguration ceremony of unveiling, which took place in Tehran's Normal School (*Dānešsarā-ye moqaddamāti*) on 17 Day 1314 Š./8 January 1936, was attended by the Shah, the Queen, and their daughters, along with the wives of ministers and other dignitaries who appeared in public without a veil for the first time (Hekmat, 1976, pp. 87 ff.; Tolu'i, pp. 321-32). In his memoir, he reports in a slightly critical tone the occasional use of force in unveiling women on the streets of Tehran and claims to have advocated a more gradual, voluntary approach, but implying that the monarch had not heeded his advice (Hekmat, 1976, pp. 99-101).

National Archeological Museum. The antecedent of Persia's archeological museum goes back to 1916, when Morteżā Momtāz-al-Dawla, minister of education, collected various archeological artifacts which had been submitted to the ministry by Délégation Archeologique Française (q.v.) and exhibited them in the basement of Dār-al-fonun School (q.v.). This rudimentary collection and exhibition of archeological finds demonstrated the need for a modern museum for the preservation and exhibition of archeological treasures of Persia. In 1933 Hekmat's proposal for the creation of a National Archeological Museum (*Muza-ye Irān-e bāstān*) was approved by the shah. The proposed museum was completed and inaugurated in 1937 and was expanded in the following years as the country's major archeological institution (Hekmat, 1976, pp. 47-58).

National Library. Until the mid-1930s Persia's national library consisted of a collection of books at the disposal of the ministry of education housed in the basement of Dar al-fonun School. In 1936, Hekmat acquired valuable land north of the National Archeological Museum for the construction of a modern building for the National Library of Iran (*Ketāb-kāna-ye melli*), which was inaugurated in 1937 and expanded in the following years (Hekmat, 1976, pp.



56-58).

Literacy campaign. At the suggestion of Dāvar, Hekmat submitted a plan for a general literacy campaign by setting up evening classes (*kelāshā-ye akāber*) for adults across the country. In 1936, the campaign was launched and over 200,000 students enrolled in adult education courses during the first two academic years of 1936-37 and 1937-38 (Hekmat, 1976, pp. 376 ff.).

Museum of Anthropology. Hekmat has also been credited with the creation of the Anthropological Museum (*Muza-ye mardomšenāsi*). With the help of local centers of education Hekmat embarked on the collection of a considerable quantity of ethnic clothes, decorative objects, armor, musical instruments, tribal tents, and other artifacts within two years and had them exhibited in October 1937 at a building arranged for the Museum (Hekmat, pp. 366-75).

Collection and publication of manuscripts. During his term as minister of education, Hekmat commissioned such scholar as Moḥammad Qazvini to have photocopies made from rare Persian manuscripts found in European libraries and sent to Persia. It was in the light of such services that Qazvini, a meticulous scholar who did not praise easily, eulogized unstintingly Hekmat's cultural contributions to the country (Qazvini, III, pp. 548-49). Hekmat also assigned a number of prominent scholars such as Moḥammad-Taqī Baḥār, Qazvini, Foruzānfar, Foruḡi, Rašid Yāsami, and Ḥabīb Yaḡmā'i to edit classical Persian manuscripts (Ḥabīb Yaḡmā'i, p. 49).

Dismissal. In spite of all his accomplishments, Hekmat fell from grace in December of 1938 as a result of his alleged diplomatic *faux pas*. When a French magazine made a pun of the word Shah by replacing it with the French word *Chat* (cat), the monarch was not amused and severed diplomatic relations with France. Hekmat, apparently unaware of these developments, sent a perfunctory telegram of congratulations to his French counterpart on the occasion of the opening of Persia's booth at the Paris exhibition of that year. Another contributing factor was the publication of an article by Taqizādeh in *Ta'lim o tarbiat* (journal of the ministry of education) criticizing the *Farhangestān*'s excesses in 'purifying' the Persian language from Arabic words, a practice favored by the army's high-ranking officers (Taqizādeh, pp. 256-57, 261; Ra'di Āḍarākšī, pp. 367-79). After his dismissal and facing an uncertain future, he went into self-exile in Shiraz. Less than three months later, in February 1939, he was called back to Tehran and appointed minister of the interior (*wazir-e kešvar*), where he served until May 1940 (Hekmat,



1976, pp. 245 ff., 387-92).

POST- REZA SHAH RESPONSIBILITIES

Following the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, Hekmat's distinguished political career did not end but entered a new and different phase. Foruġi's premiership in 1941 helped Hekmat land the post of minister of arts and crafts (*wazir-e piša wa honar*; Šaji'i, p. 186; Ḥabib Yaġmā'i, pp. 49-50). As a member of Foruġi's inner circle, Hekmat had, in the words of the British Embassy in Tehran, "a good deal to do with the negotiations about the Tripartite Treaty of 1942" that ultimately proved very important in safeguarding Persia's territorial integrity at the end of World War II (Foreign Office of Britain, 1944, p. 25).

After the resignation of Foruġi's cabinet in late November 1941 (Šaji'i, p. 188), Hekmat ran for a seat in the Majles from Tehran and failed by a narrow margin, ending up thirteenth for a slate of twelve. In 1943 he was named minister of health (*wazir-e behdāri*). Later appointments included tenures as minister of the interior, minister of justice (*dādgostari*) in 1943, and minister without portfolio (*wazir-e mošāwer*) in 1947 and 1949-50. He served as minister of foreign affairs in 1948-49 and 1958-59, each time for little more than a year (Šaji'i, pp. 186, 190, 197, 229, 230, 239, 245, 246). He was reputed to have been an effective minister of foreign affairs who also established cultural sections in a number of Persian embassies.

Hekmat served as ambassador to India 1953-58. During his tenure, he was quite active in promoting cultural ties between Persia and India. His sojourn in India as the Persian ambassador resulted in a keen interest in historical Indo-Persian cultural relations and an attempt to familiarize his compatriots with India and the Indians with Persia by a number of books, pamphlets, and articles in Persian and English. These include *Parsis of Iran: Their Past and Present* (Bombay, 1956); *Be yād-e Hend*, (Remembering India, New Delhi, 1956); *Naqš-e pārsi bar ahjār-e Hend: fehrestī az katibahā wa koṭuṭ-e fārsi bar lawḥ-sanghā-ye Hendustān* (Persian Inscriptions of India: A Catalogue of Persian Writing on Stone in India, Tehran and Calcutta, 1958); *Sarzamin-e Hend: barrasi-e tāriki wa ejtemā'i wa siāsi wa adabi-e Hendustān az adwār-e bāstāni tā 'aṣr-e ḥāẓer* (The Land of India: An Account of the Social, Political, and Literary History of India from Ancient Times to the Present, Tehran, 1958); *Glimpses of Persian Literature* (Calcutta, 1956); and his translation of Kalidasa's *Abhijñānaśakuntalam* as *Šakun-tālā yā kātām-e mafqud* (New Delhi,



1956).

Hekmat's second appointment to the ministry of foreign affairs in 1958-59 coincided with the period when Persia was under propaganda attacks by the Soviets for negotiating a military pact with the United States. To blunt their attack, Persia was on the brink of signing a "Non-aggression Pact" with the Soviet Union. Hekmat seemed to have played an important role in the January 1959 negotiations with the Russians. The U.S. Embassy in Persia concluded at the time that Hekmat was influential in initiating the negotiations. He was, in their assessment, an advocate of neutralism for Persia and had convinced the Shah that "the best defense against the Soviet Union was diplomacy and cleverness" (United States Department of State, p. 632). During his tenure at the foreign ministry he commenced the publication of a new journal called *Našriya-ye wezārat-eomur-e kāreja*, devoted mainly to publishing articles as well as documents dealing with diplomatic relations and international organizations as well as history of Persia (Āqeli, p. 588).

For years, while carrying his heavy responsibilities as a member of various cabinets, Hekmat also served as the head of such non-governmental institutions as the Society [for Preservation] of National Heritage (*Anjoman-e ātār-e melli*, q.v.), the Persian National Commission for the UNESCO (*Komisiun-e melli-e Yunesco*), and the Persian version of the Red Cross (*Šir o koršid-e sorkò*). His major achievement as the head of the Unesco commission was organizing the publication of *Irānšahr*, an encyclopædic collection of original studies in Persian covering almost every aspect of Persian life and culture, both historical and contemporary (2 vols., Tehran, 1963-64), a pioneering undertaking at the time (Etteḥād, p. 506; Afšār, p. 613).

His scholarly interests made him eager to have a teaching position at the University of Tehran parallel with his other occupations. He was appointed Professor of the History of Religions (*Tāriḳ-e adyān*) for post-graduate courses at the Faculty of Letters. In this connection, he wrote, notably, *Noh goftār dar tāriḳ-e adyān* (Nine Essays on the History of Religions, 2 vols., Shiraz, 1961-62) and translated J. B. Noss's *Man's Religions* as *Tāriḳ-e jāme'-e adyānaz āgāz tā emruz* (Tehran, 1965).

In the latter stages of his life, when he had already left public service, he helped establish, with an eye on financial profit, a private college for teaching foreign languages and literature (*Madrassa-ye 'āli-e adabiyāt wa zabānhā-ye kāreji*).



LITERARY INTERESTS

Written works. In spite of heavy administrative responsibilities, besides heading several cultural and charitable organizations (see above), Hekmat found time to attend to his literary and intellectual interests. He wrote a fairly large number of articles, authored some 13 works, edited 6, and translated some 12. Being endowed with passable poetic gifts, he also wrote poems and composed several *matnawis*. He had a natural cultural curiosity and was eager to share what he learned with others. His writings may be divided into original works, edited works, translations, and poems.

Original works. Beside those already mentioned, these include *Zendagi-e Jāmi šā'er-e irāni* (A Biography of Jāmi, the Persian Poet, Tehran, 1941), 2nd ed. as *Jāmi: taḥqiqāt dar tāriḳ-e aḥwāl wa ātār-e manẓum wa manẓur-e Nur-al-Din 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmi* (Tehran, 1984), and *Resāla dar bāb-e Amir 'Alīšir Navā'i* (A Treatise about Amir 'Alīšir Navā'i [the famous vizier of Solṭān Ḥosayn Bāyqarā], Tehran, 1947, a pamphlet), both related to the 15th century or the late Timurid era, which became almost his specialty.

His publications comprise also several works related to Islam, exhibiting what seems to be a genuine interest in the subject. They include *Amṭāl-e Qor'ān: faṣḥi az tāriḳ-e Qor'ān-e karīm* (Parables of the Qur'an: A Chapter in the History of the Glorious Qur'an, Tehran, 1954) and *Eslām az naẓargāh-e dānešmandān-e ġarb* (Islam from the Point of View of Western Scholars, Tehran, 1961).

Editing. The first book he edited was an official yearbook of the ministry of education (Tehran, 1919), when he was heading the personnel office of that ministry. For three years from 1925 through 1927 he edited the *Majalla-ye ta'lim o tarbiat*, when he was in charge of the inspectorate office of the same ministry. The most important work that he edited was the 12th-century *Kašf al-asrār wa 'oddatal-abrār*, a Sufistic exegesis of the Qur'an by Abu'l-Faẓl Meybodi, based on 'Abd-Allāh Anṣārī's earlier exegesis and a single manuscript, in 10 volumes—a work of engaging prose and mystical insights (University of Tehran Press, 1952-60). Among other works he edited was 'Alīšir Navā'i's *Majāles al-nafā'es* consisting of two old translations by Faḳri Herāti and Šāh-Moḥammad Qazvini of Navā'i's treatise on the contemporary poets (Tehran, 1944, repr. 1984). He also compiled, edited, and partially wrote a collection of pieces in pure Persian (i.e., without Arabic words) called *Pārsi-e naġz* (Exquisite Persian, Tehran, 1944, repr., 1951). Much earlier he had also published *Hazār o yak šab* (A Persian Version of a Thousand and One Nights),



in 5 volumes (Tehran, 1936). His eclectic dilettantism is shown by his publication of a *Golzār-e Hekmat: Majmu'a az nawāder wa aš'ār wa hekāyāt wa amṭāl be alsena-ye fārsi, 'arabi, engelsi, wa farānsa* (Hekmat's Flower Garden: A Collection of rare pieces, poems, stories, and parables in Persian, Arabic, English, and French, Tehran, 1977).

Translations. Hekmat's translations show a great variety and were dictated by different circumstances, not infrequently motivated by financial reasons (e.g., three translations commissioned by Franklin Publications, q.v.). Among his translations are William Shakespeare's *Romeo wa Žuliet* (Tehran, 1941); *Az Sa'di tā Jāmi*, a translation with annotations of the third volume of E. G. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia* (Tehran, 1948, repr. 1982), apparently induced on account of its inclusion of the life and works of the poets Sa'di and Hafez, whom he loved and cherished and in whom he took great pride as a Shirāzi; *Panj hekāyat az šekspier* (Five Stories from Shakespeare, 2 vols., Tehran, 1953-54); N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia as Tāriḡ-e siāsi-e Pārt*, commissioned by Franklin Publications (Tehran, 1963); Ernst Herzfeld, *Archeological History of Iran as Tāriḡ-e bāstāni-e Irān bar bonyād-ebāstān-šenāsi* (Tehran, 1975); Leo Tolstoy, *Voskresenie* as *Rastākiz* (Resurrection, Tehran, 1960); Edward Chiera's *They Wrote on Clay* as *Alwāḡ-e Bābel*, commissioned by Franklin Publications (Tehran, 1962); Nikolā Haddād's *Menāhej al-ḡayāt: al-sa'y, al-'amal*, from Arabic as *Rāh-e zendagāni*, (Tehran, 1967).

Poems. Hekmat published two collections of his poems, namely *Soḡan-e Hekmat* (Tehran, 1972) and *Kalamāt-e ṭayyebāt* (Tehran, 1975). Some of his *maṭnavis* had earlier been published in magazines. His poems, however, are not particularly distinctive.

Among his miscellaneous works are two memoirs: *Si kāṭera az 'ašr-e farḡonda-ye Pahlavi* (Thirty memoirs from the auspicious Pahlavi era, Tehran, 1976); and *Rahā-ward-e Hekmat: šarḡ-e mosāfarathā-ye 'Ali-Ašḡar Kān Hekmat Širāzi* (ed. Moḡammad Dabirsiāqi, Tehran, 2000).

PERSONAL TRAITS

Hekmat's political longevity under the Pahlavis was no doubt the result of his social intelligence, hard work, genuine devotion to letters and Persian cultural heritage, affability in his contacts with the shah, his acceptance of the shah's agenda, his unfailing commitment to and competence for promoting cultural



and educational reforms, his strong sense of discipline and organization, and his mastery of the art of bureaucratic survival.

He was by all accounts a man of many talents, endless energy, endearing congeniality, and subtle wit. The British Embassy in Tehran described him in 1943 as “a go-ahead, pleasant young man always very helpful and approachable” (Foreign Office of Britain, p. 25). However, some detected a hint of vanity in Hekmat, pointing to the fact that in nearly every building constructed during his tenure, he made sure that his own name appeared in some noticeable corner of the structure. Those who worked under him or enjoyed close relationship with him have expressed admiration for him. However, Bāqer Kāzemi, a minister of foreign affairs, in a letter to Taqizādeh, where he characterizes a number of leading political figures of the time, including Moḥammad-‘Ali Foruġi and ‘Ali Sohayli, in a fit of pessimistic and cynical accusations refers to Hekmat as a man who “is cunning, hypocritical and dishonest; he is with everyone and no one, he is without any ideology and principle” (Kāzemi in Afšār, ed., pp. 419-20).

Hekmat enjoyed good living and companionship. He purchased a large, pleasant house in a fashionable district of North Tehran (*Fišerābād*) with attractive flower-beds and trees. He was also a collector of books and manuscripts. Late in his life, he donated his library of 5,549 books, including 275 manuscripts, to the University of Tehran, where they were to be kept as a separate collection (Etteḥād, p. 572). He also donated a collection of manuscripts he had inherited from his family to the library of the Shrine of Imam Reza in Mašhad. A bibliography of these manuscripts was prepared and published by Moḥammad-Taqi Dānešpažuh (Afšār, p. 614).

Hekmat spent the last few years of his life in poor health, nearly deaf, and hardly ambulant. Though he had played an important role in the unveiling of Persian women and the secularization of educational system, he was spared the wrath of the new Islamic zealots after the revolution of 1979. Yet, in the frenzy of the new Islamic revolutionary politics, his death, in spite of long years of service to his country, went all but unnoticed, except for a brief note in the daily *Jomhuri-eeslāmi* and a short obituary by Iraj Afšār in the journal *Āyanda*. He was buried in the hall of the family graveyard in Shah ‘Abd-al-‘Azim cemetery, in Šahr-e Rey south of Tehran (Ḥasan-‘Ali Hekmat, p. 6).

Hekmat, like Moḥammad ‘Ali Foruqi and Mehdi-Qoli Hedāyat (both prime ministers), was among the statesmen who continued the old tradition of



learned and capable viziers.

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