



ḤEKMAT

ḤEKMAT, the first Persian-language newspaper to be published in an Arab country. It was published in Cairo from 28 Šafar 1310/20 September 1892 until 1 Jomāda II 1329/30 May 1911, as a weekly for the first eight years, three issues per month for the next five years, and fortnightly for the remaining six years. The publisher, Mirzā Moḥammad-Mehdi Tabrizi (b. Tabriz, 1253/1837-38, d. Cairo, 4 Moḥarram 1333/22 November 1914), worked without any collaborators (*Hekmat*, 7th Year, no. 246), so consequently the publication of *Hekmat* was interrupted several times: once from 1316 until 1320 (1898-1902) due to Mirzā Moḥammad-Mehdi's ill health (*Meftāḥ al-ẓafar*, 14 Rabi' II 1316/1 September 1898), and on other occasions from ten days to three months, due to his travels as well as because of a change in printing house. The printing house which was used as of the third year of publication was owned by Mirzā Moḥammad-Mehdi himself.

Mirzā Mehdi Tabrizi studied medicine in Tabriz, and then Istanbul. There he collaborated in the publication of *Ak̄tar* (q.v.), the first Persian-language newspaper to be published abroad, before moving to Cairo in 1309/1891. A year after his arrival in Egypt, he began to publish *Hekmat*. Mirzā Moḥammad-Mehdi also wrote articles about Persia for Arabic publications, particularly *al-Helāl* of Cairo, and he has left behind some patriotic poetry as well as a few books, the best-known among which is *Meftāḥ-e bāb al-abwāb*, on Bābism (q.v.). Mirzā Moḥammad-Mehdi was known by the honorific *ra'is-al-ḥokamā'* until, during a visit to Persia in 1319/1901, he was given the honorific *za'im-al-dawla* by Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah.



Hekmat was both patriotic and defensive of the Shi'ite Islam of the Persians; it opposed the activity of Christian missionaries, as well as Russian, British, and Ottoman interference in Persian affairs, while it supported the efforts to introduce modern scientific knowledge into Persia. Since it was first published during the despotic reign of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, its remarks in support of freedom and liberalism merit recognition for their contribution in preparing the ground for the Constitutional movement in Persia. During and after the Constitutional movement, *Hekmat* was unwavering in its support and prominent especially for its defense of the press in Persia.

Although published in an Arab country, *Hekmat* avoided the use of Arabic compound words or Arabicized forms of non-Arab words. In fact, its prose is among the best of its time. Some issues of *Hekmat* during the first three years published poetry and other short pieces in Arabic for special occasions.

Apart from the first issue, which was only four pages long, during the first seven years *Hekmat* was eight pages long and was published in a 47 x 34 cm format with three columns of text. From its eighth year, it consisted of sixteen 19 x 27.5 cm pages with two columns of text (and the occasional illustration). From its thirteenth year, *Hekmat* called itself a *majalla* (magazine).

The annual subscription rate in Persia was twenty-five *qerāns* during the first three years, and forty thereafter. It was once raised to fifty but had to be reduced to forty again because of protests from subscribers (*Hekmat*, 1 Ṣafar 1316/ 21 June 1898). Outside Persia, the subscription rate was ten rupees in India, ten rubles in Russia, twenty francs in the Ottoman Empire, and twenty-five francs elsewhere. During its final years, the subscription rate in Egypt, Europe, the United States, and China became one pound sterling, while in India it rose to fifteen rupees. *Hekmat* was not priced for single copies, and it published very few advertisements.

No information is available on its pressrun, but the existence of its collection in many private libraries indicates that it had a wide readership. Outside Persia, incomplete collections are held today in the libraries of Princeton University and the University of Cambridge.



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