



## MO'TAMEN, ZEYN-AL-'ĀBEDIN

**MO'TAMEN** (Ar. Mo'taman), **Zeyn-al-'Ābedin** (b. Tehran, 13 Kordād 1293 Š./4 June 1914; d. Tehran, 2 Ābān 1384 Š./24 October 2005), teacher, writer, and scholar of Persian literature ([FIGURE 1](#)).

Mo'tamen was born into a family with a long literary tradition, traceable to Fath-'Ali Kān Kāšāni, better known by his nom de plume as Šabā (q.v.; d. 1823), the poet laureate (*malek-al-šo'arā*) at the court of the Qajar Fath-'Ali Shah (q.v.; 1797-1834), and Mirzā Aḥmad Kān Kāšāni, known as Šaburi (d. 1812). A later generation included the poet, painter, and calligrapher Maḥmud Kān Šabā, (d. 1894). Mo'tamen's grandfather, Mirzā Zeyn-al-'Ābedin Kān Donboli-Žarrābi (d. 1908), also known as Mirzā Zeyn-al-'Ābedin Kān Ḥakim, was among the earliest graduates of the Dār-al-Fonun School (q.v.) and later a respected physician at the court of Nāṣer al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896), from whom, in 1885, he received the title Mo'tamen-al-Aṭebbā'.

Mo'tamen was first educated at the Aqdasiya School in Tehran, which was adjacent to his parental house. At fourth grade, he enrolled at the American College of Tehran (later renamed [Alborz College](#)) from which he graduated in 1936. In the same year he embarked on his forty-two-year teaching career at the American College of Tehran. Alongside teaching he also studied English at the American College of Tehran as well as at Dāneš-sarā-ye 'Āli (Teachers Training College; see [EDUCATION](#)) and graduated from both in 1940. He further studied Persian literature at Tehran University, graduating in 1944 (Mo'tamen, 2001, pp. 4-5). Among his teachers of those years Mo'tamen was always particularly appreciative of Šādeq Rezā-zādeh Šafaq (ca. 1892-1971)



and [Badi' -al-Zamān Foruzānfar](#) (1904-1970) (Mo'tamen, 2001, p. 5).

Mo'tamen was an effective teacher with a lasting impact on several generations of students at Alborz High School. He was noted for his even temper, and throughout his life he maintained a very high standard in his teaching with effortless ease (Gheissari, p. 83; Katouzian, pp. 452-54). He was briefly married and had no children. He spent time on his students, some of whom he regarded as members of his extended family. Throughout the years, his current and former pupils would regularly visit him at his home (a mid-Qajar period house built in 1883 by his grandfather Mo'tamen-al-Aṭebbā') in the old Pāmenār district of Tehran or, more often, at his favorite haunt, the Café Nāderi on Nāderi Avenue.

Mo'tamen had a keen interest in Persian classical music and played the reed flute (*nay*). He was also an avid traveler, often going on tours his own. In his youth he covered extensive terrain in on foot, and in later years he used every opportunity to travel to different parts of the world. He had a large collection of photographs and slides, over 3,000 at his own estimation, all taken by himself in the course of his travels.

Mo'tamen authored and edited a number of works in prose and verse, including perhaps his best known work, *Āšiāna-ye 'oqāb* (The eagle's nest), a popular historical novel set in the early [Saljuq](#) period, depicting the life of [Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḥ](#) (ca. 1050s-1124) and the Ismā'īlīs of [Alamut](#). He began the novel in 1930, at the age sixteen, and completed it in 1936 (Mo'tamen, 1995, p. 11; idem, 2001, p. 6). *Āšiāna-ye 'oqāb* appeared in print in 1934 as a serial in consecutive issues of the influential paper *Šafaq-e sorḡ*, prior to the paper's closure in 1935 (Mo'tamen, 2001, p. 7; Ṣadr-Hāšemi, III, pp. 75-80). novel was later published as a book in 1936 and reprinted regularly thereafter (Mo'tamen, 2001, pp. 6-7).

In the writing of *Āšiāna-ye 'oqāb*, Mo'tamen was admittedly influenced by his early readings of popular historical stories such as *Amir-Araslān*, and *Eskandar-nāma*. Under their influence, he had initially drafted a two-volume novel, entitled *Malek Firuz ebn Iraj* (or *Malek Firuz-e Nāmdār*) which he never published (Mo'tamen, 2001, p. 5; Ārianpur, III, p. 239, quoted from Ṣedāqat-Nežād). Certain European historical novelists such as Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) and Michel Zévaco (1860-1918), whose works—in particular Dumas's *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* and *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, and Zévaco's *Les Pardaillan*—had already been translated into Persian, also had an impact



on him. Inspired by these works, and prior to the writing of *Āšīāna-ye 'oqāb*, he had also drafted *Nāšer Kān va pesaraš Manšur Kān* (or *Afsāna-ye Nāšer Kān*), a story in five volumes about the period of the [Constitutional Movement](#) in Persia, which also remained unpublished (Mo'tamen, 2001, p. 6; Āriānpur, III, p. 239).

The *Āšīāna-ye 'oqāb* has been criticized by some literary historians for its excessively prosaic style (Āriānpur, III, p. 240), while other scholars have regarded it as a significant contribution to the genre of historical novel, and a pioneer of that genre in modern Persian literature (Kubícková, 1968).

During the 1930s, Mo'tamen also collaborated with the weekly *Omid*, to which he contributed a series of essays with satirical title “Asrār-e 'ālam-e haparut” (Secrets of the world of illusions) portraying the life of drug addicts.

After *Āšīāna-ye 'oqāb* he stopped writing fiction and from the early 1940s, turned to research on Persian literature. He wrote two critical volumes on classical Persian literature, *Še'r o adab-e fārsi* (1953), and *Taḥavvol-e še'r-e fārsi* (1960). He took a keen interest in the Indian Style (*sabk-e hendī*) in Persian poetry, which at the time went against the prevailing fashion of criticizing the style for being too ornate and opting for the less florid style of earlier eras (see [BĀZGAŠT-E ADABI](#)). In a way therefore, he anticipated the contemporary reevaluation of styles. In this respect Mo'tamen was also a pioneer among modern scholars in introducing the works of [Šā'eb Tabrizi](#) (ca. 1592-1676) his *Golčīn-e Šā'eb* (1941), and *Goharhā-ye rāz az daryā-ye andiša-ye Šā'eb* (1985). He also wrote *Bargi čand az daftar-e zendegi* (limited edition, Tehran, 1965), containing a selection of his own poems and literary essays.

Mo'tamen is buried in the Behešt-e Zahrā Cemetery near Tehran in a plot specifically allotted to writers and artists. A memorial meeting was held in his honor on Sunday 30 October 2005 at the Alborz High School in Tehran.



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