Published: January 1, 2000
Last Updated: August 3, 2015

SAʿDI

SAʿDI, Abu Moḥammad Mošarref-al-Din Moṣleḥ b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Mošarref Širāzi, Persian poet and prose writer (b. Shiraz, ca. 1210; d. Shiraz, d. 1291 or 1292), widely recognized as one of the greatest masters of the classical literary tradition. The present article examines the sources for his biography, including his major works; for the articles on these in detail, see the links given below.

Little about Saʿdi's life is known with absolute certainty. Even the earliest references to him in external sources differ in important details, and although Saʿdi's own writings, especially the Bustān and Golestān, contain many purportedly autobiographical reminiscences, a good number of these are historically implausible and are probably fictionalized or cast in the first-person for rhetorical effect. Uncertainty begins with the proper form of his name. In reporting his full name—comprising given name, honorific (*laqab*), agnomen (*konya*), and patronymic—the historical sources seem to present every possible permutation of several basic elements. The earliest available record is the *Talḵiṣ al-majmaʿ al-ādāb fi moʿjam al-alqāb* (Summary of the gathering of refinements concerning the lexicon of honorifics) by Ebn al-Fowaṭi (d. 1323). He wrote to Saʿdi in 1262 to request samples of the poet's Arabic verses and gives the full form of his name as: Moṣleḥ-al-Din Abu Moḥammad ʿAbd-Allāh b. Mošarref b. Moṣleḥ b. Mošarref. S. Nafisi (p. 65) considers this source definitive. But most other scholars have turned to the evidence of early manuscripts of Saʿdi's works. E. G. Browne (II, p. 526), for example, appeals to an early manuscript (BL, India Office Library MS pers.

876, dated 728/1328) to give the poet's name as Mošarref-al-Din b. Moṣleḥ-al-Din ʿAbd-Allāh. Most later Western scholars, such as A. J. Arberry, J. Rypka, and R. Davis, make ʿAbd-Allāh part of Saʿdi's patronymic: Abu ʿAbd-Allāh Mošarref-al-Din b. Moṣleḥ. Finally, based on the introduction to one of the earliest surviving compilations of Saʿdi's collected works written by his fellow townsman ʿAli b. Aḥmad b. Abu Bakr Bisotun in 1326 (Saʿdi, *Kolliāt*, p. 847), Ṣafā (III/1, p. 587) concludes that Moṣleḥ was the poet's given name and presents his full name as Abu Moḥammad Mošarref-al-Din (or Šaraf-al-Din) Moṣleḥ b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Mošarref. Jāmī (1414-92; q.v.) gives essentially the same form of the name in his *Nafaḥat al-ons* (p. 598), and this is the version tentatively accepted here.

There is no such uncertainty about Saʿdi's pen name; it serves as his signature (*takalloṣ*)in all of his ghazals (*ḡazal*, q.v.) and appears repeatedly elsewhere in his work. But questions have been raised about its origin. There is no doubt that it is based on the poet's service to the Salghurid atabegs (*atābak*, q.v.) that governed Shiraz for most of his lifetime, since two members of this dynasty were named Saʿd. Ebn al-Fowaṭī associates the pen name with Saʿdi's connections to the younger of the two, Saʿd b. Abi Bakr. But this attribution creates chronological difficulties; Saʿdi would have been about 50 years old when he first had the opportunity to meet the younger Saʿd, and it is highly unlikely that he started composing the hundreds of ghazals bearing his pen name only after this time. Later sources are probably more reliable on this point. Dawlatšāh Samarqandi (d. after 1487; q.v.) states that Saʿdi took this *nom de plume* due to his father's service in the court of Saʿd b. Abi Bakr's grandfather, Saʿd b. Zangi (p. 351). Saʿdi himself, however, was still an adolescent when Saʿd b. Zangi died in 1226, and his works contain no references to the elder Saʿd. ʿA. Zarrinkub (pp. 66-67) resolves these difficulties by arguing that Saʿd or Banu Saʿd served as the name of the dynasty as a whole, as well as the personal name of its founder and his grandson, and the pen name marks the poet's allegiance to all members of the royal house.

The two most reliable dates in Saʿdi's biography are the dates of the completion of his two best-known books, the *Bustān* and the *Golestān*. The *Bustān* was completed late in the year of 1257, after Saʿdi's return to Shiraz following an extended absence. The *Golestān* was completed a year later in 1258. Saʿdi opens his account of his reasons for composing the latter work with verses that "correspond to my circumstances": "Every moment a breath of life passes. When I look, not much remains. / O you who sleep as 50 [years] pass,

can you seize these five days?" (*Golestān*, p. 52). Even though 50 is a conventional age at which to reflect on life's transience and one's life's work, these verses seem to provide an approximate starting point for establishing a chronology of Saʿdi's life. They place the date of Saʿdi's birth around 1209-10, which is the modern scholarly consensus. ʿA. Eqbāl Āštiāni (pp. 487-89; cf. Saʿdi, *Kolliāt*, p. 691), however, notes that the second of these verses also appears as the first verse in one of Saʿdi's *qaṣida*s and discounts its evidentiary value. He argues for a slightly later date between 1213 and 1218 based on the identity of the Abu'l-Faraj b. al-Jowzi mentioned in a story in the second chapter of the *Golestān* (for a rebuttal, see Katuzian, 1996, p. 74, n. 16.)

In this story, Saʿdi (*Kolliāt*, p. 94) relates that as a young student in Baghdad (q.v.), he ignored the advice of his teacher, Ebn Jowzi, to shun musical entertainments. The identity of this Ebn Jowzi, however, has itself been a bone of contention and points to the general difficulty of relying on the first-person anecdotes in the *Bustān* and *Golestān* as historical sources. Earlier scholars identified this Ebn Jowzi with ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān b. ʿAli Abu'l-Faraj b. al-Jowzi, the famous preacher and prolific polymath of Baghdad, who wrote dozens of works on history and religious studies. Since this Ebn al-Jowzi died in 1200, Saʿdi must have been born around 1184 in order to have met him as a student (Massé, pp. 6, 20). A similarly early birth date is indicated by another first-person anecdote in the *Golestān* (pp. 141-42), where Saʿdi tells of his visit to a mosque in Kashgar (q.v.) in the year that "Moḥammad Ḵᵛārazmšāh made peace with Ḵatāʾ," an event that took place between 1210 and 1211 (Massé, pp. 25-26). But given the likely year of Saʿdi's death, a birth date before 1200 would require an implausibly long life span of well over a century. M. Qazvini (pp. 68-73) clears up this conundrum by noting that Abu'l-Faraj b. Jowzi was also the name of the famous author's grandson, himself a preacher, market inspector (*moḥtaseb*)of Baghdad, and well-respected teacher. He died during the Mongol sack of the city in 1258, and this identification provides Saʿdi with a more natural life span. The anecdote set in Kashgar is not so easily resolved. Saʿdi was undoubtedly absent from Shiraz for many years, as he states in the introductions to both the *Bustān* and *Golestān* and in a ghazal composed after his return to the city, in which he apologizes for his prodigal ways (*Ḡazaliāt*, pp. 217-18). It is also certain that he traveled widely during this period, and some of the many first-person stories in his works probably have a basis in biographical reality. But it is a mistake to identify the life of the author too closely with the literary persona. As a literary artist, Saʿdi needs to create a narrative voice that fits his purposes: experienced, yet fallible, worldly wise,

but committed to certain fundamental values. Casting himself as an actor in his tales contributes to their immediacy and is crucial to establishing his ethical authority and empathy. His didactic, artistic purposes far supersede the demands of historical or autobiographical fidelity. The very first story of the *Golestān*, after all, praises the virtues of the beneficent falsehood, and elsewhere, the narrator warns us that "one who has seen the world tells many lies" (*Golestān*, p. 81).

Since there are no contemporary external sources to confirm what Saʿdi's works tell us of their author's life before his return to Shiraz, any account of these years is necessarily tentative. As Zarrinkub (pp. 68-69) observes, Saʿdi's father is "a nameless shadow in his works, but not without weight." He was apparently responsible for his son's early education and taught him lessons in tolerance that would remain with him throughout his life (*Golestān*, p. 89), but his death left Saʿdi an orphan (*Bustān*, p. 58). Still an adolescent, Saʿdi left his native city to continue his studies in Baghdad, probably around 1223-24, when Saʿd b. Zangi was temporarily ousted from power by Sultan Ḡiāṯ-al-Din Pir Šāh (Ṣafā, III/1, p. 593). He was for a time a fellowship student in Neẓāmiya madrasa in Baghdad (*Bustān*, p. 153), where, as we have seen,his instructors included the Hanbalite scholar ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān b. ʿAli Abu'l-Faraj b. al-Jowzi. He may have also been associated with the Sufi master Šehāb-al-Din Abu Ḥafṣ ʿOmar b. Moḥammad Sohrawardi (d. 1234); although the verses from the *Bustān* (pp. 487-88) that would support this are of dubious authenticity, B. Foruzānfar has documented significant similarities between Saʿdi's teachings and those of this influential shaikh. An extended period of travel around the Islamic world followed his course of studies. First-person anecdotes have the narrator taken prisoner by the Crusaders in Syria (*Golestān*, pp. 99-100) and murdering a temple priest in India (*Bustān*, pp. 176-80). Despite efforts of scholars such as H. Massé and J. A. Boyle, the effort to re-create an exact itinerary of his travels from his works is misguided. After a careful sifting of the evidence, H. Katuzian concludes that it is probable that Saʿdi visited Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and the Arabian Peninsula, but unlikely that he ever traveled east to Khorasan (q.v.), India (q.v.), or Kashgar (Katuzian, 2006, pp. 13-17; 1996, pp. 76-98; see also Zarrinkub, pp. 62-64).

When Saʿdi returned to Shiraz around 1257 after some 30 years of travel, he was apparently already a famous and highly respected poet, a fame that must have been based on the wide circulation of his masterful ghazals. As the quick publication and dedications of the *Bustān* and *Golestān* indicate, he was eager

to re-establish his ties to the house of Saʿd. In a short qaṣida, Saʿdi (*Kolliāt*, p. 696) credits Abu Bakr b. Saʿd with creating the stability and prosperity that encouraged him to return to Shiraz. The Salghurid dynasty, however, did not long outlast the poet's return. Abu Bakr died in 1260, and his eldest son, Saʿd b. Abi Bakr, died only 12 days later, events that Saʿdi (*Kolliāt*, pp. 701-03, 698-99) memorialized in several elegies. Saʿd's 12-year-old son, Moḥammad (r. 1260-62), ruled briefly under the guidance of his mother, Tarkān Ḵātun; both are praised in poems that serve as dedications to Saʿdi's collected ghazals (*Ḡazaliāt*, pp. 5-7), and the latter, according to Qazvini (pp. 27-28), is the subject of another qaṣida (Saʿdi, *Kolliāt*, pp. 686-87). Under steadily increasing Mongol pressure, the fortunes of the dynasty quickly unraveled. Two of Abu Bakr's nephews were installed as rulers after the death of Moḥammad, and Saʿdi (*Kolliāt*, pp. 661, 676, 687) wrote three poems in praise of the second of these, Moẓaffar-al-Din Saljuqšāh, during his short, 5-month reign in 1263. When he was killed by the Mongols (see IL-KHANID DYNASTY) after an ill-advised, alcohol-induced rebellion, rule officially passed to the youngest daughter of Saʿd b. Abi Bakr, Ābaš Ḵātun, but her forced marriage to Mengü Temür, the son of the Mongol Il-khan Hülegü, assured the de facto integration of Shiraz into Mongol dominion. Ābaš Ḵātun is probably the subject of another dedicatory ghazal (*Ḡazaliāt*, p. 7; cf. Qazvini, pp. 33-34).

Saʿdi cannot have welcomed the imposition of direct Mongol rule. He had written two qaṣidas, one in Arabic and one in Persian (*Kolliāt*, pp. 703-04, 705-08), to mourn the death of the last ʿAbbasid caliph al-Mostaʿṣem be'llāh (d. 1258), during the Mongol sack of Baghdad and to lament the fall of the caliphate. Saʿdi (*Kolliāt*, pp. 678-79) nevertheless wrote a poem to commemorate the transfer of power from the Salghurids to the Mongols, and his collected works contain numerous poems dedicated to both the Mongol governors and their Persian administrators. Among the most notable of these is Amir Ankyānu, who served as governor of Shiraz between 1268 and 1272; he is the subject of four qaṣidas (Saʿdi, *Kolliāt*, pp. 667-68, 674-75, 693-94, 696-97) and is thought to be the addressee of one of Saʿdi's prose treatises, *Dar tarbiat-e yaki az moluk* (*Kolliāt*, pp. 820-82). None of these works can be considered panegyrics in the usual sense of the word, since they consist mostly of counsel and warnings concerning the proper conduct of rulers. Less admonitory in tone are the poems that Saʿdi (*Kolliāt*, pp. 661-62, 683-84, 680) addressed to the long-time head of the chancery in Shiraz, Šams-al-Din Ḥosayn ʿAlakāni (d. ca. 1289). He had been appointed to this post by the Il-khanid general finance minister, Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Jovayni Ṣāḥeb Divān (killed

1284; see JOVAYNI FAMILY). He is celebrated some of Saʿdi's finest qaṣidas (*Kolliāt*, pp. 650-51, 660, 664-67, 671-72, 680-83, 684-86), along with his brother, ʿAlāʾ-al-Din ʿAṭāʾ-Malek Jovayni (d. 1283; q.v.), the author of the *Jahāngošā-ye Jovayni* (q.v.). Two treatises commonly included in Saʿdi's collected works (though clearly not by his hand) discuss his meeting with the Jovayni brothers and the Il-khan Abaqa (q.v.) in Tabriz during the poet's return home from a pilgrimage to Mecca (Saʿdi, *Kolliāt*, pp. 842-45). In several older manuscripts of Saʿdi's works, there is also a collection of poetic fragments (Ar. q-ṭ-ʿ "to tear apart": sing. *qeṭʿa*, pl. *moqaṭṭaʿāt*) entitled the *Ṣāḥebiya* in honor of Šams-al-Din Moḥammad.

Although Saʿdi spent the final decades of his life in Shiraz, his poetry and reputation spread throughout the Persophone world, traveling even to places that he probably never visited in person. In India, his lyric poetry in particular made a significant impression on the two master poets of Delhi in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, Amir Ḵosrow (1253-1325; q.v.) and Ḥasan Sijzi (d. 1336). In his *Qerān al-saʿdayn*, Ḵosrow chides himself for aspiring to write poetry during Saʿdi's lifetime: "In the age of Saʿdi—may it never grow old—aren't you ashamed to compose poetry?" (Ṣafā, III/1, p. 600). Ḥasan (p. 158) concludes a ghazal with a signature verse that plays on the name of Saʿdi's most famous work and acknowledges his pervasive influence on all lovers: "Ḥasan has brought a flower from Saʿdi's *Golestān*, for the true of heart are all plucking flowers from that garden." In Anatolia, Sayf-al-Din Moḥammad al-Farḡāni (d. first quarter of 14th century) not only translated Saʿdi's *Golestān* into Turkish, but also composed several Persian qaṣidas in his honor. In a poem that Sayf composed on sending some samples of his poetry to Saʿdi, he confesses that in his eagerness to please, "I didn't realize that it is foolishness to send copper to a gold mine" (Ṣafā, III/1, p. 601).

Perhaps the last dateable poem in Saʿdi's works is the short qaṣida (*Kolliāt*, p. 655) dedicated to Majd-al-Din Rumi, who served as an administrative official in Shiraz under the Il-khan Arḡun between 1287 and 1289 (Qazvini, pp. 50-51). Saʿdi died a few years later. Early sources give death dates ranging from 1291 to 1299. In a detailed review of the evidence, Nafisi concludes that Saʿdi died on 27 Ḏu'l-ḥejja 691/9 December 1292. Later medieval biographical compendia, such as Dowlatšāh's *Taḏkerat al-šoʿarāʾ* (pp. 362-63) and Jāmi's *Nafaḥāt al-ons* (p. 599), agree on the year 691, but place the event in the month of Šawwāl/15 September-2 October 1292. The oldest surviving credible record is the *Tāriḵ-e gozida* (composed 1330) by Ḥamd-Allāḥ Mostowfi (q.v.), and

based on this and other 14th-century sources, Ḏ. Ṣafā (III/1, pp. 598-99) opts for a date a year earlier, Ḏu’l-ḥejja 690/25 November-22 December 1291. This earlier date has the advantage of helping to account for variations in the chronograms (q.v.; cf. MĀDDA TĀRIḴ) written on Saʿdi’s death; since he died in the last month of the year, commemorative chronograms might memorialize either the actual year of death or the following year, at the conclusion of the 40-day period of mourning.

Although Saʿdi’s works are an unreliable guide to his biography, his biography, at least in its general outlines, may tell us something about his works and the worldview that informs them. Saʿdi lived through one of the most eventful and traumatic centuries in the history of Asia and the Middle East. The expansion and consolidation of Mongol power was marked by the destruction of old centers of culture and civilization, the upheaval of established political institutions, and the mass migration of populations. Mere survival demanded luck, wit, determination, and practical savvy. Saʿdi met the challenges of his age by adept and constant motion. In his early years, this motion was physical; as an itinerant scholar and increasingly respected poet, his mastery of language and literate culture allowed him to move from place to place and in and out of mosques, markets, and palaces. He maintained a social mobility even after settling in Shiraz. His works show that he was in regular contact with the ruling circles of the city, but he apparently never joined the court in a formal capacity, and reports (Ṣafā, III/1, p. 597) that he resided in a Sufi hospice (*ḵānagāh*, q.v.) despite his influence, status, and access to the wealthy seem plausible. These circumstances help account for the breadth and variety of the world depicted in his work from the mansions of the elite to street life among the poor. More importantly, the course of his life also seems to have contributed to the attitude of detached engagement that characterizes his work. The irony, humor, and charity of judgment that are often found in his writings result from an ability to maintain multiple perspectives and an awareness of his own fallibility. This detachment is nevertheless informed by a commitment to certain core values: concern for the suffering of others (especially the less privileged), awareness of the fragility of life, and faith in a moral reckoning both in this life and the next. Saʿdi’s concern for social welfare requires an engagement with the politically powerful, but also a circumspect caution and a willingness to adapt principle to the particular situation at hand. Similarly, the works acknowledge the need for religious authority, but also recognize the hypocrisy and self-righteousness that often accompany it. Despite the dire times through which the author lived, Saʿdi’s

works project a joy and vitality that seems to grow from his full participation in two capacities that most make us human: love and language. His works celebrate love in its manifold forms—social solidarity, friendship, amorous desire, and religious devotion—and they do so in a language that revels in the full capacities of the linguistic medium to range from dignified balance and aphoristic concision to playful punning and raucous excess.

Several of Saʿdi's works have already been mentioned and will be discussed in detail in the following sections of this entry. His collected works in verse and prose are known by the generic title of *Kolliāt*. Saʿdi himself probably began the task of gathering and organizing his own oeuvre (Ṣafā, III/1, pp. 607-8), but our earliest record of this process is a note by ʿAli b Aḥmad b. Abu Bakr Bisotun, who provided indexes to Saʿdi's lyric poems and rearranged sections of the *Kolliāt* in 1326 and again in 1334. This recension contains 22 sections: (1) *Taqrir-e dibāča* ("Exposition of the preface," probably written not by Saʿdi, but by an earlier compiler who compares the book to a ship (*safina*) loaded with precious cargo); (2) *Majāles-e panjgāna* ("Five sermons," in prose); (3) *Soʾāl-e ṣāḥeb-divān az šayḵ* ("The finance minister's question for the shaikh," in prose, a report on Saʿdi's meeting with Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Jovayni); (4) *Resāla-ye ʿaql va ʿešq* ("Treatise on reason and love," in prose); (5) *Naṣiḥat al-moluk* ("Advice to kings," short prose mirror for princes); (6) *Taqrirāt-e ṯalāṯa* ("Three accounts," short prose pieces about rather than by Saʿdi, concerning his interactions with Abaqa Khan, Amir Ankyānu, and Šams-al-Din Tāzikuy); (7) *Golestān*; (8) *Bustān*; (9) *Qaṣāyed-e fārsi* ("Persian qaṣidas"); (10) *Qaṣāyed-e ʿArabi* ("Arabic qaṣidas"); 11) *Molammaʿāt* ("Macaronic poems" in Arabic and Persian); (12) *Tarjiʿāt* ("Strophic poems"); (13) *Ṭayyebāt* ("Delights," collection of ghazals); (14) *Badāyeʿ* ("Marvels," collection of ghazals); (15) *Ḵawātim* ("Endings," collection of ghazals); (16) *Ḡazaliāt-e qadim* ("Old ghazals"); (17) *Ṣāḥebiya* ("The Saheb's poems"); (18) *Moqaṭṭaʿāt* ("Fragments"); 19) *Robāʿiāt* ("Quatrains"); (20) *Mofradāt* ("Single verses"); (21) *Moṭāyebāt* and *Możāḥekāt* ("Jokes" and "Humorous diversions," prose); and (22) *Ḵabiṭāt* ("Facetiae," in verse). The last two sections, known collectively as the *Hazliāt* ("Bawdy works"), are suppressed from most modern editions of the *Kolliāt*.

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