



## ZOHURI TORŠIZI

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**ZOHURI TORŠIZI**, Mollā Nur-al-Din Moḥammad (d. 1025/1616), Persian poet. Zohuri was born and raised in rural Khorasan. Zohuri himself states that he comes from the village of Qāyen (*Sāqi-nāma*, p. 203), but the earliest biographies associate him with the town of Toršiz, near today's Kāšmar, where he perhaps went to study in his youth. Based on the statement of 'Abd-al-Nabi Qazvini that Zohuri died at the age of 82 (*Maykāna*, p. 364), he was born around 943/1537-38. In his early thirties, Zohuri left Khorasan for Yazd, where he joined the court of Ġiāṭ-al-Din Moḥammad Mir-e Mirān and the literary circle headed by Vaḥši Bāfqi. About five years later, Zohuri moved to Shiraz and struck up a friendship with the calligrapher, gilder, and poet Mowlānā Darviš Ḥoseyn (Awḥadi, II, p. 1325), who was also a literary mentor of 'Orfi Širāzi (Nahāvandi, *Ma'āter-e Raḥimi*, quoted in Golčīn-e Ma'āni, II, p. 825).

After spending seven years in Shiraz, Zohuri migrated to India in 1580. Settling in the Deccan, he entered the service of the Neẓāmšāhis in Ahmadnagar during the last years of the reign of Mortazā I (r. 1565-88). It was here that Zohuri first met his fellow émigré and lifelong friend Malek Qomi (d. 1616). Zohuri performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, probably sometime near the end of Mortazā's reign (Ahmad, pp. 116-23). In addition to his patrons in Ahmadnagar, Zohuri was in contact with a number of officials of the Mughal court, especially the poet laureate Abu'l-Fayz Fayzi. They probably began a correspondence shortly after Zohuri arrived in India and met face to face when Fayzi visited Ahmadnagar on a diplomatic mission for the emperor Akbar in 1591-92. Fayzi mentions both Malek and Zohuri by name in one of his



letters back to the court (Fayzi, pp. 135-36), praising their poetic talent and recommending them for imperial service. Ṣohuri nevertheless remained in Aḥmadnagar throughout the period of political unrest that followed the death of Mortazā. The ascension of Borhān II to the throne in 1591 promised a revival of Neḗāmšāhi fortunes, and Ṣohuri dedicated numerous poems to this ruler, including his *Sāqi-nāma*. This promise was cut short by Borhān's unexpected death in 1594, and Ahmadnagar was besieged by the Mughal generalissimo 'Abd-al-Raḥim Ḳān-e Ḳānān.

Ṣohuri briefly joined 'Abd-al-Raḥim's retinue, but again seems to have been reluctant to avail himself of Mughal patronage. He moved to Bijapur, the capital city of the 'Adelšāhis, in 1596, where he spent the last twenty years of his life. Here he enjoyed the generous patronage of the court, the vizier Šāhnavāz Khan Širāzi (d. 1611), and especially the ruler himself, the highly cultured Ebrāhim II (r. 1580-1627). The majority of Ṣohuri's surviving works were probably composed during this final phase of his career. Ṣohuri continued his close friendship with Malek Qomi, marrying his daughter and working with him on joint literary projects. Though the dates given in the sources differ slightly, it is almost certain that Ṣohuri died in 1616, a few months after Malek (Ahmad, pp. 283-99).

Ṣohuri's *divān* contains poems in all the conventional forms and genres. During his lifetime, he was especially renowned for his panegyric *qašidas*. In addition to poems in honor of the Shi'i imams, Ṣohuri sang the praises of a wide range of patrons including Shah 'Abbās and the Ḳān-e Ḳānān, but most especially Borhān Neḗāmšāh II and Ebrāhim 'Adelšāh II. Ṣohuri's *qašidas* often include extended descriptions of his patron's court, palace, weapons, and other royal accouterments. Ṣohuri's strophic poems (*tarkib-* and *tarji'-bands*) are similarly eulogistic in theme and dedicated to the same patrons. His collected works also contain some 1,300 *ḡazals*. Most of these poems are mystically tinged amorous laments and include few of the ethical-philosophical themes favored by some of his contemporaries.

Many of Ṣohuri's *robā'i* poems celebrate various aspects of courtly culture in Bijapur, with sets of poems on the court festival *Nowras*, Ebrāhim's skill in calligraphy and music, his favorite lute (*ṭanbur*), and even his drug of choice. In addition to a smattering of short humorous and satirical poems, Ṣohuri's *divān* also contains an untitled *maṭnawi* in rhymed couplets celebrating a palace constructed by Šāhnavāz Khan, which was also the subject of poems by the young Kalim Kāšāni (Losensky, pp. 55-61). Ṣohuri reportedly wrote a



response to Neẓāmi's *Maḵzan al-asrār*, but no trace of this work survives. Ẓohuri's major *maṭnawī*, however, is his *Sāqi-nāma*, the most notable product of his stay in Aḥmadnagar. According to the poet himself, this work was written in two stages. Its first thousand or so verses follow the conventions of the genre established in the first decades of the 16th century, but Ẓohuri set it aside awaiting a worthy dedicatee. With the accession of Borhān II, Ẓohuri elaborated the final panegyric section of the *Sāqi-nāma* to an unprecedented three thousand verses. After apologizing for a long absence from court, Ẓohuri goes on to praise Borhān's character, his prowess in battle, and the royal palace precinct before turning to a paean to the power of the word, a series of ethical admonitions, an account of his own life, and praise of the Prophet Moḥammad and Imam 'Alī. This final portion of the work features numerous illustrative anecdotes, making Ẓohuri's *Sāqi-nāma* one of the longest and most variegated representatives of this quintessentially Safavid-Mughal genre.

But it was Ẓohuri's *Se-naṭr* that perhaps most influenced later writers. This work consists of three introductions dedicated to Ebrāhīm II: *Dibāĉa-ye Nowras* prefaced a collection of song lyrics written by Ebrāhīm himself in the Deccani vernacular (Ebrāhīm 'Ādelšāh, pp. 55-82). *Dibāĉa-ye Golzār-e Ebrāhīm* and *Dibāĉa-ye K'ān-e Kalil* introduced anthologies of panegyric verse by both Ẓohuri and Malek Qomi. These works were long regarded as models of rhymed prose, packed with rhetorical devices and studded with verses, and were frequently copied and published in lithograph prints (Ahmad, pp. 344-50). Two other prose works sometimes attributed to Ẓohuri—*Panj roq'ā* (a collection of love letters) and *Minā Bāzār* (a description of the Delhi glass market)—are probably the work of Erādat Khan Wāẓi', who died in 1716 (Ahmad, pp 337-52).

Ẓohuri's poetry was regarded highly by contemporary readers. Fayẓi lauds his "colorful speech" (*rangin kalām*). According to Taqi-al-Din Kāšāni, Ẓohuri was able to invent "rare conceits and surprising metaphors" (*maẓāmin-e ġariba va este'ārāt-e 'ajiba*) by imitating 12th-century masters of the *qaṣida*, such as [Atir Aḳsikati](#) and ['Emādi Rāzi](#) (see Kāšāni, pp. 305-6). Awḥadi similarly states that the "style of his words is fresh" (*šiva-ye goftārash tāza*), and Ẓohuri's *ġazals* in particular often utilize the metaphorical conceits and compound neologisms associated with the emergent "Fresh Style" (*šiva-ye tāza*; Awḥadi, IV, p. 2300). For Nahāvandi, Ẓohuri's work renovated "the lofty foundations of poetry," which had fallen into disrepair (*Ma'āter-e Raḥimi*, quoted in Golĉin-e Ma'āni, II, p. 824). The modern literary historian Ḍabiḥ-Allāh Ṣafā has cast serious doubt



on these assessments, judging that Ẓohuri's *qaṣidas* are sometimes marred by slippages in usage, weak syntax, and unnecessary verbiage (Şafā, V/2, p. 981), though he holds Ẓohuri's *ġazals* in somewhat higher regard. The ongoing publication of Ẓohuri's works in modern scholarly editions will perhaps allow for a more objective and balanced critical appraisal of this prolific Indo-Persian poet.

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