



ABŪ ŠAKŪR BALĪ

ABŪ ŠAKŪR BALĪ, poet of the Samanid period. Nothing is known of his life. Allusions in his poetry indicate that he was a professional poet and had suffered reverses; in one distich (*Āfarīn-nāma*, line 36; in Lazard, *Premiers poètes*) he presents himself as a stranger imploring the protection of the “king of the world,” probably the Samanid amir.

Of his work, only short fragments and isolated verses quoted by dictionaries, anthologies and various other works survive; these amount to some sixty distichs of lyrical poetry and a number of fragments of *maṭnavīs* in various meters. Of the latter, the most noteworthy are the 140 distichs in *motaqāreb* that formed part of the *Āfarīn-nāma*; to these we can perhaps add close to 175 unattributed distichs in the *Toḥfat al-molūk* of ‘Alī b. Abū Ḥafṣ Eṣfahānī (7th/13th century), which seem to be extracts from the same work, as S. Nafīsī demonstrated. The lyrical fragments contain traditional themes (love, description of nature, eulogy of wine, panegyrics, and satire) but also give a notable place to morality; a philosophic culture is disclosed here. The *maṭnavī* fragments best show the importance of Abū Šakūr; their contents are narrative or descriptive, sometimes philosophical or scientific, and very often moral. The *Āfarīn-nāma* probably comprised anecdotes illustrating moral notions, or else diverse anecdotes within a frame narrative, as in *Kalīla wa Demna*. The surviving verses are maxims or moral statements whose inspiration is very close to that of the Pahlavi *andarz* collections and of Persian works in this genre. Among the poets of the 4th/10th century, Abū Šakūr definitely was the principal inheritor of the wisdom literature of pre-Islamic



Iran. He must have enjoyed great fame, because Manūčehrī mentions him among the former masters alongside Rūdakī and Šahīd Balĳī.

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