



AḤMAD-E JĀM

AḤMAD-E JĀM, in full ŠEHĀB-AL-DĪN ABŪ NAṢR AḤMAD B. ABU'L-ḤASAN B. AḤMAD B. MOḤAMMAD NĀMAQĪ JĀMĪ, a Conservative Sufi with unreserved loyalty to the *Šarī'a* (b. 440/1049 in Nāmaq, near Toršīz, Khorasan; d. 536/1141 in Ma'addābād on the outskirts of Jām, which today, thanks to his tomb, is called Torbat-e [Šayk-e] Jām). Although he claimed descent from the line of Jarīr b. 'Abdallāh al-Baḡalī, a companion of the Prophet, he had a distinctly non-Arab physiognomy (*EI*² I, p. 283) and an unusually original and thoroughly native sounding quality to his Persian. The nickname *Žandapīl*, “the colossal elephant,” expressive of both his appearance and religio-social conduct and mentioned first by Ḥamdallāh Mostawfī, goes back to his own lifetime (*Būzjānī*, p. 26). In his youth Aḥmad enjoyed some formal schooling, and the claim to total lack of education forwarded by himself (*Maqamāt*, p. 357) and his biographer Moḥammad Ġaznavī is meant to credit him with supernatural knowledge. At the age of twenty-two, while immersed in the pleasures of a loose life, Aḥmad experienced a miracle which led him to denounce worldly interests and spend the following eighteen years in the secluded mountains of Nāmaq and Bēzad, undergoing self-imposed hardships, meditating, and studying. At forty (?), ordered by God, he left the solitary life and embarked on a long career devoted to preaching, combating sin and irreligion, spreading orthodoxy, teaching Sufi followers, and writing books. He traveled to many nearby towns and villages including Nišābūr and Herat, and once made the *ḥajj*.

As a Sufi Aḥmad stands rather alone, unrelated to any known order of his



time. His *pīr*, Abū Ṭāher Kord, an otherwise unknown figure, appears in several stories of Aḥmad's early period (repeated in the *Nafahāt* of Jāmī to fill a gap and is quickly abandoned. The attempt made by Ġaznavī to present Aḥmad as the legitimate successor of Abū Sa'īd Abi'l-Ḳayr is baseless. He built a mosque and a *kānaqāh* in Jām, his permanent residence. His contact was mostly with the local population and minor dignitaries, only rarely including a figure as distinguished as Faqīh Moḥammad b. Manṣūr Saraḳsī—revered by Sanā'ī—with whom Aḥmad clashed in a hostile conflict for personal recognition. Sultan Sanḡar was the one great exception: He allegedly had conceived a particular liking for Aḥmad who in turn devoted his *Rawzat al-moḏnebin* to him. Two extant letters to Sanḡar, one defending Jām's inhabitants in a rather fearless tone and the other answering Sanḡar's question about the "signs of God's friends," support this report (Ġaznavī, *Maqāmāt*, pp. 60, 337).

Aḥmad is portrayed by Ġaznavī as meddling in everyone's affairs, destroying vats of wine and musical instruments, and punishing sinners and forcing them to repent, but this does not correspond to the impression left by his books, where he appears gentle and ready to forgive a whole life of sin and corruption if only the last breath is taken in repentance. He constantly warns against hypocrites, who disguise themselves as *'ālem*, *qāzī*, *moftī*, *faqīh*, Sufi, Qur'ān reciter, etc. His discussions concern ordinary subjects of Sufi practice and religious morality, hardly ever touching on sophisticated questions of philosophy or theology. (For a listing of his more important topics, see 'A. Fāẓel's introd. to *Rawzat al-moḏnebin*, pp. 68-69.) Writing in the simple though penetrating style of sermons, he often repeats himself, even word for word, in his different books. He must have impressed certain simple believers with his religious zeal and demonstrations of power and authority; they in turn imagined the wild miracles recorded in the *Maqāmāt* but practically unsupported by Aḥmad's own writings. Unlike other famous mystics, his appeal to scholars and poets remained minimal; 'Aṭṭār never mentions him, though he practically followed in his footsteps and, one feels, should have sensed his presence in the air.

Aḥmad's works, over 850 years old, are more precious for their contribution to Persian literary history than for their teachings. His style is mostly conversational, clear, flawless, rich in rare obsolescences, abounding in parables and situational examples, beautiful and truly enjoyable to read. His books are 1. *Serāj al-sā'erīn*, 3 vols. written in 513/1119; 2. *Meftāḥ al-naġāt*, 522/1128 (pp. 65-69 unexpected significance attached to the figure seven); 3.



Rawzat al-modnebin, 526/1132; 4. *Ons al-tā'ebīn*, date unknown (2, 3, and half of 4, edited by 'Alī Fāzel, were published in Tehran by Bonyād-e Farhang-e Īrān in 1347 Š./1968, 1355 Š./1976 and 1350 Š./1971 respectively); 5. *Behār al-ḥaqīqa*, 527/1133; 6. *Konūz al-ḥekma*, 533/1139; 7. *Resāla-ye Samarqandīya*, a collection of several letters in answer to questions (partly printed in *Maqāmāt*, pp. 329-47). Of the remaining five books mentioned in sources, no mss. have been discovered. (M. T. Dānešpažūh has given the headings of the chapters of the existing seven works with brief selections of important samples in *FIZ* 16, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 240-325). A *dīvān* of poems, mostly *ḡazals*, with the pen name Aḥmad or Aḥmadī is attributed to him and has been lithographed several times in India. Aḥmad certainly wrote poems; the authenticity of the printed text, however, is at least partly questionable (see *Maqāmāt*, introd., pp. 52-67).

Aḥmad married eight wives and was survived by fourteen sons, some of whom became famous, wrote books, and carried their father's tradition ahead. A few generations later, his descendants were widely spread and numbered in the thousands. In 840/1436 about 1,000 of them were living in Jām, Nīšābūr, Herat, and some nearby places. They met with particular good fortune in India: Homāyūn's mother as well as his wife, i.e., Akbar's mother, to mention just two examples, belonged to the great Jāmī family (*Maqāmāt*, introd., pp. 67-71). Rulers of the Āl-e Kart dynasty (8th/14th century) greatly respected them and entered into kinship with them by marriage. Numerous kings including Tīmūr, Šāhroḡ, and Shah 'Abbās are said to have visited Aḥmad's grave and contributed to the complex of educational and religious buildings on its site. The family Jāmī al-Aḥmadī is influential and respected to the present day, particularly in Jām and Herat. Their true spiritual center, however, is Ḥawz-e Karyās near Herat where in 1968 I met their venerable shaiḫs and the hierarchy's "*kalīfa*". The living tradition and practices still need to be studied.

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