



AMĪR ARSALĀN

AMĪR ARSALĀN, a prose romance of the genre *dāstānhā-ye ‘ammīāna*, “popular tales.” The story was composed by Mīrzā Moḥammad ‘Alī Naqīb-al-mamālek, the *naqqāl-bāšī* or chief storyteller of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah (r. 1264-1313/1848-96). According to D. ‘A. K. Mo‘ayyer-al-mamālek (*Yağmā* 8, 1334 Š./1955, pp. 554-56), Tūrān Āgā Fakr-al-dawla, daughter of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah, wrote down the story of Amir Arsalān, as the *naqqāš-bāšī* related it in the evenings to help the monarch fall asleep. The oldest manuscript is dated 1305/1887-88, which is close to the actual completion of the story (*Amīr Arsalān*, ed. Maḥjūb, intro. p. 65).

The story opens with K̄vāja No‘mān, chief merchant of Cairo, rescuing from an island the widow of the king of Istanbul, recently killed when Sām Khan conquered the city and dispersed the court. She is pregnant and on her journey to Egypt gives birth to Amir Arsalān. As a youth he shows precocity and is taught to speak seven languages. He attracts the khedive of Egypt’s attention and is called upon to translate in court when an ambassador arrives from Peṭros Shah of Farang. Amir Arsalān kills the ambassador in a quarrel and sets out with an army to avenge his father. He kills Sām Khan, captures Istanbul, and becomes its king. There in a church he sees a portrait of Farroḳ-leqā, daughter of Peṭros Shah, with whom he falls in love. Learning that Amir Arsalān has killed his ambassador and Sām Khan, Peṭros has portraits of Amir Arsalān distributed to aid in his capture; Farroḳ-leqā, seeing one, falls in love with him. Amir Arsalān goes in disguise to Peṭrosīya to find Farroḳ-leqā. Under an alias he works in a cabaret, where his handsomeness eventually attracts



the attention of Farroḡ-leqā herself. They meet there and declare their love. Soon Farroḡ-leqā is murdered, and the action now becomes fantastic in a manner typical of the genre. Šams, a vizier and wizard, revives Farroḡ-leqā; but she is soon carried off by a hand from a cloud. Amir Arsalān sets out to find her but encounters difficulties in a foreign city and is sentenced to hang. An afreet rescues him from the gallows and carries him to the land of the *parīs*. A series of adventures leads him to another land where he is reunited with Farroḡ-leqā. Later her father forgives Amir Arsalān and agrees to their marriage. They return to Istanbul, where Amir Arsalān resumes his rule, and they live happily ever after.

In terms of plot structure, Amir Arsalān is consistent with other examples of the genre, although there is less emphasis on chivalry (*javānmardī*) and the deeds of *‘ayyārs* than in earlier romances. There are numerous reflections of the life and attitudes of Qajar Iran. Its language shows much influence of spoken Persian. Unusual are the setting, which is wholly outside Iran, and the Turkish name of the hero. The characters are somewhat less black and white than in other romances although in the end evil is punished and good triumphs. Two films based on this romance (1334 Š./1955 and 1345 Š./1966), a play by Parvīz Kārdān staged in 1965, and a 32-episode television series in 1968 (*Kayhān International*, 18 June 1968) attest to the continuing interest in this tale.

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