



## AMIR PĀZVĀRI

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**AMIR PĀZVĀRI**, semi-legendary poet of Māzandarān, who is believed to have composed, among other dialect poems, the quatrains (*do-baytis*) known as *amiri*, a popular genre still sung widely in rural communities throughout the province. His epithet relates him to the plain of Pāzvār (near [Bābolsar](#)), the administrative center of which, Amirkalā, is named after him. His biography is limited to vague deductions from his verses, above all, the numerous references to his futile love of Gowhar, the daughter of his landlord, according to popular accounts (Melgunov, 1985, pp. 132 f.; *Kanz al-asrār*, in Dorn, I, pp. 124-29). A love story of Amir and Gowhar, two youths from the town of Sāri in Māzandarān, also is related in the unpublished *maṭnawi* of *Rešta-ye gowhar* by the 17th-century Indo-Persian poet [Bineš Kašmiri](#). While the latter story may have its roots in the Caspian province, the contrary cannot be ruled out (cf. Anuša); but it is difficult to establish how Bineš's poem might have been introduced to rural Māzandarān.

The first mention of Amir Pāzvāri in Persian sources is by Reżāqoli Khan Ḥedāyat (p. 68), himself a Māzandarāni on his mother's side. Hedāyat, who includes him among the mystics and elders (*'orafā wa mašāyek*), calls him Amir Māzandarāni and Šayḡ-al-'Ajam, refers to him as "one of the ancients" (*az qodamā*), and credits him with a *divān* of *robā'is* in *pahlavi* (i.e., dialect poetry, see [FAHLAVIYĀT](#)). This *divān* has never been identified and cannot be *Kanz al-asrār* (see below), since the latter is predated by Hedāyat's *Riāz al-'ārefin* (comp. 1844). Moreover, Hedāyat's identifying the *do-bayti* that he quotes from the *divān* as a sample *robā'i* is quite unexpected of an expert of



Persian literature. All in all, Ḥedāyat does not throw any light on the identity of the poet.

Collection of the *amiris* was begun in the 19th century by European travelers and orientalisks, who found them quite popular in Māzandarān. The published material includes 15 quatrains with English translation by Aleksander Borejko Chodźko (pp. 568-71, 510-14), *amiris* among other songs with French translation by Il'ya Nikolaevich Berezin (II, pp. 57-72), and ten short poems including *amiris* by Giorgiĭ V. Melgunov (1868, pp. 216-18). The largest collection was published in the two-volume *Kanz al-asrār* by the German-Russian scholar Boris Andreevich Dorn (q.v.) with the assistance of Mirzā Šafi' Bārforuši, a Persian diplomat at Saint Petersburg. *Kanz al-asrār* consists, in addition to other Māzandarāni materials (prose tr. from Persian), of poems attributed to Amir Pāzvāri (Dorn, I, pp. 130-164, II, pp. 1-276, 488-554) in Perso-Arabic orthography, partly marked with diacritic symbols and/or translated into Persian. Collections of *Kanz al-asrār* are: Dorn's own collection during his 1860-61 trip to the Caspian provinces of Persia (Dorn, 1862); collection of V. Gussev, the Russian consul in [Astarābād](#); those collected by a certain Moḥammad-Šādeq Bārforuši; and those from the unpublished collections of Brugsh and Dittel at Saint Petersburg (Dorn, II, p. iv). The missing part of the second volume (pp. 277-484) would be a linguistic and literary analysis of the poems.

*Kanz al-asrār*, referred to as the *divān* of Amir Pāzvāri, has long inspired local intellectuals to write about the poet (for a bibliography, see *Bābol*, pp. 608-17), yet little has been done to improve the inaccuracies and disorderliness of Dorn's edition. Contemporary fieldwork to collect more *amiris* is limited (e.g., 78 quatrains in Najafzāda, 1996, pp. 149-228; Naṣri Ašrafi, 1997; see also Borjian), with reports of work in progress (e.g. Farhang-k-āna, pp. 216 f.).

The *divān* embraces, not only stanzas of four hemistiches (i.e., quatrains) or more, but also the genres of *qeṭ'a*, *gāzal*, *maṭnawī*, and *robā'ī*. The poems, however, are diverse in language and style, and the presence of the epithets Zargar and Naṣiri as well as verses cited in literature of older character makes the attribution of the entire book to one poet untenable (Kiā, p. 20; Jawādiān Kutanāyi). Themes are diverse as well. On the one hand, there are lyrical verses expressing fondness of nature and rural life and affection for the beloved Gowhar, as well as for young men, with a touch of mysticism; and on the other extreme there is a preaching voice advocating piety or eulogizing Shi'ite saints, often in a convoluted language that follows Persian syntax and is



devoid of truly Māzandarāni character except for the vernacular accent. In general, however, the styles in *Kanz al-asrār* are not incompatible with older varieties of Caspian literature, and exhibit parallels, particularly in the genre of riddles (four lines of questions followed by four answers), with Gilaki-Ṭāleši poems of Šarafšāh Dulā'i (cf. Najafzāda, 1992, pp. 19-23). All things considered, *Kanz al-asrār* is an extensive collection of oral literature from various places and dialects of Māzandarān in the first half of the 19th century, and it shares a great deal with the current genre of *amiri*.

*Amiri* is an appellation given especially to the lyrical-mystical quatrains which are widely recited, often as songs, in the rice fields of Māzandarān and on occasion by the semi-professional minstrels known as *amiriḳ-<sup>vān</sup>* or *še:rk-un* (*še'rk-<sup>vān</sup>*), accompanied sometimes by the reed flute (*lalevā*) or other instruments. The song of *amiri* is called also, in western Māzandarān, *touri/tabari*, seemingly the older name of the genre before it was identified with Amir Pāzvāri (Jawādiān). The music, known as *āhang-e amiri*, is largely devoid of rhythm, and is often sung in the modes of Dašti and Šur (see [DASTGĀH](#)), but varies in form and microstructure with locality and singer (Mobaššeri, pp. 71, 75; Fāṭemi). The verses themselves occasionally allude to music: *mərə rəbāb-sun bə har āhang nəvājən* "I am sung/mourning like a lute with any music" (Najafzāda, 1992, p. 43), perhaps referring to *nəvāješ* "mourning," a song closely associated with *amiri*. Moreover, *amiri* merges with *ṭālebā*, a lyrical-narrative genre (whose name and subject is connected to the poet Ṭāleb Āmoli), which, like many *amiris*, begins at times with the announcement *Amir gətə/gənə/bāutə* "Amir would say/says/said."

The structure of an *amiri* quatrain is very simple and monotonous. It consists mostly of four rhyming hemistiches of twelve syllables each, with no regard to the quantity (length) of syllables when sung. Thus attempts to explain *amiris* in terms of the quantitative meters of the classical Persian prosody have largely been futile. To attain the right number of syllables, certain vowels are inserted or dropped (shown here as subscripts and superscripts, respectively):

*Amir gətə, dašt-e Pāzəvār k-əjir ə.*  
*gašt-e Pāzəvār-ru dar bəhār k-əjir ə.*  
*biriš-e rikā-ye zəlf, dār k-əjir ə.*  
*čit-e qalamkār-e butədār k-əjir ə.*

Amir would say: the plain of Pāzəvār is pleasant.  
 Walking in Pāzəvār is pleasant in the spring.



Beardless youth is pleasant with long hair.  
Floral designed calico/chintz is pleasant.

(*Kanz al-asrār*, in Dorn, I, p. 130, no. 1; II, p. 520; cf. Berezin, II, p. 66)

*tirəng badimə ke vēšə-ē ništə biə.*  
*bautəmə, “tirəng! te maddā čēči ə?*  
*“me dim sərḳ- ə, me gərdən hali titi ə,*  
*har kas āšeq bu dunnə me dard čēči ə.”*

I saw a pheasant who was sitting in a forest.  
I said: “pheasant! what is your condition?”  
“My face is red, [it replied,] my neck is [white as] green-gage’s blossom,  
Only lovers know what I am suffering from.”

(*Kanz al-asrār*, in Dorn, I, p. 149, no. 104; II, p. 541).

Being oral in nature, *amiris* are manipulated freely and interpreted according to the circumstance. The following, recomposed by a local minstrel, is supposed to express metaphorically the feelings of a father who has lost his young son:

*nəmāšunəsar vang dakətə sa:rā-rə;*  
*dār-e čəlāču bavərdə me qəvā-rə.*  
*əšā burdə šir dakəfe me pəlā-rə,*  
*vərg biamuə bavərdə me gəlā-rə.*

In the evening a clamor hunted the field;  
Tree’s brushwood held (took) my gown [while I ran in the woods].  
Now that milk is about to fall in my rice [pointing to *širberenj* “milk-pilaf,” a meal favored over that of plain rice],  
Wolves came [and] took my rams.

(Moḥammadi Kordk-eyli, p. 641; cf. Dorn, I, p. 131, no. 6, in which the first line is entirely different)

*Amiris* have inspired contemporaries to compose similar poems (Farhang-ḳ-āna, pp. 38-40), the most prominent was those of Nimā Yušij in his Māzandarāni collection *Rujā*.

For a music sample, see [Amiri-e kutāh o boland o Ṭālebā](#).



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