



AMIRI, YUSOF

AMIRI, Yusof, a Persian-Chaghatay poet of the first half of the 15th century. He was of Persian origin; the dates of his birth and death are unknown. Amiri was a poet at the Timurid court in Herat and a confidant of **Bāysonḡor Mirzā**, one of Šāhroḡ's sons, whom he honored with a Persian *qaṣida* and with a few lines of gratitude in **Chaghatay** at the conclusion of his 'Ten Letters' (*Dah nāma*, British Library, MS. Add. 7914, fols. 270r:9-270v:7) which is dedicated to Bāysonḡor. Amiri was an erudite person with remarkable poetic skills. He enjoyed the secular atmosphere among the Timurid elite, where his poems were received with great enthusiasm (*Dah nāma*, fols. 270v:1-271r:5). The fundamentalist wave spreading in the Timurid empire was of a great concern to him. "Today I understood some of the frustrations Mercury had. All [these people] are talking about the Tablet and the Pen [and then not about events, heroes, and sentiments of real poetry]"—he complains in the *Dah nāma* (fol. 271v:2). Dowlatšāh Samarḡandi (q.v.) mentions him in the *Taḡkerat al-šo'arā'* (Browne, pp. 441-43), and so does 'Ali-Šir Navā'i (q.v.) in the *Majāles al-nafā'es* (Navā'i, I, p. 22).

Yusof Amiri was a bilingual poet. Along with Persian he also wrote in the Chaghatay language, which, compared to his native tongue, was for him the tempered (*mo'tadel*) form of literary expression. For his audience at the Timurid court, he would use Chaghatay, but he was also asked to show his mastery in Persian (*Dah nāma*, fol. 279v:1).

Three of his works have come down to us: a collection of poems (*divān*) in Persian, a panegyric *maṭnawi* *Dah nāma*, and a contest poem (*monāḡera*)



entitled *Bang o čağir* ('Hashish and Wine'), the latter two in Chaghatay. His Persian *divān* exists in only one manuscript preserved in the library of the Ayasofya Museum in Istanbul (MS. 3883), which is still unpublished and very little-known. What was believed to be two Amiri's works included in a manuscript at the University Library of Istanbul (Köprülü, p. 292) turned out to be the works of a late Chaghatay poet Amir Muḥammad 'Omar Khan (Vambéry, pp. 200-08; Eckmann, 1964, p. 320) who used the same pen name Amiri. The *Dah nāma* survived in the British Library manuscript Add. 7914 (fols. 228-272; Rieu, pp. 288-89), and is still unpublished. Of the *Bang o čağir*, also preserved in the same British Library manuscript Add. 7914 (fols. 329-337; Rieu, p. 291) a Russian translation was made by Rustamov (pp. 321-44), which is followed by a facsimile edition of the manuscript.

The *Dah nāma* represents the genre borrowed from the Persians and much favored by the Chaghatay literary elite. At least three other similar poems had been in vogue before Yusof Amiri's work: the *Moḥabbat-nāma* ('The Book of Caring Love') by K̄vārazmi (middle of the 14th century), the *Laṭāfat-nāma* ('The Book of Elegance'), by K̄ojandi (late 14th-early 15th century), and the *Ta ššoq-nāma* ('The Book of Passionate Love') by Sayyed Aḥmad Mirzā (first half of the 15th century). These three consist of at least ten letters written by the Lover to his Beloved in order to attract her interest (through a psychological process, as explained by Bābor in his *Resāla-ye Wālediya*; Bodrogligeti, 1986; see [BĀBOR, ZĀHIR-AL-DIN MOḤAMMAD](#)). Yusof Amiri changes the format: in his *Ten Letters* the Beloved reads and promptly answers every letter creating a two-way correspondence which eventually leads to a formal encounter, ceremonial celebration, and loud festivities. This work, with its polished language, colorful figurative speech, and erudite content, is one of the best pieces of the high-style Chaghatay literature.

The *Bang o čağir*, a prose work with inserted verses, belongs to the genre of literary contest that was well known both in Chaghatay and Persian literatures. For the 15th century, two more Chaghatay contest poems are known: one by Yaqini, called *Oq yayniṅ munāzarasi* ('The Contest of the Bow and the Arrow'); and one by Aḥmadi, conventionally entitled *The Contest of the String Instruments*, since the existing manuscript does not have a title (Bodrogligeti, 1987, pp. 55-88). In contest poems, the parties sing praises of their own, and malign or put down their opponents until they engage in a heated battle. Then a moderator comes along to make peace between the two. Amiri follows the same pattern. *Čağir* (Wine) appears as a strong and brave



young man, while *Bang* (Hashish) looks as an old Sufi. The Wine boasts with his strength (nobody can beat him) and rank (Allāh mentions him by name in the Qurʾān, which is considered respectful, even if the mention is not positive). He further claims that in Persian the reverse of his name (*may*) is ‘ocean’ (*yam*), which stands for endless wisdom and abundance. The Hashish says he is a medicine for the sufferer and a source of pleasure for the healthy; his real name is not ‘hashish’ (*bang*), which is often ridiculed because of its color and foul smell, but—reading the Persian word backwards—‘hemp’ (*kanab*). The language tends to become vulgar as the debate goes on. Finally, the Honey (*bal*) intervenes as the moderator and settles the dispute to the satisfaction of both parties.

In addition to their philological and cultural-historical value, Yusof Amiri’s poems are important primary sources for studying the use of figurative language in Chaghatay-Persian literary expression.

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