



## ‘ĀŠEQ EŞFAHĀNĪ

‘ĀŠEQ EŞFAHĀNĪ, ĀQĀ MOḤAMMAD ḲAYYĀṬ (or, in one account, Moḥammad Khan), a Persian poet of the 12th/18th century (pen name ‘Āšeq). He must have been born ca. 1111/1700, as he is reported to have died at the age of 70 in 1181/1768.

‘Āšeq’s work consists almost entirely of short lyric poems (*ġazals*) with a straightforward and simplistic amatory content. He was an associate of the contemporary poets Mīr Sayyed ‘Alī Moštāq, Şabāḥī Bīgdelī, Hātef Eşfahānī, Ṭabīb Eşfahānī, and Loṭf-‘Alī Beg Āḍar (Āzar), the author of the well-known *taḍkera*, the *Ātaškada*. According to Āḍar, ‘Āšeq had some knowledge of conventional subjects, but this is not discernible in his poetry, which is plain and unsubtle in the extreme, perhaps due to the fact that he had had little formal education as stated by R. Ḳāleqī in “‘Āšeq-e Eşfahānī,” *Mehr* 2, pp. 392-96. Āḍar reports that ‘Āšeq earned his living as a tailor (*ḳayyāṭ*), hence, perhaps, his sobriquet. Although he seldom showed annoyance with his friends, he was not easily appeased if someone did annoy him. He would allow no interference, even if justified, by anyone in his poetry, and would take offense. There are brief mentions of ‘Āšeq, derived from Āḍar’s *Ātaškada*, in the *Anjoman-e Ḳāqān* (a *taḍkera* of the early Qajar period) and in Reżā-qolī Khan Hedāyat’s *Majma’ al-foṣaḥā’* (III, p. 732). Maḥmūd Mīrzā Qājār, in his *Safīnat al-Maḥmūd* (ed. ‘A. Ḳayyāmpūr, II, p. 387), bestows exaggerated praises on ‘Āšeq, even comparing him to Sa’dī and ḤāfezĀj.

According to Jalāl-al-dīn Homā’ī [private communication to this writer] Mīrzā ‘Abd-al-Wahhāb Kalāntar, the governor of Isfahan under Karīm Khan Zand,



formed a literary society at Isfahan, which poets, including ‘Āşeq, were invited to attend. There they discussed and emulated the *ġazals* of the early masters; but when the Kalāntar chose as its head Mīr Sayyed ‘Alī Moštāq, the leading advocate of the “reversion” movement (*bāzgašt-e adabī*, see below), ‘Āşeq disapproved and never attended again.

‘Āşeq died, according to his contemporary Āḍar and also the evidence of a chronogram by Şabāḥī Bīgdelī (in *Anjoman-e Kāqān*), in his 70th year at Isfahan in 1181/1767-68; Ḥosayn Makkī’s 1177/1763-64 (*Dīvān-e ‘Āşeq Eşfahānī*, ed. Ḥ. Makkī, Tehran, 1318 Š./1939, Introd.) is certainly wrong.

‘Āşeq’s *dīvān* runs to some 7,800 verses (estimate of Ebn Yūsof Šīrāzī, *Fehrest-e Ketāb-kāna-ye Majles-e Šūrā-ye Mellī*, Tehran, 1318-21 Š./1939-42, p. 345). A fine illuminated manuscript of it was reported by ‘A. Čehranamā Īrānī (“Dar atrāf e Šāh-nāma-ye dovvom wa ‘Āşeq Eşfahānī,” *Armaġān* 14/9) to exist in the National Library of Egypt, the first poem being an ode apparently in praise of Aḥmad Mīrzā Şafawī. Čehranamā also quoted a fragment by ‘Āşeq beginning with *Qorrat al-‘ayn-e dūstān Āḍar* “Āḍar, the delight of the eye(s) of (his) friends,” which does not appear in Makkī’s edition, and three or four verses in praise of a certain Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī (not to be confused with the minister of Moḥammad Shah Qājār).

Two editions of ‘Āşeq’s *dīvān* have been printed: 1. ed. with preface and short biographical note by Ḥosayn Makkī, (Tehran, 1318 Š./1939) containing a number of *qaşīdas* (odes) and a *tarkībband* (stanzaic poem) lamenting the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn, *qeṭ‘as* (short poems), some with chronograms of death-dates of unknown persons, and *robā‘īs* (quatrains), in addition to 944 *ġazals*; 2. ed. by Sa‘īd Nafisī with notes and comments by M. Darviš (Tehran, 1343 Š./1964).

‘Āşeq lived at a time when Persian poetry was at its weakest, although reversion to the style of the early masters (*bāzgašt-e adabī*), at present viewed by some critics as a renaissance, was being pursued. In the present writer’s opinion, this reversion was rather a retrogression and amounted to no more than lifeless imitation of some of the early masters. Poets completely forgot the good points in the poetry of the Safavid period: the poet’s intellectual introspection and *weltanschauung*, treatment of new themes and fresh ideas, acute observation of man’s nature and his emotions, portrayal of characters and potentialities, and richness in artistic and philosophical metaphors and similes. Instead they were content to say simple things and platitudes in



commonplace or long-familiar words and phrases dressed up as poetry. Admittedly the later poets of the Safavid period, particularly Şā’eb, were prolix and wrote many poetically tasteless pieces, some more like puzzles than poems; but at least they felt obliged to innovate in subject-matter and imagery. The poets of the *bāzgašt*, however, not only discarded all thought of innovation but lacked even a smattering of the force and eloquence of the early poets whom they took as models. They wrote traditional *qaşīdas* in the style of Zahir Fāryābī, poems halfway between the *ġazal* and the *qaşīda* with old ideas and stereotyped words, and *ġazals* in mere imitation of Sa’dī and, above all, Ḥāfez. Borrowing from the ample stock of ready-made poetic tools bequeathed by Ḥāfez was all too easy (and is still a widespread practice).

‘Āseq in his long career wrote practically nothing except amatory *ġazals* and showed no interest in any subject-matter or imagery relevant to people’s manifold characters, outlooks, desires, and circumstances; but in fairness it must be said that he was an eloquent and melodious poet in his chosen field. His work is never careless and never coarse. Although his concentration on the *ġazal* suggests that he lacked talent for any other genre, he was, in the present writer’s opinion, the best poet of his time.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

*Ātaškada*, Bombay, 1277/1860-61, pp. 414-42.

M. Fāzel Khan Garrūsī, *Anjoman-e Kāqān*, *anjoman-e čahārom* (in manuscript).