



AYĀZ, ABU'L-NAJM

AYĀZ, ABU'L-NAJM B. ŪYMĀQ, favorite Turkish slave of the Ghaznavid Sultan Maḥmūd, whose passion for Ayāz is a recurrent theme in Persian poetry, where he is also called Ayās or Āyāz. Information about Ayāz's life is very scarce, his real personality being hidden behind a veil of tales. As the chief royal cupbearer (*sāqī*), he enjoyed Maḥmūd's trust and probably was given some important assignments (Bayhaqī, 2nd ed., pp. 329, 527). After Maḥmūd's death, Ayāz refused to join Moḥammad, the designated heir to the throne, and together with two other prominent men and "most of the palace slaves" left Ġaznī to join Mas'ūd, the rival claimant, at Nīšāpūr. This move must have had importance, because Mas'ūd mentioned it in a letter which he wrote to the Qarakhanid amir Qāder Khan (Bayhaqī, p. 94). Ayāz continued to enjoy favor in Mas'ūd's reign. Aḥmad b. Ḥasan Maymandī recommended Ayāz for the governorship of Ray, a prestigious and hazardous post, but the sultan decided otherwise on the ground of his inexperience (*ibid.*, p. 346). Later in Mas'ūd's reign, however, Ayāz was appointed governor of Qoşdār and Kermān. Ebn al-Aṭīr gives the year of Ayāz's death as 449/1057 (IX, p. 638). The tomb of the Ghaznavid governor Arslān Jāḍeb near Mašhad is locally referred to as Gūr-e Ayāz (the tomb of Ayāz; see [ĀSTĀN-E QODS-E RAŻAWĪ](#)).

In Persian literature, much has been written about Ayāz's good looks and his qualities of valor, shrewdness, sincerity, and loyalty, though a few authors deny that he was good-looking. Farroḳī, one of Maḥmūd's court poets, panegyricized Ayāz in a *qaṣīda*, describing him as valiant, brave, and handsome. A passage in the *Tārīḳ-e Bayhaqī* (p. 527) suggests that Maḥmūd probably



wearied of Ayāz's frivolous behavior but does not make clear why. Sultan Maḥmūd's relationship with this Turkish *gōlām* had many parallels in the category of royal love for a slave, but this one was presented in Persian literature as something different and exceptional. Neẓāmī 'Arūzī in his *Čahār maqāla* (text, pp. 55-57), written just over a century after Ayāz's death, tells a story which is meant to absolve Maḥmūd of sinful love for Ayāz, but confirms the sultan's great fondness for this slave. In other literary works, however, and particularly in Sufi writings, where the love of Maḥmūd and Ayāz often comes up, Ayāz is presented as a paragon of purity and sincerity: e.g., in the story of Ayāz's shoes and fur coat as told in 'Aṭṭār's *Moṣībat-nāma*, Rūmī's *Maṭnawī*, and several other works. Sufi writers also drew mystic inferences from the love of Maḥmūd and Ayāz. The subject was pursued and poetically interpreted in various ways in the works of many Persian poets and several prose-writers. The consequence of this extraordinary fame was that in Persian literature Maḥmūd and Ayāz came to be placed in the same category as Laylī and Majnūn, Kōsrow and Šīrīn, Vīs and Rāmīn, and Yūsof and Zolaykā. Long *maṭnawī* poems about the love of Maḥmūd and Ayāz were written by litterateurs such as Faḵr-al-dīn 'Alī b. Ḥosayn Wā'eẓ Kāšefī, Anīsī Šāmlū, Zolālī K'ānsārī; another was once wrongly ascribed to 'Aṭṭār.

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Deḥkodā, s.v. Ayāz.

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