



BAHĀRESTĀN

BAHĀRESTĀN (Spring garden, Abode of spring, and similar renderings in various languages), occasionally referred to as *Rawzat al-akyār wa toḥfat al-abrār* (Garden of the virtuous and rare gift of the pious), is an anecdotal and moralistic work of belles-lettres in prose (both plain and rhythmic-rhyming) and verse, by ‘*Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī*, composed in the poet’s old age, in 892/1487, and dedicated to the Timurid Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā (r. 875-912/1470-1506). Like many other works in this genre, it is written in professed imitation of Sa’dī’s *Golestān*, which the author had notionally used in teaching his son. These two works have been widely employed as text books, which has led to a great proliferation of manuscripts, editions, and translations—all of widely varying quality.

The main body of the *Bahārestān* is divided into eight so-called gardens (*rawza*), the same number of chapters (*bābs* “gates”) as in the *Golestān*, but it often diverges considerably from the latter in themes, content, treatment, and style. These gardens, to paraphrase summarily their rather elaborate and fanciful titles, are concerned with: 1. words and deeds of the mystics; 2. wisdom of the sages; 3. justice and statecraft; 4. munificence and generosity; 5. love (of various kinds); 6. jest and merriment (some obscene and acerbic material here); 7. poetic composition (with plentiful examples and criticism); and 8. animal fables. The work is of modest size, of comparable length with the *Golestān*, though this is probably as much a typical feature of the genre as a conscious imitation.

Jāmī is commonly seen as a gifted and versatile, but somewhat unoriginal



reworker of old themes (e.g., *Laylī o Majnūn*, *Yūsof o Zolaykā*), old genres, and old styles. This is certainly the case with the *Bahārestān* though in the Epilogue Jāmī claims (not always with full justice) originality for the stories themselves. It is a clever work, but the work of a man in his seventies, and an inadequate indication of his characteristic skill and periodic profundity. It must also go without saying that—coming, as it did, over two centuries later than the *Golestān*—it could not hope to achieve the freshness and spontaneity of that work. With all this, however, the book has still attained for itself a distinctive place in Persian literature.

Certain characteristics of Jāmī’s professional posture can be seen in the *Bahārestān*. There is, for example, an enormous self-assurance and a sense of his own worthiness; if he does sometimes write here as a mystic, it is with singular coolness and self-control. He is above all a scholar and an artist, with a linguistic sense that is both erudite and delicate, and usually unforced. One quality he does seem to share with Sa’dī is a feeling for humanity, and particularly for its less fortunate majority, though it is not easy to relate this significantly to his own high and affluent social standing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The potential bibliography is large, but most of it is of little value and nearly all of it is long since out of print. The first and major “edition” is that of Baron O. M. von Schlehta-Wssehrd, Vienna, 1846.

It is accompanied by a German translation which is for the most part painfully “faithful,” but which omits matter judged to be excessively scabrous. An English version (full, but likewise unsatisfactory), attributed to E. Rehatsek, was published anonymously, and allegedly at Benares, by the so-called Kama Shashtra Society in 1887.

C. E. Wilson’s *Persian Wit and Humour* (London, 1883) includes an attempt to deal with the notorious Garden VI by a measure of boldness, certain omissions, and a little Latinity. A sensitive and intelligent French version is that of Henri Massé, Paris, 1925.



See also A. J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, London, 1958, pp. 430-32.

Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* III, p. 515.

J. Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, pp. 287, 788. Şafâ, *Adabîyât* IV, Tehran, 2536 = 1356 Ş./1977, pp. 514-15.

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