



BOḤŪR AL-ALḤĀN

BOḤŪR AL-ALḤĀN (Meters of melodies), a treatise on Persian music and prosody by Sayyed Mirzā Moḥammad-Naṣīr Forṣat Šīrāzī (1271--1339/1855-1920), first published in 1332/1914 (see Bombay ed., pp. 326, 334). The book is divided into two parts and a conclusion (*kātema*). The first part, the introduction, contains a discussion of Persian music (pp. 2-33), tables of the seven modes (*dastgāh*; pp. 34-37), and observations on Persian prosody (pp. 38-56). The second part (pp. 57-319) is a collection of poems (*ġazals*, *robā'īs*, a *maṭnawī*, a *sāqī-nāma*, etc.) specially selected for singing. For each *ġazal* its mood, the best time and place for singing it (e.g., day, night, spring, garden, house), and the most suitable musical mode are specified.

Boḥūr al-alḥān seems to be little more than an imitation of 'Abd-al-Qāder Marāġī's *Jāme' al-alḥān*; indeed, the concluding sections of the two works (defending the legality of music) are identical (Bombay ed., pp. 319-21). The book is nevertheless significant for the study of the historical and theoretical development of Persian music. For example, in *Jāme' al-alḥān* Persian melodies are divided into twelve cycles (*adwār*), six *āvāzes* (singing parts), and twenty-four *šo'bas* (branches), whereas in *Boḥūr al-alḥān* they are divided into seven *dastgāhs* and several *āvāzes*, *ġūšas* (melodic materials), and *rengs* (rhythmic parts for dancing).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Editions: *Boḥūr al-alḥān*, Bombay, 1332/1914; *Boḥūr al-alḥān dar ‘elm-e mūsīqī o nesbat-e ān bā ‘arūz*, ed. with introd., commentary, and indices by ‘A. Zarrīnqalam, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966-67. See also idem, *Dīvān-e Forṣat*, Bombay, 1399/1978-79 (see pp. 1-185 for an autobiography of Forṣat Šīrāzī). ‘Abd-al-Qāder b. Ġaybī Ḥāfeẓ Marāḡī, *Jāme‘ al-alḥān*, ed. T. Bīneš, Tehran, 1366 Š./1987.

(Taqī Bīneš)

Evaluation. Most of the information about ancient music in the *Boḥūr al-alḥān* (pp. 14-28) has been copied from various older sources (During, pp. 157-59), especially the Safavid treatise *Bahjat al-rūḥ* (incorrectly ascribed to Ṣafī-al-Dīn Ormavī), e.g., on the *maqāms* (modes), the corresponding signs of the zodiac, and patterns of modulation, but also the anonymous *Ma‘refat-e ‘elm-e mūsīqī* (ed. Doḡā‘), in particular on the traditions concerning the origin of the twelve *maqāms* of the “systematic” school, eight of which are attributed to Pythagoras, the scope of the 42 ancient *maqāms*, *āvāzes*, and *šo‘bas*, ranging from five notes (*bāng*) to two octaves, and the spirit of each mode and the appropriate time for performing it. These sources are not, however, acknowledged in the book. No scientific or technical treatment of intervals, modal scales, and rhythmic cycles is included of the kind that can be found in the writings of his contemporaries Qoṭb-al-Dīn Šīrāzī or ‘Abd-al-Qāder Marāḡī.

According to the present-day masters of traditional music, the author originally intended to develop his description of modern Persian music on the basis of such traditional materials, but the master Mīrzā ‘Abd-Allāh (q.v.) explained to him that the traditional system had long since fallen out of use and taught him the rudiments of the modern modes (*dastgāhs*). Mīrzā Moḥammad accordingly continues with a brief outline of the Safavid system (pp. 26-27). He remarks that, though several modern melodies bear old names, it is doubtful that they are the same as those played by such early masters as *Bārbad* (pp. 28-29). Then, after pointing out that many learned men had struggled to arrange contemporary melodies (p. 29) in a traditional twelve-mode *radīf* (repertoire), he outlines the modern system, defined as a *radīf* consisting of 270 *gūšas* grouped in seven *dastgāhs* (pp. 34-37). This inventory is identical with that of Mīrzā ‘Abd-Allāh, which is still taught, but it is less extensive than those of *radīfs* worked out in various later schools (see Safvat,



pp. 74-100).

The second and more important part of *Boḥūr al-alḥān*, consisting of more than 250 pages, is a collection of poems intended to be sung in particular *dastgāhs*, *āvāzes*, or *gūšas*. Although, following contemporary vocal practice, the author focuses on affinities between the ethos of each poem and the corresponding mode, rather than on technical and metrical links between the two, he does not specify the nature of these affinities. His attributions are thus too imprecise to be useful in practice, and this section of the text must for the moment be regarded as merely a collection of poems, though a careful examination of its contents may some day reveal closer esthetic and expressive links between poetry and music.

Y. Dokā', "Ma'refat-e 'elm-e mūsīqī," *Nāma-ye Mīnovī*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971, pp. 190-98.

J. During, *La musique traditionnelle de l'Azerbâyjân et la science des Muqâms*, Baden-Baden, 1988.

R. Kāleqī, *Sargodašt-e mūsīqī-e Īrān I*, Tehran, 1333 Š./1955, pp. 186-88.

D. Şafvāt, *Ostādān-e mūsīqī-e Īrān wa alḥān-e mūsīqī-e īrānī*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971.

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