



BOT

BOT, a term which appears frequently in poetry with meanings ranging from an idol in the literal sense to a metaphor for ideal human beauty. These senses are found in the earliest surviving poetry and have been used continually since then. In its literal sense it is used in descriptions of pre- or non-Islamic lands and times, as in Sa'dī's line: *botī dīdam az 'āj dar Sūmanāt / moraṣṣa' čo dar jāhelīyat Manāt* (I saw an idol in Sūmanāt / bejeweled as was Manāt in the age before Islam; *Būstān*, ed. R. Alioff, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, p. 230), and in moralizing poetry such as Nāṣer-e Kōsrow's *mard-e nekū šūrat-e bī 'elm o šokr / sū-ye ḥakīmān be ḥaqīqat bot ast // mard maḳvān hīč a bota-š ḳvān az ank / čūn bot bā qāmat o bī qāmat ast* (A handsome man lacking in wisdom or gratitude / in the eyes of wise men is an idol // Don't call him a man, but call him an idol, for / like an idol, he has a shape but is worthless; *Dīvān*, ed. N. Taqawī, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960, p. 66).

As a metaphor for beauty, *bot* has aspects of exoticism, remoteness, sumptuousness, irresistible attraction, and danger. It is often associated with Central Asia, as in Rūdakī's *rūy be meḥrāb nehādan če sūd / del be Boḳārā vo botān-e Ṭarāz* (What use in facing the prayer niche / for the heart looks to Bukhara and the idols of Ṭarāz (Rūdakī, *Āṭār-e manzūm*, ed. Y. Braginskii, Moscow, 1958, p. 474), or Ḥāfez's *bot-e čīnī 'adū-ye dīn o delhāst / ḳodāvandā del o dīn-am negahdār* (The Chinese idol is the enemy of the faith and of hearts; / O God, preserve my heart and my faith!; *Dīvān*, ed. M. Qazvīnī and Q. Ġanī, Tehran, 1320 Š./1941, p. 166). The idol can be a Turk, as in Rūdakī's *Gol-e bahārī, bot-e tatārī / nabīd dārī, čerā nayārī* (You are a spring flower, a Tatar



idol / you have the wine, why don't you bring it?; op. cit., p. 491).

Idols are made by idol makers (*botgar*, *bottarāš*), the most famous of whom is Āzar, said to be the father of Abraham (Qur'ān 6:74). 'Onṣorī says: *Bot-e man del barad ke šūrat-e ū'st / āzarīvār o ṣoṇ'-e Āzar nīst* (My idol carries away hearts because her face is as if made by Āzar, but Āzar did not make her; *Dīvān*, ed. Y. Qarīb, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, p. 14). In descriptions by the Ghaznavid court poets nature is often personified. Because it creates flowers and trees, it is likened to an idol maker, as in 'Onṣorī's *Bād-e nowrūzī hamī dar būstān o botgar šavad / tā ze ṣoṇ'-aš har derakṭ-ī lo'bat-ī dīgar šavad* (The spring breeze scatters pearls and becomes an idol maker / until each tree becomes another idol; op. cit., p. 45), or Farroḳī Sīstānī's *Māh-e farvardīn jahān-rā az dar-e dīdār kard / abr-e farvardīn zamīn-rā por bot-e Farḳār kard* (The month of Farvardīn has made the world worth seeing / the clouds of Farvardīn have filled the earth with idols from Farḳār; *Dīvān*, ed. M. Dabīrsīāqī, Tehran, 1335 Š./1956, p. 427). This image is extended to include the worshippers of idols, frequently called shamans. Rūdakī says: *Bot parastī gerefta-īm hama / īn jahān čūn bot ast o mā šaman-īm* (We have all begun worshipping idols / the world is like an idol and we are the shamans; op. cit., p. 535). The image of the idol worshipper was often used by mystical poets such as 'Aṭṭār in discussing the kinds of love: *pas az mastī-e 'ešq-am gašt ma'lūm / ke nafs-e man bot o man bot parast-am* (After becoming drunk with love, it became apparent to me / that my soul is an idol and I am the idol worshipper; *Dīvān*, ed. T. Tafazzolī, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, p. 391). Likewise from Sanā'ī: *Tawba-ye man jaz' o la'l o zolf o rokṣār-at šekast / dī ke būdam rūzadār emrūz hastam bot-parast* (Your eyes and lips and locks and cheeks have broken my repentance / Yesterday I was fasting, today I am an idol worshipper; *Dīvān*, ed. M. Moṣaffā, Tehran, 1336 Š./1957, p. 381).

Idols were thought to be located in temples (*bot-kāna*, *bot-kada*) which were metaphors for rich and beautiful places, but which were also liable to destruction by militant conquerors bent on spreading Islam among unbelievers. An example of the first sense is in Farroḳī Sīstānī's description of a magnificent Indian city: *čegūna jā-ī, jā-ī čō būstān-e eram / čegūna šahr-ī, šahr-ī čō bot-kada-y[e] Farḳār* (What sort of place? A place like the garden of Eram / What sort of city? A city like the idol temple of Farḳār; op. cit., p. 64). In another place the poet combines garden and idol imagery in an elaborate metaphor: *Bāḡ bot-kāna gašt o golbon bot / bada ḳārān-e golparast šaman* (The garden became an idol temple and the rose bush the idol / the wine drinkers



were the rose-worshipping shamans; *ibid.*, p. 307). Sultan Maḥmūd of Ġazna was congratulated on his return from Somanāt by Farroḳī: *botān šekasta vo bot-ḳānahā fakanda ze pāy / hešārḥā-ye qawī bar gošāda lād az lād* (Idols were smashed and idol temples thrown down / strong fortresses were conquered wall by wall; *ibid.*, p. 34). This practice also has a metaphorical connection with idols as images of beauty. Šahīd Balkī says: *Va'gar to-rā malek-e hendovān bedīdī mūy / sojūd kardī o bot-ḳānahā-š bar kandī* (And if the king of the Hindus were to see your hair / he would prostrate himself and raze his idol temples; Lazard, *Premiers poètes* I, p. 68; II, p. 35). Of all the images based on *bot*, the one of great and irresistible beauty is the most frequent.

See also [afghanistan ix](#); [art in iran vi](#); and [buddhism ii](#).