



## ČAHĀR MAQĀLA

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**ČAHĀR MAQĀLA**, Persian prose work written in the 6th/12th century by Abu'l-Ĥasan Neẓām-al-Dīn (or Najm-al-Dīn) Aḥmad b. 'Omar b. 'Alī Neẓāmī 'Arūzī Samarqandī, originally entitled *Majma' al-nawāder*. The authors of *Haft eqlīm* (III, p. 352) and *Kašf al-ẓonūn* (ed. Yaltkaya and Bilge, pp. 621, 1604) are evidently wrong in considering *Majma' al-nawāder* as a separate work (see *Čahārmaqāla*, introd., pp. vii-ix). It consists of four discourses (*maqālas*), hence the title, on four different subjects. The date of its composition can be placed in the years 550-52/1155-57, when the author was already at an advanced age (introd., pp. ix-x, comm. p. 22 n. 4). The references in this article are to Mo'īn's edition (see below).

*The author.* The exact dates of Neẓāmī's birth and death are not known, but he was probably born in the last quarter of the 5th/11th century. Most of our scanty information about Neẓāmī's career comes from scattered passages in the *Čahārmaqāla* itself. In 504/1110-11 he was in his home town Samarqand, where he collected some information about Rūdakī (pp. 53-54). At Balk in 506/1112-13 he met 'Omar Ḳayyām and [Abū Ḥātem Asfezārī](#) at a banquet. There Ḳayyām predicted that his tomb would be covered by flower petals in the spring (pp. 100-01). In 509/1115-16 he was at Herat (p. 71). Next year he left for the sultan Sanjar's camp near Ṭūs and there met the poet Amīr Mo'ezzī, who tested his poetical talent, showed him favor, and encouraged him by explaining how his own career had started and progressed at Malekšāh's court (pp. 65-69). On this journey he visited Ferdowsī's tomb at Ṭūs (p. 83), and in the same year he was at Nišāpūr (p. 15), where he was again in 512/1118 (pp.



108-09) and in 514/1120-21, when he heard the story of Ferdowsī and Sultan Maḥmūd of Āazna from Amīr Mo‘ezzī (pp. 81-83). These statements may indicate that he resided at Nīšāpūr during these four or five years. In 530/1135-36 he revisited Nīšāpūr and found Kayyām’s tomb hidden under petals at the foot of a garden wall (pp. 100-01). In 547/1152-53 he was with the defeated Ghurid army at the battle between the Saljuq Sultan Sanjar and the Ghurid Sultan ‘Alā’-al-Dīn in the Ōba district near Herat, and for some time afterward he lived in hiding at Herat (pp. 104, 132-33).

Nezāmī himself claims to have studied with ‘Omar Kayyām (p. 100; see also introd., pp. xxxiii-xxxiv; Yār-Aḥmad, p. 160) but also mentions another teacher, Abū Ja‘far b. Moḥammad Abī Sa‘d (p. 125, and comm. pp. 440-43). Dawlatšāh describes Nezāmī as one of the pupils of Amīr Mo‘ezzī (ed. Browne, p. 60), but this is probably no more than an inference from Nezāmī’s account (p. 65) of his meeting with Amīr Mo‘ezzī in 510/1116-17 (see above). No further information about Nezāmī is found in later sources, except that Dawlatšāh (ed. Browne, p. 60) and Ḥājī Kalīfa (*Kašf al-ẓonūn*, ed. Yalrkaya and Bilge, p. 2025) wrongly credit Nezāmī with the versification of the romance of *Vīs o Rāmīn* (in fact the work of [Fakr-al-Dīn As‘ad Gorgānī](#)).

Nezāmī dedicated the *Āahārmaqāla* to Abu’l-Ḥasan Ḥosām-al-Dīn ‘Alī, a prince of the Āl-e Šansab or Šansabānīya dynasty of kings (*molūk*) of Āūr (pp. 2, 135), who were hereditary governors of Bāmīān and Toḳārestān on behalf of the sultans of Āūr to the south (*Āahārmaqāla*, introd., pp. x-xiii, comm. pp. 2-4). When he wrote *Āahārmaqāla* Nezāmī had already spent forty-five years in the service of this dynasty (p. 5).

*Works.* Other than *Āahārmaqāla* Nezāmī wrote some poetry. He tells us (pp. 84-86) that a prince at Balk praised him for his poetic improvisation; however, the few surviving pieces of his poetry (*Āahārmaqāla*, pp. 84-86; ‘Awfī, *Lobāb*, ed. Nafīsī, pp. 246, 395-97) are not particularly attractive.

The *Āahārmaqāla* reveals an author with a complete mastery of Persian prose, a fine understanding of philosophical concepts (pp. 6-18), knowledge of astronomy (pp. 104-05) and medicine (pp. 132-34), and a scholarly interest in authors and bibliography. The work, which has long been widely read and admired, is also important for the historical events and episodes in the lives of notable scientists and men of letters which it includes, and its graceful language provided a model of good Persian prose-writing in the 6th/12th century. Thus, only about sixty years after the completion of the work, Ebn



Esfandiār took the entire account of Maḥmūd of Ġazna and Ferdowsī from the *Čahārmaqāla* (pp. 75-83) and incorporated it in his *Tārīk-eṬabarestān* (II, pp. 21-25), written in 613/1216-17. Later authors, such as Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfī (*Tārīk-egozīda*, pp. 379-81, 753), Dawlatšāh (*Taḍkeratal-šo‘arā’*, pp. 57-58, 72-73), Ġaffārī (*Negārestān*, pp. 27, 59, 99-100, 114, 144, 145, 169-70), etc., have also drawn upon the *Čahārmaqāla* (introd., pp. vi-viii, xl-lii).

*Čahārmaqāla* consists of a doxology (pp. 1-2), a preface (pp. 3-18), and four discourses (pp. 19-134), and an epilogue (pp. 135-36). The preface comprises five sections, which contain a eulogy of contemporary Ghurid rulers and discusses the creation of the universe, heavenly spheres, stars, minerals, plants, animals, humans, internal and external senses, and an anecdote and justifications of prophethood, imamate, rulership, and government. The four discourses describe the functions of secretaries (*dabīrs*), attributes of the perfect secretary, and related matters (pp. 19-41); qualities required in poets and their poetry (pp. 42-86); astronomy and the wide knowledge needed by astronomers (pp. 87-105); and medicine and counsels of physicians (pp. 106-34). The epilogue expresses wishes for the success of the author’s patrons (pp. 135-36).

Neẓāmī considered that no ruler could do without the four kinds of functionaries: secretaries, poets, astrologers, and physicians, who were among his close associates, and gave this as the reason for writing the book. In his opinion, which also may reflect the prevailing views of the time, the good order of the realm was ensured by secretaries, the perpetuation of its good name by poets, the good timing of its business by astronomers (or astrologers), and the good health of its ruler by physicians (p. 18). At the beginning of each *maqāla*, Neẓāmī briefly describes the function in question; then he discusses the human qualities it requires and how these qualities can be acquired, namely through education, study, methodology, style, and observance of necessary proprieties and standards of conduct. These passages, despite their brevity, contain important points. For example, in discussing the definition of the functions of secretaries (pp. 19-20) and the definition of poetry (p. 42), Neẓāmī gives more weight to the substance and effect of their prose and verse than to the form. Here he is clearly influenced by the views of philosophers and logicians rather than belletrists and rhetoricians. His proposals for professional training throw light on the contemporary methods of teaching, learning, and the development of skills in these fields, and his recommendations of books for study show which Persian and Arabic works



had won professional acceptance and wide circulation as textbooks.

In addition, each *maqāla* contains about ten exemplifying anecdotes, which make the book engaging reading, a merit which doubtless explains its lasting popularity and influence through the centuries. Furthermore, the examples make the abstract theories which the author propounds in the introductory sections of the discourses appear factual and acceptable. Finally, the anecdotes contain interesting information about the identities and careers of eminent men of letters and scientists often not found elsewhere, e.g., Rūdakī (pp. 52-54), ‘Onṣorī Balkī (pp. 56-57), Farroḳī Sīstānī (pp. 58-65), Amīr Mo‘ezzī (pp. 65-69), Abū Bakr Azraqī Heravī (pp. 70-71), Mas‘ūd-e Sa‘d-e Salmān (pp. 71-72), Rašīdī Samarqandī and ‘Am‘aq Boḳārī (pp. 73-74), Ferdowsī (pp. 75-83), ‘Omar Ḳayyām (pp. 100-01), Ebn Sīnā (pp. 118-23), and several more, as well as accounts of events at which the author was present as an eyewitness, e.g., the account of Ḳayyām’s prediction about his tomb and the encounter with Amīr Mo‘ezzī (see above).

The historical information found in *Āahārmaqāla*, however, is seriously marred by repeated errors (confusion of names, dates, etc.), even in the case of events in the author’s lifetime (he confuses the Saljuḳ sultans Sanjar and Mas‘ūd, p. 36, see introd. pp. xiv-xviii, comm. pp. 34-36, 42-44, 54, 55-56, 67-68, 223-28, for a discussion of these errors).

*Āahārmaqāla* as a masterpiece of good classical Persian prose ranks immediately after Bayhaḳī’s *Tārīḳ-emas‘ūdī*, ‘Onṣor-al-Ma‘ālī’s *Qābūs-nāma*, Neḟām-al-Molk’s *Sīāsāt-nāma*, Moḥammad b. Monawwar’s *Asrār al-tawḥīd*, and ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadḳeratal-awlīā’*. The language of the introductory parts of the discourses is, by reason of the subject matter, more stilted and loaded with Arabic words than that of the actual text. But in the anecdotes Neḟāmī’s style becomes fluent, vivid, rich, and engaging, although, where brevity suits the context, he can also express his meaning effectively in short, simple sentences (cf. pp. 79-83, 116-17, 121-23). His descriptions of scenes, characters, and outward and inward moods are fine and well developed, as when he describes Farroḳī’s meeting with ‘Amīd As‘ad (p. 59), the place where colts belonging to the Chaghanid *amīr* Abu‘l-Moḟaffar were being branded (pp. 59-60; cf. Farroḳī’s poem, pp. 61-63, and Yūsofī, pp. 7-8), Naṣr b. Aḥmad’s reluctance to leave Herat (pp. 49-51), al-Ma‘mūn in the palace of Faḟl (Ḥasan) b. Sahl (pp. 32-36). His comments on the poetry of Rūdakī (p. 54), Farroḳī (p. 59), Mas‘ūd-e Sa‘d-e Salmān (p. 72), and Ferdowsī (pp. 75-76) illustrate his critical appreciation of literature and also demonstrates his ability to write graceful



and cogent prose. Although rhetorical embellishments such as euphonic balance (*mowāzana*) and rhymed prose (*saj'*) with consequent use of redundant synonyms appear in some passages of the *Čahārmaqāla*, they are never so cumbersome as to make the reading tedious; they are rather graceful and well balanced. The linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the *Čahārmaqāla* and its literary merits and importance have been discussed in detail by Moḥammad-Taqī Bahār (*Sabk-šenāsī* II, pp. 298-318; see also the *Čahārmaqāla*, introd., pp. lii-lxxiii). The text contains a few solecisms, which are probably lapsus calami, or else due to clerical error (introd., p. lxxvi).

Due to its popularity, the number of printed editions of *Čahārmaqāla* in Iran and abroad is large (see the lists in Mo'īn's ed., pp. lxxx-lxxxii, and in Nafīsī's notes to his ed. of *Lobāb al-albāb*, pp. 695-96). The first critical edition was prepared by Moḥammad Qazvīnī and published with a preface and notes (Cairo, 1327/1909-10; reprs. Tehran, Bombay, and various European countries). Qazvīnī's edition was revised by Mo'īn and published with additional comments and notes by Mo'īn and other scholars, a glossary, and indices (Tehran, 1336 Š./1957).

*Čahārmaqāla* has been translated into several languages, including Urdu, by Mawlawī Aḥmad Ḥasan Šāḥeb Sevānī, with Persian text and a glossary (Delhi, n.d.); Arabic, under the title *al-Maqālāt al-arba'*, by 'Abd-al-Wahhāb 'Azzām and Yaḥyā Kaššāb, with abridged translations of Qazvīnī's notes in an appendix (Cairo, 1368/1949); English, by E. G. Browne, first published in *JRAS* 31, July and October, 1899, pp. 613-63, 757-845, and in a separate edition (Hertford, 1899). Browne subsequently revised his translation, and his revised version, together with abridged translations of Moḥammad Qazvīnī notes, were published in 1919 and reprinted under the title *Revised translation of the Čahār Maqāla (Four Discourses) of Nizāmī-i 'Arúđī of Samarqand, followed by an abridged translation of Mīrzá Muḥammad's Notes to the Persian text*, London, 1921. The fourth discourse, on medicine and physicians, was translated into Turkish by Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı as *Tib ilmi ve meşhur hekimlerin mahareti* and printed with a French summary by Süheyl Enver (Istanbul University Publications 32, 1936). The entire *Čahārmaqāla* has been translated into French by Isabelle de Gastines as *Les quatre discours*; the translation is based on M. Mo'īn's text and contains preface (pp. 7-16) and notes derived from the comments of Qazvīnī and various medieval writers and modern Western scholars (Paris, 1968). A complete Russian translation was prepared by S. I. Baevskiĭ and A. N. Vorozheĭkina as *Nizami Aruzi*



Samarkandi, *Sobranie redkosteĭ, ili chetyre besedy* (Moscow, 1963, with introd. and gloss.); the chapter on the art of the physician was included as “Rasskazy o vrachebnom iskusstve (is knigi “Sobranie redkosteĭ”)” in an anthology of Eastern storytelling, *Vostochnaya novella*, compiled by Z. N. Vorozheĭkina and O. L. Fishman (Moscow, 1963, pp. 94-99).

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(Ġolām-Ḥosayn Yūsofī)