



CARD GAMES

CARD GAMES (*ganjafa-bāzī*, *waraq-bāzī*). Card games were invented in China in the 7th-8th centuries and via India were brought to Persia, whence they reached the Arab world and Europe. The Persian game of *ganjafa*, like chess, spread to the Arab west and was popular around 800 (around 1400) among the Mamluk rulers in Egypt (where it was called *kenjafa* or *kanjefa*). From an Arabic chronicle we learn that about 802/1399 an amir paid 2,000 drachmas for a slave, an amount that he had just won in a game called *kanjafa* (Rosenfeld, p. 74). The existence of the eight-suited *ganjafa* game (8 x 12 = 96 cards) in the early Safavid period under Shah Esmā'īl (907-30/1501-24) and Shah Ṭahmāsb (930-84/1524-76) and later under Shah 'Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629) is known from Persian literary references and European travel books (Taqī-Kānī, pp. 296-97). They prove that *ganjafa* was popular at the court and in the coffee houses of Isfahan under Shah 'Abbās (Chardin, p. 62; Falsafī, I, p. 144; II, p. 331). Jean B. Tavernier writes: "Among the games of the Persians is one with cards called Gengefé. Our cards are four kind, theirs are of eight kind" (p. 273a). The poem "Ganjafa robā'iyāt" of Ahlī Šīrāzī (see below) confirms Tavernier's observation of the existence of the eight *ganjafa* suits at the time of the early Safavid kings. Mīrzā Moḥammad-Šādeq Mīnā Ešfahānī's (1018-61/1609-51) statement in his encyclopedic *Šāhed-e šādeq* that *ganjafa* was invented by Mīrzā Ġīāt-al-Dīn Maṣū'ī Šīrāzī (d. between 940/1534 and 949/1542; Roschanzamir, 1981, p. 38), can therefore not be correct. However, the fact that Mīrzā Moḥammad-Šādeq also suggests that Mīrzā Ġīāt-al-Dīn adopted the game from European card games shows that he had no reliable basis for his statement.



There is no substantial information about the nature of the original *ganjafa*. Mīrzā Moḥammad-Šādeq, himself the inventor of games (Taqīkānī, pp. 298, 300 n.), preferred playing the game with four participants, though two to nine people could participate, depending on the kind of game. He names the varieties Šafdarḳānī (for two), Lab (?; for two or more), Farangī (lit. European; variable number of players), and Hamrang, in which the partners would drop out one by one. The author compares this game with chess because of the concentration it requires. Ahlī Šīrāzī (858-942/1444-1535), a court poet of Shah Esmā'īl I, explains in the introduction of his *ganjafa* poem how he became induced to compose it when a nobleman showed a beautiful set of painted *ganjafa* cards intended as a gift for a prince and said that it would be wonderful if each card could also carry a poem in addition to the picture. Thus Ahlī Šīrāzī wrote a *robā'ī* for all 96 cards in each pack. The *robā'īs* contain all the information concerning the value of the card. The suits named in the poem are: *gōlām* (slave), *tāj* (crown), *šamšīr* (sword), *zar-e sork* (red gold; *ašrafī*, gold coin, in Ahlī), *čang* (harp), *barāt* (bill of exchange), *zar-e safīd* (white gold; *tanka*, silver coin, in Ahlī), and *qomāš* (cloth, bales; Roschanzamir, 1981, pp. 30-36).

Original *ganjafa* cards from the time of the early Safavids and before had not been noted until 1981, when eight Persian lacquer paintings in the album of Morād III (*Collection of Manuscripts and Incunabula of the Austrian National Library in Vienna, codex mixtus*, fol. 313) were recognized as such by D. Duda (Duda, pp. 9-18). Persian *ganjafa* and *ās* (see Supplement) playing cards, like pen boxes (*qalamdān*), were hand-painted and heavily lacquered for protection against damage by constant playing. The backgrounds were of plain colors without landscape or architectural setting. All eight *ganjafa* cards are rectangular and framed at the upper end by a cusped festooned arch.

Under Shah 'Abbās II (1052-77/1642-66) all kinds of games were prohibited. In the *Ebrat-nāma* of Toḡrā Mašhadī (d. 1100/1689) the disappearance of the game is deplored (apud Monzawī). However, towards the end of the 11th/17th or the beginning of the 12th/18th century the game of *ās* became popular. A typical pack of cards for *ās* has five series consisting of five identical cards each. Often more series were added to accommodate more than five players. It was played like poker (see Roschanzamir, 1986, pp. 74-76). Many specimens of *ās* cards are known from the Qajar period (1210-1342/1796-1925) in numerous collections in Iran and elsewhere: for example, the Bielefelder Spielkarten, Charta lusonia, the collection of the Hamburgisches Museum für Völkerkunde,



and the author's own collection. They display various qualities, from rare luxury sets painted on ivory by talented artists to numerous products on paper or papier mâché with folk art level. Their motives are taken from the epics and other literary sources. Some show historical, contemporary, or European costumes. There are many with erotic and some with floral illustrations. The flower cards were used by more devoted Muslims, whereas those with epic and literary motives have been used by the courtiers and the aristocracy.

The game of *ās* was popular during the 14th/20th century until about the end of World War II but then went out of fashion, and games like poker, rummy, belote, trump, bridge, became popular.

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(Mahdi Roschanzamir)