Encyclopædia Iranica

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Published: December 15, 1998
Last Updated: April 24, 2013

ELEGY

ELEGY (Ar. *marṯīa*, Pers. *mūya*), poetry of mourning in Persian literature. The Western term elegy covers a wider range of themes, most of which are represented in the Persian tradition. The frequent complaints of the transience of life and the cruelty of fate, of disasters or of personal grievances (the so-called *šakwīyāt*) are elegiacal in this broad sense, but they are not included in the present article, which is restricted to poems lamenting the deaths of individuals. The common appellation of a classical Persian elegy is *marṯīa* or, more rarely, *reṯā'*. The Arabic plural *marāṯī* often occurs as the heading of a section in a *dīvān* especially devoted to the genre. Less formal types of laments are called *nawḥa* in Arabic or *mūya* in Persian. Singers of elegies were called *marṯīaḵᵛān* (Anwarī, p. 12), *nawḥagar* or *mūyagar* (Ḵāqānī, p. 408). The word *marṯīa* may also refer to mourning in general, in which case it is equivalent to *ʿazā-dārī, taʿzīa, sūgvārī,* and *mātam* (Dehḵodā, s.v. "*marṯīa*"). The elegy was an important topic in court poetry. Keykāvūs b. Eskandar mentioned "the writing of *marṯīa*s on friends and notables" among the duties of the professional poet. He considered that *ḡazal* and *marṯīa* should be written in a similar but opposite manner (*ṭarīq*; p. 191). The mourning of a deceased patron, however, may also be regarded as the natural counterpart to the conventional praise for the living. Quite often, congratulations and good wishes to a successor were added to the elegy, as can be noticed already in a fragmentary poem by Abu'l-ʿAbbās Rabanjanī, one of the oldest Persian elegies still extant (Lazard, *Premierspoètes* II, p. 67). Many elegies were written on the occasion of personal losses. Some of the finest specimens of the genre belong to this category. The cult of martyrdom in Shiʿism gave rise to a rich elegiac literature

of religious nature. Unlike the classical Greek elegy, Persian poems of mourning were not bound to specific prosodic rules but could be written in any type of verse. The *qaṣīda* was the obvious medium for a courtly elegy. Masʿūd-e Saʿd was perhaps the first to use the *tarkīb-band* in a poem on the death of one of his sons (II, pp. 751-56). Many later poets (e.g., Ḵāqānī, Kamāl-al-Dīn Esmāʿīl, Saʿdī, Jāmī) adopted the latter form not only for private purposes, but also for poems devoted to public figures. The stanzaic form became the standard in Shiʿite elegies. Shorter verse forms, especially the *qeṭʿa* and the *robāʿī*, were also frequently used. Special applications of the latter were chronograms (q.v.), concealing the date of a demise in a letter puzzle, and inscriptions on tombstones (for specimens of elegiac *robāʿī*s, see Meier, pp. 22-26). The use of Arabic *marṯīa* as the most general term for elegy betrays the impact of Arabic literature on this form of Persian poetry. The Arabs had known a rich elegiac poetry since pre-Islamic times and provided the Persian poets with authoritative models (see PELLAT). As always, the question to what extent pre-Islamic Persian poetry also played a role in shaping the Muslim Persian tradition is difficult to answer because of an almost complete lack of evidence. Although Persian elegies greatly differ in form and content, it is possible to mention a few stylistic features which frequently occur. The poet emphasizes his words rhetorically by anaphoric sequences or, especially in the stanzaic poems, by *radīf* rhymes appropriate to the subject; he often feigns ignorance (*tajāhol al-ʿāref*) and attempts to give a soothing explanation for the tragic event, e.g., by supposing that the dead person has merely fallen asleep; the deceased is addressed directly as if he were still alive; blame for the loss suffered is laid upon the heavens, the world, and the blind workings of fate, but only rarely on the sovereign will of God; the poet describes confusion in the life of the community and in the order of the universe caused by the demise. Unlike the conventional panegyric, the elegy is constructed as a continuing discourse without a pre-established pattern. Nearly all of these features appear together in the oldest example of a grand courtly elegy still extant, i.e., the *qaṣīda* which Farroḵī Sīstānī (q.v.) wrote at the death of Sultan Maḥmūd of Ḡazna (pp. 90-93). It opens with a view of the disarray in the sultan's residence Ḡazna, which is described from the point of the view of an uninformed spectator (anaphora: *bīnam*). This leads the poet to various assumptions as to the reason for this unusual situation (*magar emsāl*; *kāškī*). For a brief moment, he becomes aware of the truth and laments the loss suffered by the empire (*āh o dardā*), but soon he turns his back to reality again, trying to awaken the sultan, whom he assumes to be asleep (*ḵīz šāhā*). Following the logic of this conceit, he starts to speak to the monarch,

celebrating his virtues and his great exploits. In the end, however, he returns to reality and hails the successor to the throne. Major examples of royal elegies are found in the writings of Moʿezzī on the almost simultaneous deaths of Sultan Malekšāh and his vizier Neẓām-al-Molk (pp. 379, 405-6); Ḵāqānī, on the ruler of Šervān (pp. 527-32); Saʿdī on the Salghurid *atābeg* of Shiraz and the last ʿAbbasid caliph (pp. 482-84, 488-89); Bābā Fāḡānī on Sultan Yaʿqūb of the Qara Qoyunlu dynasty (pp. 60-68); and many others. Ḵāqānī was probably the most prolific writer of Persian elegies. He commemorated the deaths of not only rulers and their officials, but also prominent *ʿolamāʾ* and members of his own family. More than once, he wrote several poems at the death of a single person, using different verse forms. These poems probably were intended to be recited at different moments of the traditional cycle of mourning. The most touching elegies of Ḵāqānī are the poems on the decease of his own son Amīr Rašīd-al-Dīn, especially the *qaṣīda* in which he introduces the young man speaking, first from his sickbed and then from the grave (pp. 406-10). Other remarkable poems on relatives were composed by Ḥāfeẓ in a *ḡazal* on a son (*Dīvān*, p. 276), and by Moḥtašam on a brother (Massé, 1969). A special category are elegies inserted in fictional narratives. They occur, in particular, in stories situated in the pre-Islamic past. An interesting example is the Bārbad mourning for Ḵosrow II Parvēz, related by Ferdowsī and called a *pahlavānī mūya* (a heroic lament, or a lament in Pahlavi ?). His words seem to be intended as a poem showing some of the traits common to later elegies, especially the use of anaphora (*kojā ān*) and the direct address to the deceased by the minstrel (*Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, IX, pp. 278-80). Another instance is the lament uttered by Faḵr-al-Dīn Gorgānī's heroine Šahrū when she wrongly assumes her daughter Vīs to be dead (pp. 198-203). Although the structure of this long speech is rather loose, some of the features just mentioned are found here as well. There are several sequences of anaphoras. Religious elegies became an important subsidiary genre of elegy only from the 16th century onward, after the establishment of Shiʿism as the state religion in Safavid Persia. Specimens by medieval poets are also on record, e.g., an elegy on the Ahl al-bayt by the Sunnite poet Sayf Faṛḡānī (cf. Rādfar, pp. 57-59) and an elegy on the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn by Salmān Sāvajī (pp. 423-26). Moḥtašam's poem in twelve stanzas (*dawāzdah-band*) is the most famous representative of the Shiʿite elegy and set an example for later poets (Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* IV, pp. 173-86). It was integrated in the repertoire of the *rawżaḵᵛān*s (see, e.g., the collection of texts described by Browne, *Catalogue*, pp. 122-42). In the 19th century the poet Yāḡmā Jandaqī used the form *mostazād*, which was common in folk poetry but rarely used by poets before him (e.g. Masʿūd-e Saʿd, II, p.

783), for the type of popular elegies he called *nawḥa-ye sīna-zanī* (lit. “laments for flagellations”; see Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia*, IV, pp. 339-44; Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, pp. 333-34; Āryanpūr, *Az Ṣabā tā Nīmā* I, p. 117, also called *nawḥa-ye sang-zanī*). Elegiac poems can be found in great abundance as inserts in prose works devoted to religious mourning. The writing of elegies remained a vital Persian literary activity, mainly because of its close links to the rites of mourning still current in Persian culture. A prominent elegiac poet of the present century was Moḥammad-Taqī Bahār (q.v.) who wrote both religious and profane *marṯīa*s. Condolences in the form of elegiac writing are still regularly published at the deaths of prominent literary personalities. A recent example is the series of elegies devoted to the distinguished poet and scholar Ḥabīb Yāḡmāʾī (*Āyanda* 10, 1363 Š./1984, pp. 262-74).

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