



# ĠAZAL I. HISTORY

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## ĠAZAL

### i. HISTORY

The word *ġazal* (غزل) is of Arabic origin. The basic meaning of its root is “spinning.” At a very early stage, the figurative sense of “having amorous talks with women, flirting” must have led to the association with erotic poetry. In Arabic the word can be used to denote the subject matter of this kind of poetry in general, as well as an individual love poem written in any prosodical form. Both usages are known since the earliest Islamic period, and this has created some uncertainty about the precise reference of the term as it was actually used by literary critics and poets. For a period of time, the same ambiguity existed in Persian, but eventually *ġazal* became specialized as the term for a specific love poem defined by a set of prosodical rules, certain thematic and stylistic conventions, and an equally conventional stock of imagery. To distinguish it properly from other forms of love poetry, the appellation “technical *ġazal*” (*ġazal-e eṣṭelāḥī*) has gained currency in modern studies (see especially Mirzoev, 1957, p. 23). The cognate word *taġazzol* is a generic term for love poetry; *nasīb* and *tašbīb* are sometimes used in the same sense, but they are better known as technical terms for the prologue of a *qaṣīda*, for which often erotic themes were chosen.

As a formal genre the Persian *ġazal* is governed by a combination of rules, all of which are to be strictly observed, though no one is exclusive to this type of poem. The rhyming scheme is based on monorhyme with internal rhyme in



the opening line, called *maṭla‘e moraṣṣa‘*, as in a *qaṣīda* (aa ba ca, etc.), but *ġazals* are much shorter poems. The length may vary between five and fifteen bayts, or rarely, a few more (Blochmann, p. 86; cf. Elwell-Sutton, pp. 245-46). Toward the end of the 15th century, the poet ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī regarded a poem of seven distichs as the most perfect form (cf. Rażī, intro. p. 247).

Another feature is the *radīf*, consisting of an independent word, a phrase or a personal suffix added repeatedly to each rhyme. It is optional, but it occurs very frequently in the *ġazal*, because it gives a semantic coherence of some kind to the lines of the poem, which are often only loosely connected. Actually, the *radīf* is one of the extra rules (*eltezāms*) allowed by the theory of Persian rhyme and may therefore be applied to any poem (see, e.g., Šams-al-Dīn Rāżī, *Moġam*, pp. 258-61).

The technical *ġazal* is marked in particular by the mention of the poet’s pen-name at the conclusion of the poem, usually in the last distich. Such passages are called *maqṭa‘* or *maḳlasá*. Here the poet introduces a personal reference into the poem speaking either to himself or about himself in the third person. The motive used in a *maḳlaṣ* could be the identification of the poet with the lover who is speaking in the text, but also the boast of the poet’s literary skill, the latter echoing a convention of panegyric poetry. Since late medieval times the devise is known as *taḳallosá*, a term which also came to denote the pen-name itself. In Persian literary theory, however, *taḳallosá* only occurs in its original meaning, that is the transition from the prologue to the praise of a patron in the structure of a panegyric. A. J. Arberry gave it the appropriate name of a “clasp theme” (p. 707). Also the use of the pen-name in poetry is a general rhetorical device which can be found in any kind of poem.

All the common Persian metres can be used in a *ġazal*, except the metre of the *robā‘ī*. The language of the poem should be elegant classical Persian, which is on the one hand devoid of vulgarism, and on the other hand full of intricate learned allusions and extravagant hyperbole. The rhetorical embellishment should be less than in a panegyric *qaṣīda*, but euphonic figures, especially alliteration, are often applied. Of the figures of meaning, amphibological ambiguity (*īhām*, cf. Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* II, pp. 54-55) and irony are conspicuous in *ġazal* poetry. Of the particularities of style and language, by far the most important is the tendency to treat individual lines as separate units, which greatly increased in the course of the *ġazal*’s long history.

The *ġazal* is further distinguished by its subject-matter. The form is in the first



place connected to the genres of erotic poetry, though poems of this kind usually include a great variety of other themes. Descriptions of nature and wine songs are fully integrated elements. Antinomian motives, centered around the poetic types of the *qalandar* and the *rend*, and mingled with references to non-Islamic religions (*kofrīyāt*), also became closely associated with the erotic theme. Again, however, each of these features separately can equally be found in other types of poetry. What makes the *ḡazal* into a quite distinct kind of poetry is its unique blend of formal and thematic features providing it with an unmistakable poetical aura which holds the secret of its exceptional popularity throughout the centuries.

This variety of subject-matter provided the *ḡazal* with a rich imagery which could easily be used for symbolization and allegorization. It became a very apt medium for mystical poetry; its use for this purpose is actually known since the beginning of the recorded history of the Persian *ḡazal*. However, the links with profane love poetry were never completely severed. In the best specimens, a subtle balance between the possibilities of transcendental and secular references is carefully maintained.

The equivocal evidence of the early centuries has led to various explanations of the origin of the Persian *ḡazal*. In early modern studies it was accepted that the *ḡazal* existed in Persian poetry right from the beginning. As little evidence supporting this assumption could be found in the extant sources, scholars like Šebli No'mānī and E. E. Berthels proposed that the independent *ḡazal* had its origin in the erotic *nasībs* of the *qaṣīda*. During the 6th/12th century, the *ḡazal* gradually crystallized into its technical form, a process which was fully completed only by the time of Sa'dī (13th century). An explanation of this literary development was sought in changes in the cultural and social environment: on the one hand, in the growing influence of Sufism on Persian poetry, of which Sanā'ī's *ḡazals* provided the first example; on the other hand, in the rise of urban, non-aristocratic, circles as the recipients of poetry, which would have led to a decline of the panegyric *qaṣīda* which was characteristic of the culture of the courts. Neither of these theories fully answers the problems posed by the spectacular appearance and success of the *ḡazal*. Notwithstanding the great importance that should be attached to mysticism as one of the formative factors, it should not be overlooked that many poets who wrote *ḡazals* were not Sufis. Moreover, the *ḡazal* flourished as much at the courts as it did in other circles. The court poet Anwarī, who played a significant role in the development of the *ḡazal* in the 12th century,



exemplifies both counter arguments.

In view of the close contacts between the two traditions, it is understandable that the origins of the Persian *ġazal* have been sought, first of all, in Arabic literature. Arabic love poetry provided an important example to the Persian poets. Its impact on the development of Persian love poetry is quite evident and can be explained by the permanent presence of Arabic models in medieval Persian culture. The erotic prologues of the pre-Islamic Arabic *qaṣīda* lived on as a convention in the panegyrics of Persian court poetry, though greatly changed thematically. The existence of separate love poems can be traced back already to the first Islamic century (see Blachère and, in particular, Jacobi). Before the Abbasid period (8th cent. C.E.), the urban poetry of the cities of Ḥejāz, to which the name of ‘Omar b. Abī Rabī’a (d. ca. 712 or 721) is connected, and the more or less contemporary Bedouin poems of the ‘Ođrite type, represented various attitudes toward the erotic. Prior to the rise of Persian literature, Arabic love poetry with a mystical intent is also known to have existed, especially in the fragments attributed to Rābe’a ‘Adawīya (d. 801). The “modern” school of the *moḥḍat* poets, flourishing in 9th century Iraq, was an obvious source of influence on the emerging Persian poetry of love. One of its innovations was the proliferation of short genres, not only concerned with erotic themes, but also with wine, nature, and antinomian elements, all of which can be found again in the repertoire of the later Persian *ġazal*. Even the homo-erotic orientation prevailing in the latter, and distinguishing it sharply from the heterosexuality of Arabic love poetry in general, has its predecessor in the collections of *moḍakkarāt* and *ġolāmīyāt* poems, describing the beloved as a young boy, to be found in particular in the poetry of Abū Nowās (d. 814 or 815; Wagner, 1965, pp. 308 ff.; 1988, II, pp. 84-87).

However, a one-sided derivation from Arabic poetry is certainly unjustified. Although our knowledge about the pre-Islamic secular literature of Persia is greatly limited by the almost complete loss of the primary sources, the indirect evidence pointing to the evidence of an ancient minstrelsy makes it more than likely that the survival of an indigenous tradition of erotic poetry should be reckoned with. The tradition may very well have affected already the development of Arabic poetry during the first few centuries of Islamic period. In the 2nd/8th century female singers from Persia performed love poems in cities of Ḥejāz (Wagner, I, p. 29). A Persian influence on the renewal of Arabic poetry during the early Abbasid period is even more likely in view of the general persianization of Islamic culture taking place at the center of the



caliphate, the most vociferous exponent of which was the Šo'ūbīya debate. It is, however, difficult to arrive at definite conclusions because of extreme scarcity of concrete evidence on the Persian side (see Wagner, II, pp. 89-91 and esp. Reinert). Iranologists in the former Soviet Union, denying that the lyrical *gāzal* could come into being in the aristocratic environment of the courts, postulated the ancestry of an ancient Central-Asian popular tradition of which, as a result of its oral nature, nothing has survived (Braginskiy, Mirzoev).

In Persian literature, specimens of love poetry are on record from the very beginning. Two examples of the *gāzal* in the classical form have been attributed to the Samanid poet Rūdakī, but only in very late sources so that they cannot be used to prove the early currency of technical *gāzals* (cf. Mirzoev, 1957, pp. 5-13). In the course of the 5th/11th century, the word *gāzal* frequently occurs, but mostly in the generic sense of love poetry, for instance when it is contrasted to the panegyric ('Onṣorī, p. 78, *bayt* 950; p. 232, *bayt* 2247). Probably 'Onṣorī meant no more than that when he took pride in his ability as writer of *gāzal*, though acknowledging the superiority of Rūdakī (p. 327, vv. 3094-95). Farroḳī clearly refers to separate love poems when he exhorts a minstrel to sing a *gāzal*, or else listen to such a poem recited by himself (Farroḳī, p. 105, v. 2029), or, in winding up a *nasīb*, calls for “new *gāzals*” to be sung to his patron (p. 122, v. 2388). In his descriptions of the crafts of the poet and the minstrel, Kaykāvūs b. Eskandar devotes much attention to love poetry as it was composed by the former and performed by the latter (*Qābūs-nāma*, chaps. 35-36). There can be no doubt that, in this period, the *gāzals* were already a very prominent feature of literary life, closely linked to the performing arts as practiced by minstrels and musicians. Very likely, they were mainly regarded as a kind of oral poetry which, unlike the *qaṣīdas* carrying panegyric references, were not considered to be worthy of being recorded in writing (de Bruijn, 1988; see also Lewis, pp. 36 ff.).

Evidence that the *gāzal* in its technical form did actually exist dates from the last quarter of the 11th century and the beginning of the next. The oldest sizable collection of *gāzals* has been preserved in manuscripts of Sanā'ī's *Dīvān*, though less than half of his poems contain the name of the poet as a clasp theme. Apparently, there was not yet a clear-cut distinction from other types of poems. The medieval transmission of this *Dīvān* shows interesting signs of the uncertainty still prevailing as far as the qualification of the various poetical forms is concerned. Even when a section headed *gāzaliyāt* is present in some of these medieval copies, this is probably not a marker of poetical



form but of genre, as they coincide with other headings of a specifically generic meaning like *madhīyāt* and *zohdīyāt*. Also the *qalandarīyāt* are still a distinct thematical category in these collections next to the *ġazalīyāt* (cf. de Bruijn, 1983, pp. 91-112).

This early collection also shows that *ġazals* were not exclusively used for lyrical poems. Some of them are didactical poems dealing with the subject of love in a discursive manner. Others are panegyrics as well as lyrics, for instance the series of poems Sanā'ī addressed to the Ghaznavid sultan Bahrāmšāh: in these poems a *ġazal*-like prologue, ending with the poet's name, is followed by a brief mention of the patron. Other specimens of such poems are known from the *dīvāns* of contemporary poets at the courts of Ghazna, like Mas'ūd-e Sa'd-e Salmān and Ḥasan Ġaznavī, and many later *ġazal* writers including Ḥāfeẓ (Meisami, pp. 273-79).

Many of Sanā'īs *ġazals* are not overtly mystical but seem to be characteristic of the kind of courtly love poetry which “depicts an idealized relationship on which its audience is encouraged to model its own behavior” (Meisami, p. 244). It should, however, be considered that information about the audience for which these poems were intended is hardly ever available. Poems treating of erotic themes in an apparently profane way could very well have served within the context of a homily, just as the use of mystical motives by Ḥāfeẓ does not prove that his poems only admit a transcendental interpretation. Secular and spiritual motives are from the beginning inextricably intertwined in the Persian *ġazal*.

Among the prerequisites of a history of the *ġazal* as a formal genre are detailed studies of the works of major poets and the development of its specific idiom, imagery, and thematic material. An important contribution has been made by the *Lyrical Persica* project, which is currently carried out by Daniela Meneghini Corrales, Riccardo Zipoli, and others. Under this heading a series of statistically-treated samples taken from the most important *dīvāns* are being published. For many *ġazal* collections reliable critical editions are still outstanding.

In the 12th century the *ġazal* is present in the *dīvān* of nearly all poets, whether they were poets of the court, such as Anwarī, Kāqānī and Jamāl-al-Dīn Eṣfahānī, or mystics such as Farīd-al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. ca. 618/1221, q.v.), who developed the antinomian motives introduced by Sanā'ī. Jalāl-al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) gave new dimensions to the *ġazal* using it for the expression of



mystical rapture as well as for homiletic teachings. The abundance of his imagery exceeded the conventional boundaries. Rūmī's *gāzals* have a quite unique position within the development of the form. The most outspoken poet of the antinomian *gāzal* was Fakr-al-Dīn 'Erāqī (d. 688/1289, q.v.), who seems to have actually lived the life of a *qalandar*.

The rise of the *gāzal* to the dominant position in Persian lyrical poetry reached its zenith in Shiraz during the lifetimes of the two undisputed masters of the genre, Sa'dī (d. ca. 692/1293) and Ḥāfeẓ (d. ca. 792/1390). The former is often named as the poet who finally established the technical *gāzal* as the standard form. He collected his poems in more than one volume, an example followed by a few later poets, notably Amīr Kōsrow Dehlavī (d. 725/1325, q.v.) and 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492). Blending artfully the profane and the mystical strains which had been developed by earlier poets, Sa'dī excelled in the elegant formulation of the conventional motives. Numerous lines from his *gāzals* have reached proverbial status in the Persian language.

With Ḥāfeẓ the *gāzal* entered a new phase. Although he probably added little new to the stock of themes, motives, and images which had been accumulated by his predecessors, he applied them with such density, verve and skill, that a strong impression of originality was given to his verse. The rapid changes from one item of imagery to another on the one hand, the juxtaposition of profane and mystical themes on the other, pose the much discussed problem of the proper coherence within each poem, which must have presented itself already to his contemporaries, as is shown by the many variations in the order of the lines even in the earliest manuscripts of his *Divān*. The unique quality of his poetry lies in the irony of his expression, which made him into the most beloved poet of Persian literature, whose attraction has lost nothing in the course of time. The polysemantic nature of Ḥāfeẓ's *gāzals* gave rise to their use for prognostics (*fāl-gīrī*), a popular practice in Persian. On a more intellectual level it elicited several commentaries which in most cases favor a mystical reading of his *gāzals*. The discussion on the question whether Ḥāfeẓ wrote mystical or secular poetry has never ended. The issue was further complicated when, in the first half of this century, closer study of the historical contexts revealed the presence of both explicit and veiled panegyrics in many *gāzals*.

With many of Ḥāfeẓ's contemporaries the mystical intent of their *gāzals* cannot be doubted. The adherence to Sufi organizations and institutions of K̄vājū Kermānī (d. 753/1352 or 762/1361) and 'Emād-al-Dīn Faqīh Kermānī (d. 773/1371, q.v.) is well established. During the 14th and 15th centuries the



impact of theosophical patterns of thought, derived from the doctrines of Ebn al-'Arabī (q.v.), made the imagery of *ġazal* poetry more and more into an allegorical code which could be deciphered at the hand of the authors of the treatises dealing with this language in a textbook fashion. Poets belonging to this trend are Kamāl Ḳojandī (d. ca. 808/1405), Moḥammad Maġrebī (d. 809/1406-07) and the founder of one of the greatest Sufi orders of Persia and India, Shah Ne'mat-Allāh Walī (d. 834/1431). At the same time, however, the *ġazal* continued to be an important form of court poetry. The two lines came together in the poetry of Jāmī (817-98/1414-92), who was not only a prominent Naqšbandī Shaikh but equally the leading poet at the court of the Timurids of Herat.

The Timurid period is usually regarded as one of stagnation in the history of *ġazal* poetry. In the traditional view, reflected in scattered remarks by *tadkera* writers, a new breath of life was brought into the genre by Bābā Faġānī (d. 922/1516 or 925/1519, q.v.). By emphasizing the individuality of each separate line he further loosened the internal coherence of the poem, continuing by this a tendency already begun by Ḥāfeẓ. Another new trend was the insertion of references to actual circumstances, which manifested itself during the first century of Safavid rule (16th century). Contemporary critics refer to this style as *woqū'-ġū'ī* (see Golčīn-e Ma'ānī). A striking example of its application is the *Jalālīya* of Moḥtašam Kāšānī (d. 996/1587-88), a cycle of sixty-four connected *ġazals* celebrating the performance of a dancer.

The *ġazal* continued to be the foremost lyrical form throughout the period of the Indian style. Its outstanding representatives were Šā'eb Tabrīzī (d. 1080/1669-70) in Persia, 'Abd-al-Qāder Bīdel (d. 1133/1721, q.v.) and Ġāleb (d. 1285/1869, q.v.) in India. With the turn toward neo-classicism, manifesting itself in the mid-18th century and continuing far into the 20th, the *qašīda*, the favorite form of early Ḳorāsānī court poetry, regained much of its lost territory. However, until the rise of a modern love poetry that was no longer bound to the classical rules, the *ġazal* remained the most suitable medium for Persian lyricism, and even today it has some notable practitioners.



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