



ḤĀTEM ṬĀ'Ī

ḤĀTEMṬĀ'Ī, the epitome of generosity and munificence in Arabic and Persian anecdotal traditions. Ḥātem b. 'Abd-Allāh b. Sa'd Abu Saffāna (or Abu 'Adiy) Ṭā'ī (Ebn 'Abd-Rabbeh, I, p. 197; Waṭwāṭ, p. 65) is the most renowned of the so-called “three most generous men of pre-Islamic Arabia” (Ebn 'Abd-Rabbeh), I, p. 197). He is said to have inherited his generosity from his mother Ḡonayya bent 'Afif Ṭā'īya (Eṣbahāni, XVII, pp. 279-80; Waṭwāṭ, p. 66). According to one legend, while pregnant with him his mother dreamt that she was given the choice between ten average sons and one with exceptional generosity; she chose the latter, and thus Ḥātem was born predestined to be exceptionally munificent (Ḥamza, XVII, p. 281).

Ḥātem is associated with the Lakhmid court in Ḥira (q.v.), especially under its most famous monarch No'mān b. Moṇḍer (r. 580-602; Ḥamza, XVII, pp. 283-86, 288-89; Ebn 'Abd-Rabbeh, II, p. 126; Āzarnuš, p. 183). Ḥātem belonged to the tribe of Ṭayy in Yemen (Ebn Qotayba, p. 104), which is why the people of Yemen were proud to consider him their own (Ebn 'Abd-Rabbeh, IV, p. 115). His tribe converted to Islam in 9/630, and remained Muslims even during the year 11/632, when a wave of apostasy swept across many Arab tribes (Ja'fari, p. 130). They were among the strongest supporters of 'Ali and fought on his side in the Battle of the Camel and in Ṣeffin (cf. Kaḥḥāla, p. 691). It is also due to the fact that Persians first encountered Arabs from the Ṭayy tribe that they began to refer to Arabs in general by the term *ṭāzi*. Ḥātem's wife Māwiya (or Māriya, Waṭwāṭ, p. 65; or Nawār, Ebn 'Abd-Rabbeh, I, p. 197), a Yemenite princess whom he successfully courted thanks to his generosity (Ḥamza, XVII,



pp. 291-96; Fozuni, p. 227), is mentioned in the verse of Manuḥehri (pp. 23, 102).

Ḥātem's generosity and chivalry have become proverbial in Arabic as well as in Persian (e.g., Ebn 'Abd-Rabbeh, III, p. 8; see further Dehḳodā, s.v. Ḥātem). In the verse of the earliest Persian poets Ḥātem's generosity and Rostam's bravery are paired together as a literary formula used in panegyrics (e.g., Dabir-siāqi, pp. 152, 172). Rudaki pairs Ḥātem's generosity with Rostam's valor (Nafisi, p. 496), as well as with Sām's prowess (Nafisi, p. 528). This tradition is continued by the Ghaznavid poets (e.g., Farroki, pp. 11, 127, 165, 237, 355, 431, and 'Onṣori, pp. 115, 452, 194; Gorgāni, p. 29, line 19). Ḥātem's name was also invoked as a paragon of generosity in both prose and poetry long after the Ghaznavids (e.g., *Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, p. 289; Rumi, I, v. 2244, II, v. 426, V, v. 2798, VI, vv. 173, 3016-17, 3275-276, 3368; *Baḳtiār-nāma*, p. 41; Boḳāri, p. 34).

According to legend, Ḥātem's generosity was manifest from the time of his infancy; in one story his mother tells his brother that when she tried to suckle Ḥātem he would refuse her breast unless she suckled another child on her other breast at the same time ('Aṭṭār, p. 368). Having lost his father at a young age, we are told that Ḥātem was brought up by his grandfather until their relationship was strained by Ḥātem's extreme generosity: his grandfather criticized it as wasteful, and finally abandoned him because of it (Ḥamza, XVII, p. 282).

It is said that Ḥātem used to give away everything he possessed except for his mount and weapons. According to some sources, even his mount was not safe from his liberality. In one story Ḥātem receives a royal emissary while his flocks are in pasture, and so he resorts to slaughtering his own horse to feed his guest (Fozuni, p. 229; Bostān, pp. 89-90, cf. also p. 287). A number of narratives speak of a king who feels so jealous of Ḥātem's reputation for liberality that he sends an assassin to kill him. Ḥātem receives him as a guest, inviting him to spend the night in his home. In the morning, on discovering that his guest is on a mission to kill him, Ḥātem offers his own life in order that he should not have to return empty-handed to his king. This munificence wins the assassin over, and even appeases the king when he hears about it (Bostān, pp. 90-91; Fozuni, p. 228). Ḥātem's tomb was built on a hilltop with two stone troughs representing the pots from which he fed the poor, as well as the statues of four mourning maidens. Travelers who camped near his grave would report hearing the sound of the maidens mourning all night long (Burton, IV, pp. 94-95).



According to storytellers, Ḥātem's generosity did not cease even with his death. There is a well-known story that when a group of travelers arrived at his tomb, one of them said in jest, "O Ḥātem, we are thy guests tonight." Ḥātem gave them a feast from beyond the grave, by making one of their camels fall ill so that it had to be slaughtered and eaten. The morning after, Ḥātem's son 'Adiy arrived with a fine camel in train, explaining that his father had told him in a dream to replace the one that he had killed in order to feed his guests (Ḥamza, XVII, pp. 287-88, 300; Ebn 'Abd-Rabbeh, I, pp. 198-99; Fozuni, p. 228). This story has entered the Arabian Nights tradition, where Scheherezade relates it on the 270th night (Burton, IV, pp. 94-96).

Some classical Persian sources claim that Ḥātem's generosity guaranteed his salvation in the next world despite the fact that he died an infidel. For instance, according to the *Siyāsat-nāma*, God forbade the fires of Hell to touch Ḥātem's body because of his generosity and hospitality (Nezām-al-Molk, p. 172). According to Boḥayra, during his ascension to Heaven the Prophet Moḥammad noticed two of the gardens of Paradise located instead amidst the fires of Hell. When he asks for an explanation, he is told that one of these gardens belongs to the Persian king, Anušīravān the Just, and the other to Ḥātem, and that although both of these men should be in Hell for being infidels, God has sworn not to torment the just and the generous, and so their heavenly residences have been located amidst the fires of Hell as a compromise (Fozuni, p. 227). The more orthodox religious sources seem to contradict this claim. For instance, an anonymous Koranic commentary from the 5th/11th century relates that Ḥātem's son 'Adiy asked the Prophet if his father's generosity would help him in the hereafter even though he died an infidel; the Prophet responded that it was to no avail unless he had repented before his death (Šīrāzi, p. 24; repeated almost verbatim in Meybodi (IV, pp. 41-42).

Molla Ḥosayn Kāšefī (d. 910/1504-5) has produced an account of Ḥātem's adventures (Schaefer, I, pp.173 ff). Stories about Ḥātem increasingly gained popularity in Iran, and were compiled in collections, such as *Qeṣṣa-ye Ḥātem-e Ṭā'i* and *Haft enṣāf-e Ḥātem*. One of these Persian collections was translated into English in the 19th century (Forbes, 1830), while an American adaptation of it was later also published (Enson, 1962). Several Urdu and Hindi translations of Ḥātem's adventures have also been published (see Ḥaydar Baḳš, 1972). Stories about Ḥātem have not been as successful in the Persian oral tradition as in written form. One narrator in Isfahan related a story



according to which Ḥātem must have been female, for therein he is quoted as saying, “I used to have a husband who was extremely wicked,” and later in the same story this “female Ḥātem” marries a (male) dervish (Amini, p. 85).

A number of editions of the poetry attributed to Ḥātem have been published, both in the original Arabic and in English translation (e.g., Ḥātem-e Ṭā'ī, 1990; 1994; for an English translation, see Wormhoudt, 1984). Several Persian words are used in this poetry, including *sard* and *kam* (Āzarnuš, pp. 125, 132, 134, 137).

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