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HOMOSEXUALITY III. IN PERSIAN LITERATURE

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iii. IN PERSIAN LITERATURE

A sharp contrast exists between the treatment of homosexuality in Islamic law, on the one hand (see ii. above), and its reflection in Persian literature, particularly poetry (the chief vehicle of Persian literary expression), on the other. From the dawn of Persian poetry in the ninth century all through to the twentieth century, not only was homosexuality condoned in Persian poetry, but in fact homoeroticism formed almost the only amatory subject of Persian ghazals (short sonnet-like lyrics) and the main topic of much of Persian love poetry.

THE BELOVED

The “beloved” (q.v.) in Persian lyrics is, as a rule, not a female, but a young male, often a pubescent or adolescent youth, or a young boy. No sense of shame, no unease, no notion of concern for religious prohibition affects the exuberant descriptions of the male beloved or the passionate love displayed by the poets for him. There are many poems by classical and later poets which explicitly address a boy (*pesar*) as the subject of the poet’s love, as illustrated by the following examples from different periods:

O boy, if you want to gladden my heart / You must give me kisses after serving me wine (*Ey pesar gar del-e man kard hamiḵᵛāhi šād / Az pas-e bāda marā busa hami bāyad dād*; Farroḵi [d. 1038] *Divān,* p. 46).

O boy, you carry the business of beauty beyond all limits / With such beauty you expect me to bide my time? Impossible! *(Ey pesar nik ze ḥadd mibebari kār-e jamāl / Bā čonin ḥosn ze to ṣabr konam? In't moḥāl*; Natáanzi, quoted by Šams-e Qays [13th century], p. 326).

A beau with a candle in hand is an affliction / (A beau) heavy-headed with love's slumber and intoxicated with wine (*Fetna bāšad šāhedi šamʿi be dast / Sar gerān az ḵᵛāb-o sarmast az šarāb*; Saʿdi [d. ca. 1290], *Ḡazaliāt,* p. 15).

This boy who stood up walks gracefully / He is a cypress walking so straight! *(Ḵoš miravad in pesar ke barḵāst / Sarvi'st ke miravad čonin rāst*;Saʿdi, *Ḡazaliāt*, p. 25).

One of the ghazals of Awḥadi of Marāḡe (b. 1270, p. 127) has "o boy" (*ey pesar*) as its refrain (*radif*) and begins with the following line:

Your fragrant tresses are like a trap, o boy / Your face resembles the full moon, o boy! *(Zolf-e moškinat čo dām ast ey pesar / ʿĀreżat māh-e tamām ast ey pesar*; *Divān*, p. 233).

Sanāʿi (d. ca. 1141), has no fewer than five successive ghazals with *pesar* as their radif (*Divān,* pp. 891-96).

It is to be noted that the Arabic words used in Persian poetry for the beloved—*maʿšuq*, *maḥbub*, and *ḥabib*—are all, not feminine, but masculine adjectives.

THE BELOVED AS A SLAVE SOLDIER

In early and mid-classical poetry, particularly in the lyrical preludes (*nasib*s, *tašbibs*) to panegyric odes, the beloved is sometimes a youth who serves as a page, but more often a young Turkish soldier. From early in the Abbasid period the caliphs instituted a tradition of forming army contingents composed of slaves, mostly taken as captives in the course of frontier wars and raids into Central Asia, the Caucasus, and India, among other regions. There were also slave markets where young male slaves, along with female ones, captured as booty or procured by other means, were sold (see Yarshater, 1960,

and BARDA AND BARDADĀRI iii. and v.). The preferred slaves were Turkic ones, admired for their handsome features, their valor, and their martial gifts. The Samanids, who originated from Sogdiana and were neighbors to the Turkic khanates of Central Asia, adopted the practice of enlisting slaves in their army—a practice which continued under the succeeding dynasties, chiefly the Ghaznavids, the Seljuks, and theKʷārazmšāhs.

Young slaves also were bought by the wealthy for agricultural work, domestic chores, or running errands, and by rulers to serve at their courts and in their armies. Those who were fit to fight were specially trained for military service and were placed in the slave contingents of the army, as is abundantly evident from the sources and the poetry of the Samanid, Ghaznavid, and Seljuk periods. Some of them, if talented, were also taught other skills; for instance, they learned to play music and served as boon companions (Yarshater, 1960, p. 49). The love poetry of these periods is generally addressed to such adolescent soldiers or pages, as the following examples demonstrate:

Put down your weapons boy! Bring me kisses! / All this trouble and strife serves no purpose at all! *(Ey pesar jang beneh busa biār / In hama jang o dorošti begoḏār*;Farroḵi, *Divān,* p. 141).

Take off and throw aside, O Turk, this battle raiment / Take up the lyre and put down your shield and sword (*Barkeš ey Tork o be yek su fekan in jāma-ye jang / Čang bargir o beneh darqa o šamšir az čang*; Farroḵi, *Divan,* p. 206).

The army left and that army-breaking idol left (with it) / May it not happen to anyone to lose his heart to a soldier! *(Laškar beraft o ān bot-e laškar-šekan beraft / Hargez mabād kas ke dahad del be laškari*;Farroḵi, *Divan,* p. 382).

The following line attests to the musical skill of the beloved:

Do you see that when that Turk takes the lyre in hand / Self-restraint flees a hundred parasang from the hearts of saints! *(Bini ān Torki ke u čun barzand bar čang, čang / Az del-e abdāl bogrizad be sad farsang sang*; Manučehri [d. 1041], *Divān*, p. 50).

Selecting Turkish beauties for love affairs became so prevalent that in Persian poetry that *Turk* became a poetic synonym for a male beauty or the beloved:

O my Turk, you won't say where you are today / Unless we send someone and call you you won't come! *(Ey Tork-e man, emruz naguʾi be kojāʾi / Tā kas*

naferestim o naḵᵛānim nayāʾi! Manučehri, *Divān,* p. 95).

William Jones has made the term familiar through his elegant but free translation of a ghazal of Hafez (d. 1389), beginning with:

If that Turk of Shiraz should gain my heart / I bestow upon him Samarkand and Bukhara for his black beauty spot (*Agar ān Tork-e Širāzi be dast ārad del-e mā rā / Be ḵāl-e henduyaš baḵšam Samarqand o Boḵārā rā*; *Divān,* no. 3; see Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* III, p. 304).

We find a fairly comprehensive description of such youths, who combined military tasks with a beloved's part, in the lyric prelude of a qasida in praise of the Seljuk Malekšāh by Kāfi Ẓafar of Hamadān, cited by ʿAwfi in his *Lobāb al-albāb* (pp. 210-13), of which a few lines are cited here:

These jolly riders who ravish people's hearts / One wonders whose progeny they are and after whom they take in beauty (*In šuḵ-savārān ke del-e ḵalq setānand / Guʿi ze ke zādand o be ḵubi be ke mānand).*

They are Turks by race, no doubt, but / In beauty and loveliness are like idols (*Torkand be aṣl andar šak nist walikan / Az ḵubi o zibāʾi mānand-e botānand).*

They are troop leaders and (yet) brides of chambers / They are world paladins and furious lions (*Mirān-e sepāhand o ʿarusān-e weṭāqand / Gordān-e jahānand o hožbarān-e damānand).*

They are of musky facial hair, sweet of speech, with perfumed tresses / Silver-bodied, gold-girded, and narrow-waisted (*Meškin ḵaṭ o širin soḵan o ḡālia zolfand / Simin bar o zarrin kamar o muy-mīyānand).*

In battle they think of nothing but attack by sword / In festive gatherings they have no pleasure but ravishing hearts (*Dar razm bejoz tiḡ zadan ray nabinand / Dar bazm bejoz del setādan kām nadānand).*

I hope that by the good fortune of my lord I shall find / A sweetheart from among them, even though their price is high (*Arju ke be eqbāl-e ḵodāvand biābam / Z'išān ṣanami gar bebahā nik gerānand).*

Of course there were slaves of other origins as well, e.g., Indian and Slav (generally termed *bolḡār* "Bulgarian," known for their fair skin). In a poem Farroḵi compares the Turkish and Indian partners (*Divān,* p. 435), showing

preference for the latter (perhaps with tongue in cheek) on account of their docility:

By the time a Turkish sweetheart has given you three furtive kisses / You can take an Indian one and consummate the affair with him (*Tā to rā Torki se busa-ye dozdida dahad / Hendui rā betavān bord o bepardāḵt ze kār*;Farroḵi, *Divān,* p. 435).

Anvari (d. ca. 1190) has a qasida which begins with an account of his love for an Indian sweetheart bought from a slave-seller (*Divān,* p. 165; see also Sanāʾi [d. ca. 1141], *Divān*, p. 68).

As women were totally secluded and were socially excluded from men's gatherings, wine was handed around in the feasts by youths, serving as so many Ganymedes. Such gatherings provided an occasion for the participants to admire and fall in love with the wine servers (*sāqi*s) so frequently that notions of the beloved and the sāqi are intertwined and fused together in many ghazals; and the sāqi and the beloved become one, e.g.,

Pardon me if the thread of my rosary came undone / My hand was in the arm of the silver-calved sāqi (*Rešta-ye tasbiḥ agar begsast maʿḏuram bedār / Dastam andar sāʿed-e sāqi-ye simin sāq bud*; Hafez, *Divān,* no. 202).

THE BELOVED OTHER THAN A SLAVE SOLDIER

In later times, when political and social circumstances changed and slaves were not as readily available as during the frontier wars, boys in different walks of life become the targets of homoerotic love. Novices working under master craftsmen, errand boys (*šāgerd*s) in shops, and youths working at different trades were now mostly the targets of homoerotic love in poems, although less frequently in qasidas than in ghazals, quatrains, and occasional pieces (*qetʿa*s). No doubt a similar situation prevailed also in the earlier centuries, except that in court poetry of the time we hear mostly about Turkish military cadets. Poets of the ʿErāqi school write more often for their own circle of friends and for personal gratification rather than addressing their lyrics to a ruler or a dignitary. However, many of the motifs, metaphors, and themes used by earlier poets are frozen into clichés and are used by subsequent poets, even though their usage may have no basis in their actual experiences. For instance, Attar (ʿAṭṭār [d. 1221], q.v.) uses in his ghazals, which vibrate with profound and passionate, amorous feelings, the imagery developed by earlier

poets: he sings of the beloved's moon-like face, ruby lips, narrow, hair-like waist, cypress-like figure, the lasso of the beloved's tresses, the chain of his curls, the arrow of his glance, the dart of his eyelashes, etc.

An instructive example of the variety of the subjects of homoerotic love is a number of short poems in the genre of *Šahrāšub* by Masʿud Saʿd [d. 1121], in which love towards a number of beloveds (*delbar, yār*) of different occupations are mentioned. They include among others, a dancer, a Sufi, a blood-letter, a baker, a blind man, a wrestler, a well-digger, a poet, a sāqi, a soldier, a farmer, a goldsmith, a flute player, a carpenter, a polo player, a drummer, a painter, a gardener, a lyre player, a smith, a butcher, and a donkey-driver (Masʿud Saʿd, *Divān*, pp. 913-35).

Even more revealing is *Nozhat al-majāles*, an anthology of 4125 quatrains (*robāʿis*) collected by Jamāl Ḵalili of Šarvān in the 13th century. It provides a good sampling of the themes employed by quatrain writers. Needless to say, the beloved is male. In the section on *maʿšuq* (the beloved) we find the following instructive subdivisions: On his clothing; On traveling, farewell, and return; On offering kisses and withholding kisses; On his falling in love; On speaking, not speaking, bitter retorts, and his insults (*došnām-e u*); On his oppression (*jafā*) and his stone-heartedness (*sangdeli*); On the wine-drinking of the *maʿšuqe*. The most revealing, however, is a small rubric called 'On *nesāʾiyā*'or women-related (quatrains), a collection of only 125 quatrains that have been considered distinct by the compiler since they have a woman as the subject of love. Of these, only a few can be said for certain to refer to a woman—i.e., when items such as an anklet, necklace, kerchief, collyrium, (*sorme*), rouge, and *vasme* (the blue for the eyebrows) are mentioned as worn by the beloved; the others are vague, and might refer to either sex. Even if all of these 125 quatrains were about women, they would constitute only 3 percent of a total of 4,125 quatrains—a negligible portion (Yarshater, 2000, pp. 432-33).

EFFECTS ON POETIC IMAGERY

The fact that in the poems written chiefly during the 10th-12th centuries the beloved is generally a boy and most often a soldier led to a series of images, similes, metaphors, motifs, themes, and attitudes which characterize the Persian lyric poetry written mostly in the form of the qasida and the ghazal. The beloved is frequently depicted as armed with a sword or a bow or an unspecified weapon. When annoyed by a lover, he may draw his sword and

attack him; but the lover, devoted and submissive, rejoices in the beloved's fury as a much coveted sign of attention and considers himself fortunate indeed to be struck dead by him, preferring his abuse and assault to his neglect and indifference.

The military position of the beloved (Farroḵi and some other early poets sometimes call the beloved a *sarhang* "vanguard or troop leader," possibly exaggerating his rank) and his war-like qualities have given currency to a number of martial similes and metaphors, such as comparing the beloved's eyelashes to arrows, his tresses to lassos, and his glance to a dart, likening him to an army-breaker (*laškar-šekan*), warrior (*jangju*), or blood-shedder (*ḵunriz*). Furthermore, his occasional drunkenness and even his obstreperousness are mentioned. A famous line by Hafez describing the beloved reads:

Disheveled hair, perspiring, with laughing lips and drunk / With open shirt, singing a ghazal, a jug of wine in hand. (*Zolf āšofta o ḵoy karda o ḵandān lab o mast / Pirhan-čāk o ḡāzal-ḵᵛān o ṣorāḥi dar dast*; *Divān*, no. 22).

As a result, many terms and expressions related to the battlefield, war, and armament have entered Persian lyric poetry and have served love metaphors, e.g., *tarkeš* (quiver), *separ* (shield), *nāvok* (arrow), *paykān* (arrowhead), *kamān* (bow), *neyza* (lance), *meymana* (right wing of the army), *meysara* (left wing of the army), *qalb* (center of the army).

THE BELOVED'S TRAITS

The beloved is described in Persian ghazals as an ideal beauty, a paragon of loveliness and charm, with no blemishes to mar his perfection. He is indifferent to the solicitations of the lover, who constantly laments his separation from the inaccessible and unattainable object of his love. No one can resist his beauty; he is more liberal with his favors to his other admirers than the poor poet who is madly in love with him and ready to give up even his faith for a single favorable glance on the part of the beloved. In later lyrics he is proud to be, not only the dust on his threshold, but even a devotee of his dog. His wretched and grief-laden love is seldom rewarded with a moment of attainment (*waṣl*).

Love on the part of the lover is generally motivated by physical beauty and strikes at once like a thunderbolt, a one-sided *coup de foudre*. It is rare to hear a poet wax lyrical on the beloved's other assets save the physical. There is no

mention of preliminary acquaintance or moral attractions leading to love. The lover complains against the beloved's infidelity (*bi-wafāʾi*), his cruelty (*setam*), and his harsh treatment of the lover (*jafā, jowr*). He also complains against the beloved's escorts and guardians (*raqib*s, which later comes to mean "rivals") who chase the poet away. He knows that his unbridled and extravagant love would inevitably lead to his public disgrace and infamy (*rosvāʾi*), but he shows no concern for the consequences and turns a deaf ear to the advice and admonitions of the well-wishers who keep counseling him to give up his unrequited love. Of feminine tenderness or other womanly traits we hear none, nor are there any signs of reciprocal feelings on the part of the beloved, except rarely when the beloved shows pity for his lover's misery, or when in a humorous vein he throws him a kiss or enters in a coquettish and witty exchange with him (e.g., Hafez, *Divān*, no. 227), or when in a number of preludes to panegyrics the poet claims success to show his worth as a eulogist of his patron.

The beloved in Persian lyrics is hardly ever individualized. He is an abstract representation of perfect beauty. We never learn of any intimate or private circumstances of a love affair or special features of the beloved, as if the poet is in love with the image of an idealized beloved rather than with someone in the flesh. The beloved does not differ from one poet to another; he represents a type, not an individual. Needless to say, we never learn the beloved's name or specific personal attributes which would depict him as a real person.

There are several themes and motives in Persian lyrics that derive from the age, sex, and soldierly profession of the typical beloved. One is the frequent mention of soft hair budding on the upper lip and face of the beloved (called *ḵaṭṭ*) when he reaches puberty. Generally the poets praise the *ḵaṭṭ* and consider it among the merits of the pubescent youth. The following lines from Hafez are typical:

By the grace of beauty spot and *ḵaṭṭá* you stole the heart of the wise / There are fine attractions under your trap and (enticing) grains (*Be loṭf-e ḵāl o ḵaṭ[ṭ] az ʿārefān robudi del/ Laṭifahā-ye ʿajab hast zir-e dām o dāna-ye to*; *Divān*, no. 35).

Woe! From six directions they blocked my way / The beauty spot, the ḵaṭṭ, the tresses, the face, the visage, and the figure (of the beloved), *(Faryād ke az šeš jahatam rāh bebastand / Ān ḵāl o ḵaṭ[ṭ] o zolf o roḵ o ʿāreż o qāmat*; *Divān*, no. 90).

In one ghazal he even says:

From your ḵaṭṭ one hundred charms were added to you (*Ze ḵaṭṭ'at ṣad jamāl-e digar afzud*; *Divān*, no. 454; for further examples see, ibid., nos. 3, 62, 67, 153, 307, 359, 386).

However, there are also a number of poems that warn the beloved about the ravages of a beard and even curse it because it ruins the delectability of the young face. Hafez, despite his many praises for ḵaṭṭ as an element of the beloved's beauty, also expresses the unwanted effects of growing a beard and the youth leaving adolescence (e.g., no. 155, line 6).

Suzani warns the young beloved of the affliction of growing a beard:

ĪBe mindful, o boy, that you would not grow a beard / So that a beard would not plunge you in sorrow and grief, o boy! *(Zenhār behuš bāš ke nāri pesarā riš / Tā nafkandat dar ḡām o zāri pesarā riš*; Suzani [d. ca. 1173], *Divān*, p. 396).

The ḵaṭṭ is described variously as green (*ḵaṭṭ-e sabz*), rust-colored (*ḵaṭṭ-e zangāri*), musk-colored (*ḵaṭṭ-e moš-kin*), budding ḵaṭṭ (*ḵaṭṭ-e now-damida*), etc., but most often coupled with *ḵāl* (beauty spot) on account of their homonymy.

Another theme is the unwanted, but uncontrollable, disclosure of the poet's love for the beloved with the ensuing public disgrace (*rosvāʾi*), mentioned above, which obtains on account of religious prohibition, the humiliating refusal of the beloved, and the passionate outbursts of the lover in public.

Yet another theme is the traveling of the beloved and his being away from the lover, with the resultant yearning for his return. The following line by Saʿdi bemoans the departure of the beloved:

O camel driver, drive slowly as the comfort of my soul is traveling / And the heart which I possessed is traveling with the capturer of my heart (*Ey sārebān āhesta rān k'ārām-e jānam miravad / v'ān del ke bā ḵᵛod dāštam bā delsetānam miravad*; *Ḡazaliyāt*,p. 143; see also Hafez nos. 8, 59, 138, 187, 272, 430, 439).

A fairly frequent theme of the romances or anecdotes of later classical belles-lettres is the falling in love of a dervish with a handsome young prince. We find one of these anecdotes in Zangi's *Nozhat al-ʿāšeqin*, in which a prince, realizing the desperate condition of his dervish lover, shows favor to him; but the dervish, overwhelmed by this unexpected bliss, gives up the ghost (pp.

130-41; a similar story, pp. 155-58; Attar also relates a similar story: *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, pp. 224-29).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF THE BELOVED

The poet-lover, who appears in early lyrical preludes to qasidas as a fairly confident and at times even a demanding, successful lover worthy of a youth's love, is gradually turned into a humble, selfless, supplicating lover in the ghazals of the ʿErāqi School, and an abject, lamenting, and lamentable lover in the late classical lyrics, particularly of the Safavid period and among the poets of the Indian style. For instance, Farroḵi begins one of his lyrical preludes to a panegyric ode self-assuredly with the line:

I made peace with the beloved after a long quarrel / On the condition that he would no longer play games with me (*Āšti kardam bā dust pas az jang-e derāz / Ham bedān šarṭ ke bā man nakonad digar nāz*; *Divān*, p. 205).

He even quotes the beloved as apologizing for his previous coquettish game-playing. This contrasts distinctly with later ghazals, where the beloved is supreme, arrogant, and merciless, while the poet-lover is a mere nothing, belittled by the beloved's indifference and crushed by his heartless haughtiness. Yet one should not think that the climate of Persian ghazal is all grief, misery, and lament. In fact Persian ghazal is one long hymn to exaltation of love and beauty. The passion of love is sung in all its glory, and beauty is praised in its splendor; furthermore the rhythmic music of Persian poetry often imparts a merry flavor to the poems.

PEDOPHILIA

In Persian love lyrics, however, one can hardly find the kind of homosexual relationship that is understood in the modern West; love is a one-sided and asymmetrical affair. As a rule, it is between an adult male and a boy or youth. Therefore, it should be characterized more properly as pedophilia, and its physical aspect as pederasty, rather than described under the more nebulous concept of homosexual love. In a number of poems the beloved is actually called *kudak* or *ṭefl*,i.e., a child, a young lad, or a minor, e.g.:

I love silver-bodied, ruby-lipped children. / Wherever you see one of them, call me there (*Dust dāram kudak-e simin-bar-e bijāda-lab / Har kojā z'išān yeki bini marā ānjā ṭalab*;Farroḵi, *Divān*, p. 5).

O beautifully clad child, silver-bodied and ruby-lipped, / the substance of charm and gaiety, envious houries in pain from you! *(Ey kudak-e zibā salab, simin-bar o bijāda-lab / Sarmāya-ye nāz o ṭarab, hurān ze raškat bā taʿab*; Anvari, apud Šamisā, p. 80).

What choices have I, if I should not fall in love with that child? / Mother Time does not possess a better son (*Del bedān rud-e gerāmi čekonam gar nadaham / Mādar-e dahr nadārad pesar-i behtar az in*; Hafez, *Divān,* no. 396).

My sweetheart is a beauty and a child, and I fear that in play one day / He will kill me miserably and he will not be accountable according to the holy law (*Delbaram šāhed o ṭefl ast o be bāzi ruzi / Bekošad zāram o dar šarʿ nabāšad gonahaš).*

I have a fourteen year old idol, sweet and nimble / For whom the full moon is a willing slave (*Čārdah-sāla boti čābok o širin dāram / Ke be jān ḥalqa be guš ast mah-e čārdahaš).*

His sweet lips have (still) the scent of milk / Even though the demeanor of his dark eyes drips blood (*Bu-ye šir az lab-e hamčon šekaraš miāyad / Garče ḵun mičekad az šiva-ye čašm-e siahaš*; Hafez, *Divān*, no. 284.)

In many poems the poet-lover describes himself as a fatherly figure to the beloved, and indeed a homosexual may take a catamite into his home and care for his well-being and education (acting as a ‘sugar daddy’). A case in point is that of Amir Yusof and Toḡrol, related by Bayhaqi in his *History* (pp. 329-31): Ṭoḡrol, a rare beauty was sent as a gift to Sultan Maḥmud from Turkestan; he was serving wine at one of the court’s drinking sessions when Amir Yusof, Maḥmud’s brother, became enamored of him. He was overcome by wine, and his gaze remained fixed on the boy. Maḥmud realized the situation and, though not amused, made a gift of the boy to his brother, who took charge of him and raised him as a son. Years later, at the instigation of Maḥmud, who had become suspicious of Amir Yusof’s intentions, the youth spied on his lover and lord and facilitated his downfall.

An instructive description is found in a qasida by Iraj (d. 1925) addressed to a boy on the threshold of puberty which begins with the line:

Be mindful o jolly boy that next year / Your lifestyle and your affairs will change (*Fekr-e ān bāš ke sāl degar ey šuḵ pesar / Ruzegār-e to degar gardad o kār-e to degar*; *Divān,* p. 21), and in the course of which he describes in minute

detail what an adult homosexual could do for his catamite. In a poem (p. 29), of which the first line was quoted before, he talks about a boy whose father is a hindrance to the poet's amorous desires and says:

If his father should die, there is no cause for sorrow and mourning / I am alive; I will take care of him better than his father (*Gar bemirad pedaraš jā-ye ḡam o mātam nist / Zenda'am man, benavāzam ze pedar ḵubtaraš*).

In order to secure a fatherly position over the boy, he goes so far as to say:

So that people would not say what I have to do with another person's son / I would marry his mother and shall become his father (*Tā naguyand torā bā pesar-e ḡēyr če kār / Mādaraš rā be zani giram o gardam pedaraš*; *Divān,* p. 29).

NON-MUSLIM SUBJECTS OF LOVE

Not only Muslim boys were the subject of homoerotic desires, but so were boys from minority groups, more particularly Zoroastrians boys (*mōḡ-bača*) serving in taverns and Christian ones (*tarsā-bača*), sometimes belonging to convents; for example:

If the wine-serving *mōḡ-bača* would shine in this way / I will make a broom of my eyelashes to sweep the entrance of the tavern. (*Gar čonin jelwa konad mōḡ-bača-ye bāda foruš / ḵākrub-e dar-e meyḵāna konam možgān rā*; Hafez, *Divān,* no. 9).

Earlier, from piety I would not look at wine and entertainers / It was the love of *mōḡ-bača*s that introduced me to both (*Man az varaʿ mey o moṭreb nadidami zin piš / Havā-ye mōḡ-bačagān-am dar in o ān andāḵt*;ibid., no. 17).

A *mōḡ-bača,* a thief of hearts and faith, was passing by / To follow that friendly face he [the Sufi] ceased knowing anyone else (*Mōḡ-bačaʾi migozašt rāhzan-e din o del / Dar peye ān āšnā az hama bigāna šod*; ibid.,no. 165; see also no. 413; for other examples see Ṣadiqiān, under, *moḡ-bača*).

Well said that idol of a wine-serving Christian boy / Drink to the health of those who are sincere (*Nāḡz goft ān bot-e tarsā- bača-ye bāda-foruš / Šādi-e ruye kasi ḵʷor ke ṣafāʾi dārad*;ibid., no. 119).

A Christian child suddenly attacked my heart and my soul / The love of his tresses scandalized me throughout the world (*Tarsā bačeʾi nāgah qaṣd-e del o*

jānam kard / Sowdā-ye sar-e zolfaš rosvā-ye jahānam kard; Attar, *Divān*, p. 158).

Zangi relates that a Sufi novice (*morid*) could not be inspired by Sufi ways, no matter how his mentor tried, until he fell in love with a Christian boy (*tarsā bača*), and only then did he become receptive to the ideal of divine love (*Nozhat al-ʿāšeqin*, pp. 150-51).

In the following line Iraj obviously refers to a young lad, as the rest of the poem makes clear:

His father has said that he should not mix with me / I am dying from grief; may God send death to his father! (*Pedaraš gofta ke bā man nanešinad pesaraš / Mordam az ḡōṣṣa, ḵodā marg dahad bar pedaraš*; *Divān*, p. 29).

SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF HOMOSEXUALITY

The social acceptance of homoeroticism, in spite of religious prohibition, was such that ʿOnṣor-al-Maʿāli Kay-Kāvus, a prince of Ṭabarestān, in his well-known mirror for princes, commonly known as *Qābus-nāma,* written as a compendium of advice for his son Gilānšāh, not only approves of male homosexuality, but suggests the best way of practicing it, even though he is by all accounts a man of piety, bound by the dictates of religion. In a chapter on "Enjoying Sexual Relations" (*Tamattoʿ kardan*, chap. 15) he advises a bisexual approach, employing both women and boys (*ḡolāmān*), but always in moderation: "so that you can benefit by both and neither of the two parties may turn against you" (pp. 86-87).

The social acceptability of sodomy also finds an eloquent testimony in the fact that Ḥamid-al-Din Abu Bakr, the chief judge of Balḵ (12th century), includes in his famous work, *Maqāmāt-e Ḥamidi,* written in rhymed ornate prose on the model of the *Maqāmāt* of Badiʿ-al-Zamān of Hamadān and that of Abu'l-Qāsem Ḥariri (both in Arabic), a *maqāma* ("discourse," lit. "assembly"), the subject of which is a debate between a sodomite (*lāṭiy*) and a fornicator (*zāniy*). They each proffer their arguments about the merits of their chosen ways, and the author, having heard their arguments, concludes that he should keep contact with both sexes and follow both schools (*mellat*).

The literary reflection of homoerotic love is not confined to Persian poetry, but clear traces of it are found in prose as well, even though it is in poetry that it manifests itself most. In prose works, however, it is reflected mostly in anecdotes, and occasionally in didactic works. The case of Ṭoḡrol and Amir

Yusof has already been mentioned. A famous case is the love of Maḥmud of Ḡazna for his favorite slave Ayāz, on whom Maḥmud showered many favors and who rose in military rank to become a commander. Farroḵi's *Divān* contains a qasida in his praise (pp. 163-65; see Yarshater, 1960, p. 50 for a translation of some of its lines). Their love became legendary and has served in Persian letters as a symbol of deep affection and love, as do the legends of Layli and Majnun, Ḵosrow and Širin. Neẓāmi ʿAruži (d. 1150) has a story in his *Čahār maqāla* (pp. 55-58) about Ayāz's immense worth in the eyes of Maḥmud.

In classical poems, fit to be publicly read or recited, description of the physical aspects of homoeroticism seldom go beyond embracing, kissing, and necking (*bus o kenār*). Nonetheless, in Ghaznavid poetry, more particularly in the lyrical preludes of Farroḵi and even in the poems of a preacher of high morals like Saʿdi, we find descriptions that today would be considered somewhat off-color (for instance, the lines referring to the beloved in a bathhouse). In satires of obscene nature, facetiae (*hazl)*, and invective poetry, however, the physical and pornographic aspects of sodomy and pederasty are openly referred to with bravado and described with clinical precision. Anwari, Suzani, Sanāʾi, Saʿdi, but above all ʿObayd of Zākān, the supreme satirist and writer (d. after 1371), and the modern popular poet Iraj, among others, provide ample examples of such poetry (for examples, see Šamisā, pp. 53, 79, 80, 148, 170, 255).

EMOTIONAL TIES BETWEEN SUFI ADULT MALES AND YOUTHS

Hellmut Ritter in his erudite work on Attar, *Das Meer der Seele*, 1955 (English tr. as *The Ocean of the Soul*, 2003) aptly discusses the love relations of the Sufis, not only in the works of Attar, but more generally among the Islamic mystics, and cites many stories and legends found in their works (see chap. 24, "Earthly Love with Social and Legal Ties," pp. 360-81, and the subsequent two chapters, "Earthly Love and Free Emotion" and "Religious Love of a Beautiful Person," pp. 382-519). He writes: "Love between men and youths as a community-building bond of sociological and pedagogical significance can be recognized in the Islamic *fotowwa*-associations [guild association with Sufistic tendencies] and their Anatolian variant, the Akhī-associations, as well as in the dervish orders but, being an offspring of non-Semitic origin, it is not acknowledged as a binding force of this kind, either legally or theoretically. On the contrary, frequently we can only infer that this form of love is present in the associations in question because of the vehement polemic directed against it by the law-revering orthodoxy" (p. 379). He further speaks about "the

characteristic practice in many Sufi circles of gathering for a musical event and then communally gazing upon the beauty of a youth who has been especially adorned for this purpose as a *šāhed*, whose beauty in their eyes represents the beauty of God" (p. 379).

Some Sufis went so far as to believe that God takes up residence in people (*ḥolul*), particularly in beautiful ones, and therefore it is possible to see and worship God here and now (see Ritter, pp. 463-72 for a full discussion of the concept).

Sirus Šamisa also discusses the subject at length, taking up the case of each of the leading Sufis separately and quoting from their works in a chapter called "The Sufis and Love Affairs with Šāheds" (*Ṣufiān wa šāhed-bāzi*, pp. 94-141). Zangi, who has been cited before, expounds on the legitimacy of love for a male beloved (p. 139) and says:

"And it is said that when God . . . wants to honor a worshiper with the robe of true love and put the real crown of love on his head, He will make him fall in earthly love (*ʿešq-e majāzi*) so that he would learn the ways of being a lover . . . and passes from the raw stage of desiring attention to the ripeness of (spiritual) supplication" (*az ḵāmi-e nāz be poḵtegi-e niāz berasand*; ibid., p. 139).

There were also Sufis who frowned upon revering and forming emotional bonds with pretty faces. Among them were Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAli Hojviri (d. between 1072 and 1077), the author of the important Sufi work *Kašf al-maḥjub* (Uncovering the veiled), Ebn Jawzi (d. 1201), Abu'l-Qāsem Qošayri (d. 1072), Ahmad-e Jām (Žendapil, d. 1239), Moḥammad Ḡazāli, possibly Rumi, Šams of Tabriz, and Šehāb al-Din Sohravardi (d. 1235). Perhaps the most revealing work about the various views and practices among the Sufis concerning revering šāheds and forming emotional ties with them is Abul'l-Faraj Ebn al-Jawzi's *Talbis Eblis* ("Naqdu'l-ʿelm wa'l-ʿolamā," summarized in Šamisa, pp. 128-39).

As a typical Sufi poet Attar, in his narrative works, exalts earthly love as a prelude and a preparatory stage to spiritual love. From his anecdotes, it is clear that earthly love is never devoid of a spiritual aspect. In love, the beloved becomes supreme; the lover lets himself be ruled by his beloved and sacrifices everything to his love. Even when the beloved is a slave, love annuls the status of bondage (see Ritter, p. 378) and turns a princely lover into an obedient slave

of the beloved. Attar exemplifies the total devotion of the lover to the beloved, in a number of love stories where the beloved is mostly a youth. For instance, one day sultan Maḥmud of Ḡazna asks Ayāz, his famous beloved, whether he knows a king greater and more powerful than he. Ayāz responds "Yes, I am a greater king than you." When the king asks for proof, he says: because even though you are king, your heart rules you, and this slave is the king of your heart (*Elāhi-nāma*, pp. 183-84). Attar in fact makes much of the legend of Sultan Maḥmud and Ayāz. In *Elāhi-nāma* alone he includes eight stories about their love and the depth of affection and mutual devotion between them (pp. 101, 105, 107, 109, 123, 140, 252, 257).

Attar also employs stories of heterosexual love to bring home the irresistible power of love, the most famous being the story of Shaikh Ṣanʿān (or Samʿān), who falls in love with a Christian girl and degrades himself to the point of becoming a swineherd before he eventually returns to his pious position (pp. 57-75 in English tr. by Dick Davis; pp. 108-45 in English tr. by Peter Avery; see also Ritter, pp. 400-401); the most frequent, however, is that of Layli and Majnun; but it is the love between a man and a youth which forms the bulk of the love stories used by him, among them the story of Shaikh Ali Rudbāri, who falls in love with a handsome youth in a bathhouse (*Elāhi-nāma*, p. 233), the story of the Sufi who falls in love with the beautiful son of a vizier (ibid., pp. 62-63), and the story of a troop leader (*sarhang*) who falls in love with the young son of a king (ibid., pp. 64-68).

THE GENESIS OF THE ACCEPTANCE OF HOMOSEXUALITY

For the origins of homoerotic love and its prevalence in Persia and elsewhere we do not have to go far. Perhaps the most sensible explanation is offered by Zangi, who, after relating the burning love of a dervish for a young prince, says: "This is an old custom and a recognized habit which is embedded in human nature" (p. 136). The public acceptance of homoerotic love in Persian literature, more particularly in Khorasan and Transoxiana during the 10th-12th centuries, in spite of strong religious prohibition in both pre-Islamic and Islamic Persia, however, requires an explanation. In pre-Islamic Persia the harsh punishment foreseen for homosexuality attests to its existence, but there is no evidence of its reflection in pre-Islamic "literature." The romances in classical Persian literature based on Parthian and Middle Persian originals such as Faḵr-al-Din Gorgāni's *Vis o Rāmin*, ʿAyyuqi's *Waraqa o Golšāh*, ʿOnsori's *Vāmeq o ʿAḏrā*, Neẓāmi's *Ḵosrow o Širin* and *Haft Peykar*, and possibly Attar's *Ḵosrow-nāma* all treat of heterosexual love with no hint of homosexuality. Nor

can any trace of homosexual love be found in the entire *Šāh-nāma*, which includes several romances such as *Zāl o Rudāba, Rostam o Tahmina, Bižan o Maniža*, and the infatuation of Sudāba for Siāvaš. Yet in New Persian poetry homoerotic love explodes in a surprising manner that attests to its wide currency and clear acceptability, particularly in court circles and among the court poets.

Different views have been expressed as to the reasons for the exuberance of homosexual love in Khorasanian poetry. According to Ṯaʿālebi, Jāḥeẓ believed that its spread in Khorasan was the result of frequent wars and raids in which Khorasanians often took part; unable to take their wives with them, they were accompanied by their male dependents and slaves (quoted by Ṯaʿālebi in *Ṯemār al-qolub*, Cairo, ed. 1965, p. 553, apud Šafiʿi-Kadkani, *Ṣowar-e ḵiāl*, p. 236). Šamisā expresses the view that homosexual love was prevalent among the Turks and was introduced by them to Persia (p. 15)—an opinion for which no clear evidence is adduced. It should be noted that its popularity in Persian poetry cannot be attributed to the influence of Arabic culture or poetry, since the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is devoid of it, even though the practice was known in the Yemen. There is a possibility that Greek colonies in northeastern Persia during the Hellenistic period had a share in removing or reducing the stigma of homosexual love and making it socially acceptable, whereas in southern Persia, a bastion of Zoroastrianism, and where a good deal of Zoroastrian writings originated, the situation was different.

Considering the fact that Manichean, and later Buddhist, monasteries spread in greater Khorasan and Transoxiana, it is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that such monasteries, occupied only by male members, gave rise, without social stigma, to the kind of emotional attachments that some of the Sufis have defended or advocated. The fact that among the most common words for the beloved are *bot* “idol” (derived from Buddha), *ṣanam* “idol,” both reminiscent of Buddhist culture, and *negār* “painted or drawn picture,” associated mostly with the Manichean painting and the artists of China, (i.e., Chinese Turkestan) may strengthen the assumption, although the Manichean and Buddhist Iranian literatures do not provide any evidence for the supposition (what Ritter quotes, pp. 468-69, from the apostate Abu Šakur concerning some Manichean beliefs does not provide any proof since what Abu Šakur says about šāhed does not necessarily indicate a beautiful youth, and is not corroborated by Manichean writings). As our knowledge of the social history of Khorasan, Transoxiana, and Afghanistan prior to Islam is

meager, such suggestions remain only speculative.

HOMOEROTICISM IN SUFI LITERATURE

That emotional ties should develop between Sufi mentors (*pir*s) and their young disciples in the Sufi hospices (*ḵānaqāh*s) is only natural, given the widespread tendency toward homoeroticism and its social acceptance on the one hand, and the exclusion of women from *ḵānaqāh*s, on the other. How far these ties went and whether they led to physical exploitation of the amatory feelings is a moot point. The Sufis explained such religiously suspect relationships by putting a Sufi interpretation on them. In Sufi Persian literature we find a good deal of discussion about both the approval and appreciation of the love of pretty faces and beautiful youths (*šāhed,* lit. "witness," which developed a secondary meaning as a "beautiful youth" on the grounds that he was a "witness" to divine beauty), as well as admonitions and arguments against it (for a full discussion of šāheds and God manifesting Himself in beautiful ones according to some Sufis, see Ritter pp. 484-517). With the spread of pantheistic philosophy in Iran, a great many Sufis adhered to the notion that human beauty was an instance or the manifestation of divine beauty, or rather explained their proclivity to contemplate and pay homage to earthly beauty as having recourse to the limited and ephemeral in order to reach the absolute and ever lasting. They argued that appreciating earthly beauty paved the way to the contemplation of divine beauty and served as a bridge to the love of the divine. Among the leading Sufis who subscribed to this notion and defended it were Aḥmad Ḡazāli (d. ca. 1123, q.v., the author of *Sawāneḥ*, a major mystical work); ʿAin-al-Qożāt, Attar, Awḥad-al-Din of Kermān (635/1237), Faḵr-al-Din ʿErāqi (d. 1289, q.v.). For a discussion of their views and arguments see Foruzānfar, *Šarḥ-e maṯnawi,* p. 1170; Šamisā, pp. 97-113.

In mystical *ghazal*s such as those by ʿErāqi, Attar, Rumi (b. 1207), and Qāsem-al-Anwār (d. 1433) or in ghazals on which the mystically-minded readers place a Sufistic interpretation, the beauty of the šāhed is taken to be an earthly representation of divine beauty. Such interpretations are generally derived from the Sufi philosophy of pantheism (*waḥdat al-wojud,* "unity of being"), which, following the doctrine of ʿEbn al-ʿArabi (q.v.), became very popular in Persia and in the countries influenced by Persian culture such as Turkey and India.

STUDIES OF THE REPRESENTATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

In spite of the transparency of homoerotic love in the lyrical preludes of the qasidas in the 10th-12th centuries, in the ghazals and *robāʿi*s of the ʿErāqi school, notably Saʿdi and Hafez, and later in the poems of the Safavid school and Indian style, as in many occasional poems (*qatáaʿāt*), it is surprising that among historians of Persian literature, from Hermann Ethé (q.v.), E. G. Browne (q.v.), A. J. Arberry (q.v.), and Jan Rypka, to Badiʿ-al-Zamān Foruzānfar (q.v.), Moḥammad-Taqi Bahār (q.v.), Ḏabiḥ-Allāh Ṣafā (q.v.), and ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Zarrinkub, none has broached the issue as such and discussed the implications of homosexual love in the development of the motifs, images, and metaphors in Persian poetry. Even after Ehsan Yarshater discussed it in 1955 under the heading of "*maʿšuq zan nist*" (the beloved is not a woman) in his *Šeʿr-e fārsi dar ʿahd-e Šāhroḵ* (Persian poetry in the reign of Šāhroḵ), neither Ṣafā nor Rypka took up the issue in their excellent and well-known histories of Persian literature. Much earlier, of course, the violent outbursts of Aḥmad Kasravi (d. 1946) had been published; and his diatribes against major figures of Persian literature (with the exception of Ferdowsi) went hand in hand with his homophobia and gave rise to vehement attacks on poets, Sufis, homosexuals, and modern advocates of classical Persian poetry, including Moḥammad-ʿAli Fo-ruḡi, ʿAli Aṣḡar Ḥekmat, Qāsem Ḡani (qq.v.), Sayyad Ḥassan Taqizādeh, and Ḡolām-ʿAli Raʿdi-Āḏaraḵši and Sufi writings (see for instance *Dar pirāmun-e adabiyāt*, Tehran, 1944, pp. 131-33, 141, 155).

Already in 1955, Hellmut Ritter had amply discussed earthly love and the emotional ties of some Sufis to Šāheds in his *Das Meer der Seele* (English tr., pp. 360-500), but he did not go into its influence on Persian literature. Among later literary historians, only Moḥammad-Reża Šafiʿi-Kadkani in his *Ṣowar-e ḵiāl dar šeʿr-e fārsi* (Imagery in Persian poetry, 1971) discussed the question under the rubric of the "military color of lyrical imagery" (*rang-e sepāhi-e taṣwirhā-ye ḡēnāʾi*, pp. 205-45). Recently, however, Šamisā, a literary scholar, has dedicated a volume to the subject: *Šāhed-bāzi dar adabiyāt-e fārsi* (Homosexual love in Persian literature, 2002) in which he discusses various aspects of the subject and in which he has assiduously brought together ample examples from Persian poetry and prose.

The neglect of, or rather, the omission of and silence about, the subject has been apparently due to a number of causes, including general currents of homophobia in both the West and modern Persia, aggravated perhaps by the translation and discussion of accounts of earlier European travelers and writers on Persia and the Middle East, who had emphasized the strong

element of homoeroticism in the East. The fact that in the Persian language grammatical gender is not distinguished and the 3rd person pronouns *u* and *ān* may refer to either male or female antecedents has helped to gloss over and obfuscate the true intent of Persian lyrics, even though the *ḵaṭṭ* and other indications of the maleness of the beloved discussed above are clear enough for everyone to see. Recently, however, the growing refusal of gays and lesbians to accept a clandestine existence and the resultant visibility of gay culture has led some writers in the West to pay attention also to the widespread currency of pederasty in the Middle East. Among these authors one may mention Minoo Southgate, pp. 413-52 and S. Murray, pp. 132-41).

THE TREND IN MODERN IRAN Modern Persian poetry belongs to a climate strongly influenced by Western notions, and as a consequence homoerotic poems have practically disappeared. It is heterosexual love which now has the field, as evidenced by a number of erotic poems written by, among others, Forūḡ Farroḵzād, Nāder Nāderpur, and Simin Behba-hāni, all major poets of the 20th century. It is possible, though, that with the emergence of important gay and lesbian writers and poets and their translation into Persian, in addition to the spread of more liberal attitudes toward homosexuality in the West, exemplified by the drive towards gay marriages in the U.S., modern Persian literature would be more expressive of homoerotic love, if not in Persia itself, then at least in the Diaspora. Already a Persian periodical, *Humān,* devoted to gay culture has been published in Sweden since 1991.

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