



JAZIRI

JAZIRI, SHAIKH AḤMAD, or Malâ-ye Jizrî, early Kurdish poet. Even today, very little is known about the earliest Kurdish poets. The oldest source of information on Malâ-ye Jizrî is a chapter by the scholar Maḥmud Efendi Bâyezidi, written at the request of Alexandre Jaba, Russian Consul in Erzurum, who published it in his *Recueil de Notices et Récits sur la langue kourmandji* (1860). There we learn that his name was Shaykh Aḥmad and that he came from Jazira Bohtân (or Bukhtân), a prosperous river port which was situated on a former meander of the Tigris. Maḥmud Bâyezidi claimed that Malâ-ye Jizrî lived in the 6th century A.H. Subsequently, scholars proposed various dates until D. N. MacKenzie established (1969, p. 129) that the poet was born ca. 1570 and died ca. 1640.

The oral tradition gives his name as Aḥmad Nishâni. He is said to have begun his studies in Jazira, his native town, and continued in Irak (Baghdad), Syria, Egypt, and finally Persia, where he studied philosophy, astrology, and divination. There he also became familiar with the Persian poets and most particularly, with the great Hafez (q.v.), under whose influence he fell. He then returned to his own country, first establishing himself in Diyarbekir, where he taught, and later in Jazira, where he remained for the rest of his life. He is buried in the Madrasa Sor, which has since been destroyed by the Turkish military. According to Maḥmud Bâyezidi, Malâ fell in love with the sister of Prince 'Ezz-al-Din of Bukhtân, to whom he devoted many ghazals.

Malâ-ye Jizrî, like other learned men of the period, knew Arabic and Persian. However, he chose to express himself in Kurdish Kurmanji, the prince's



language. Indeed, the earliest masterpieces of Kurdish literature emerged at the same time as the consolidation of the Ottoman and Safavid empires, when the Kurds, in contrast, failed to establish their own state. Malâ left a *diwân* of nearly 2,000 verses, and, although the published manuscripts reveal many differences in the texts and in the order of the poems, Malâ's poetry gives evidence of a well-established technique. The poet, adopting the basic forms of Arab-Persian poetry, had at his disposal a variety of genres and stylistic means. Knowledge of Arabic enabled Malâ to use the distich (*bayt*), in which the two hemistiches answer each other, as in Persian poetry. He also adopted the meter most frequently used by Hafez in his ghazals: -- o o --- o - o - o o (to be read from right to left).

His lyric poetry and ghazals, imbued with a mystical spirit, were inspired by the Sufism of the Naqshbandiya Brotherhood (Order), which dominated the Muslim East at that time. Thus, following the example of his model, Malâ sang of pure love, the wine of ecstasy, metaphysical rapture, and the joys and sufferings of mystical love.

Though Malâ-ye Jizrî's poetry is learned, his many borrowings from Arabic and Persian did nothing to make him popular. His work is still accessible only to men of letters—shaykhs and mullahs, who continue to comment on it in the increasingly rare madrasas of Kurdistan.

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