



KALIM KĀŠĀNI

KALIM KĀŠĀNI, Abu Ṭāleb (b. Hamadān, ca. 990-94/1581-85; d. Kashmir, 15 Du'l-ḥejja 1061/28 November 1651), Persian poet and one of the leading exponents of the so-called Indian style (*sabk-e hendi*).

Life. All major *tadkeras* agree on a number of essential facts about Kalim's life. He was born in Hamadān but soon moved to Kāšān, hence his *nesba* Hamadāni or Kāšāni. He studied at Kāšān and Shiraz before going to the Deccan to seek his fortune at the Indian courts. This was the age of the Mughal Emperor Jahāngir (r. 1605-27). Although Kalim did not enter the court, he became friends with Šāhnavāz Khan of Shiraz (d. 1611), a court official to Ebrāhim 'Ādelšāh II, the ruler of Bijāpur (q.v.; for the events of this troubled period, see 'Ābedi, 1983, pp. 209-10; Šebli No'māni, III, pp. 173-74; Ṣafari, 1985, pp. 104-5). His first stay in India did not bring the success he sought, and was even imprisoned on the suspicion of being a spy (*Divān*, ed. Qahremān, pp. 103-104). In 1619 he returned to Persia, placing high hopes in Persian patrons. He settled for two years at Isfahan, but won neither fame nor adequate recognition. In some poems he complains about the hardship he had to bear on the return journey to his native land, which did not yield the hoped-for benefits.

Nostalgic for India (his genuine fondness of this country often comes through in his verse), he returned in 1621, and until 1628 he was at Agra in the service of Mir Jomla of Šahrestān (he, too, a poet with the *takalloṣ* or pen name of Ruḥ-al-Amin), whom he addressed in several panegyrics. In 1628, thanks to some encomiastic and chronograms dedicated to Abu-al-Ḥasan Āṣaf Khan, he



became a member of the court of Shah Jahān (r. 1628-58), who in the meantime had become emperor. Kalim won the favor of the sovereign so much that in 1632 he was given the title of *Malek al-šo'arā* (poet laureate), previously bestowed on another two great exponents of the Indian style: Ṭāleb of Āmol and Qodsi of Mašhad. As court poet, he narrated in his *qašidas* the most significant events in the life of the sovereign and his family.

He was formally commissioned by Shah Jahān himself to compose a poem immortalizing the emperor's realm. Kalim thus dedicated the last years of his literary activity to composing a *maṭnawi* entitled *Šāh-nāma*, at times also referred to with the title *Ẓafar-nāma-ye šāh-jahāni*, *Šāh-nāma-ye Kalim*, *Šāh-Jahān-nāma*, or *Pādšāh-nāma* (his predecessor Qodsi of Mašhad had also composed a work on the same theme). In almost 15,000 lines this work narrates the most important events from Shah Jahān's birth up to the first ten years of his reign. Today still unpublished, this work was never actually completed and its value is rather historical than poetic. To devote himself to composing the *maṭnawi*, Kalim was given permission by the sovereign to reside in Kashmir. The poet was particularly fond of this region (as evidenced by some poems; see *Divān*, ed. Qahremān, pp. 50, 71, 174, 196), where the climate was beneficial to his health (in two *qašidas* and two *qeṭ'as* he complained about ailments affecting his legs). Until his death in 1651, he continued to live in Kashmir, where he was then buried. Kalim was contemporary with many other poets (for a complete list, see his *Divān*, ed. Qahremān, pp. si-siodo). Some were celebrated names, such as Salim Ṭehrāni, Qodsi Mašhadi, Ṭāleb Āmoli, and Šā'eb Tabrizi (qq.v.). According to what has been handed down by the *taḍkeras* and some of his own verses, he revered these poets and was a friend of them.

Works. Kalim's poetical works amount to just over 24,000 lines, comprising around 15,000 couplets in the *Šāh-nāma* and about 9,500 couplets collected in his *Divān*. The *Divān* edited by Moḥammad Qahremān contains 36 *qašidas* (odes), 2 *tarkib-bands* (stanzaic or strophic poem), 1 *tarji'-band* (a poem with a refrain), 32 *qeṭ'as* (occasional poem), 33 *tāriḳs* (chronograms), 28 short *maṭnawis* (rhyming couplets), 590 *ḡazals* (lyrics), and 102 *robā'is* (quatrains), making a total of 9,823 couplets.

Kalim successfully used all the current poetic genres; his *qašidas* are considered to be very balanced and his *maṭnawis* are pleasant and measured; he was very skilled in constructing chronograms, but his fame is mainly due to his *ḡazals*, and he is considered as one of the masters of this genre. The *ḡazal*



was in fact the favorite genre of all the poets of the Indian style in a historic-cultural context in which the *qaṣida* was perceived by the contemporary poets to be mannered and unsuitable for experiments in form and content. Kalim's *gāzals* are fairly regular in length, consisting of an average of nine lines. Although there is very often a *radif* (word or phrase repeated after the rhyme), it is not very long and only in eleven *gāzals* does the *radif* have a noun. Overall his style is characterized by new themes and new contents, revealing an incisive poetic fantasy and creativity in line with the other poets writing in the same style. Šebli No'māni (III, pp. 182-83) describes him as the initiator and master of the *maṭāliā*, that is the art of introducing illustrative reasoning, or argument by illustration or analogy to enhance the context of the phenomena being handled.

Recognized as having a powerful imagination, he mainly expresses himself in original metaphors, new comparisons, and refined, fantastic etiologies. He is also described as an artist capable of making traditionally non-poetic themes poetic. His accurate descriptions reveal a remarkable eye for detail and acute powers of observation. The deliberate focus on creating new meanings (he was in fact dubbed, by the critic and biographer Moḥammad-Ṭāher Naṣrābādī, p. 220, as *Kallāq al-ma'āni-e ṭāni* "second creator of meanings," after the 13th-century poet Kamāl-al-Din Esmā'il) was often stressed by the poet himself, who claimed that it was unacceptable for him to use again an image he had already elaborated, which he called stealing ("dozdi"; see *Divān*, ed. Qahremān, *gāzal* no. 535). In a certain sense, his decidedly small poetic output (compared to the *divān* of his contemporaries) confirms this quest for new themes rather than the re-elaboration of well-known contents. According to the critics, however, this experimentation is never to the detriment of sincere expression and the profundity of his existential thought (see Šams Langarudi, 1993, pp. 122-25). His cultural, as well as emotional, integration in the Indian context is highlighted by his frequent use of Hindi words as well as by several poems expressing his fondness of that country.

Kalim's poetry has been both praised and criticized for a variety of reasons (Ābedi, 1983, pp. 87-88; Ṣafā, V, pp. 1175-76). He has been reproached for a certain formal carelessness, an occasional lack of syntactical rigor, the use of words outside the poetic register, a degree of redundancy in some words and phrases, and the presence of contradictory statements and consequent conceptual incoherence. Besides, some of his new analogies are seen as being excessively contrived. Although the assessments of his poetry were always



conditioned by a comparison with the works of Šā‘eb of Tabriz (q.v.; the critics concur in judging Šā‘eb works to be superior), all the *taḍkeras* express positive opinions on his work (except for Āḍar Bigdeli, *Āteškada-ye Āḍar*, ed. Mir Hāšem Moḥaddet, Tehran, 199, pp. 47-51, whose aversion to the poets of the Indian style is well known), and the critics acknowledge his significant, original contribution to the development of the Indian style.

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