



KAMĀL-AL-DIN EŞFAHĀNI

KAMĀL-AL-DIN EŞFAHĀNI, (b. ca. 568/1172-73; d. ca. 635/1237), poet from Isfahan, noted for his mastery of the panegyric. His full name is given by Ebn al-Fowaṭi as Kamāl-al-Din Abu'l-Faẓl Esmā'il b. Abi Moḥammad 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Abd-al-Razzāq al-Eşfahāni (IV, p. 149). Other titles (*laqabs*) can be found in a letter addressed to the poet by one of his contemporaries (Şafi'i-Kadkani, p. 4). From the Timurid era onwards, Kamāl-al-Din has also been called *Kallāq al-ma'āni*, "creator of intricate meanings" (Dawlatşāh, p. 164; Jāmi, p. 104).

His father, [Jamāl-al-Din Moḥammad Eşfahāni](#), was a celebrated poet of Isfahan in the second half of the 12th century and a panegyrist of the well-established Ḥanafī family, the Şā'eds. Since the poet himself states that he was barely 20 years old at the time of his father's death (*Divān*, p. 136, v. 2232), he must have been born around 1172-73. He began to compose poetry in his youth (as early as 1189-90, and perhaps even 1186-87), when he was only 14 (Baḥr-al-'Olumi, pp. lxxiii-lxxiv). In these he displayed such precocious talents that doubts were raised about his authorship of the verses. However, the excellence of the elegy (*marṭiya*) that he had composed on the death of his father silenced his critics and established him as the major poet of the city. Kamāl-al-Din sought the patronage of his father's patron, Rokn-al-Din Abu'l-'Alā' Şā'ed (d. 1203-04), and through his bounty was able to complete his education. His poetry shows him acquainted with Islamic jurisprudence (*feqh*), philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and Arabic. A short Arabic treatise of his on archery, *Resālat al-qaws*, has survived (Baḥr-al-'Olumi, pp. cv-cxiii). He himself points



out that he is not only a poet, but also a savant (*‘ālem*), a specialist in law (*faqih*), and an *adib* (*Divān*, p. 361, vv. 6160-61).

Kamāl-al-Din often complains about being neglected by his patrons and suffering financial hardship as a result. Nevertheless, he remained in the service of the Sā‘eds until his death.

Although his talents would have surely enabled him to find a position in a royal court elsewhere, he spent most of his life in Isfahan. He visited Rayy, Ṭabarestān, and Khwarazm, which, like Isfahan, were under the rule of the [Khwarazmshahs](#) during most of his lifetime. His pilgrimage to Mecca remains a matter of conjecture, in spite of a possible reference to it in the collection of documents, *Moḳtārāt men al-rasā‘el* (pp. 134-35; Glünz, 1993, p. 14). He describes his joy at getting married (*Divān*, p. 296, vv. 5017-24), apparently quite late in life, but the loss of his beloved son ‘Ali, who drowned during a trip, caused him deep sorrow (*Divān*, p. 429). Kamāl-al-Din also suffered from various ailments, such as ophthalmia (*ramad*) and scabies (*jarab*). Another source of disquiet was the worsening situation in western Persia (Jebāl) after the collapse of Saljuq rule, when the poet witnessed famines, depicted by him in a poignant elegiac ode with the *radif* (end line refrain) *gorosna* “hungry” (*Divān*, pp. 501-4). He also witnessed injustice, expressing his anger at the confiscation of a piece of land near Isfahan (*Divān*, p. 508). He was, above all, distressed at the ongoing sectarian strife (*fetna*) between the Hanafites and Shafe‘ites, which devastated the city (Glünz, 1987, pp. 78-81; Durand-Guédy, 2010, pp. 219-20, 254-55). Appalled at these religious quarrels, he refused to acknowledge his religious affiliation (*maḏhab*; *Divān*, p. 472, v. 8113). Nonetheless, Kamāl-al-Din was clearly a Hanafite, as were both his father and the Šā‘eds. Even though he wrote verses praising the family of the Prophet Moḥammad and deploring the killing of the Prophet’s grandson [Ḥosayn](#), he cannot be considered to have been a Shi‘ite. Some have seen a contradiction between, on the one hand, his propensity towards asceticism (*zohd*) in numerous verses, and his praise of worldly pleasures and men of power, on the other (Masrur, p. 107; Rypka, p. 214). It appears, however, that at the end of his life the poet did embrace a more ascetic way of life—an ideal that his father also stressed in his work but never realized in his life. The great mystic Abu Ḥafṣ Šehāb-al-Din Sohravardi called him his “seeking brother” in a letter (Baḥr-al-‘Olumi, pp. ix-x), and according to Dawlatšāh (p. 168) he retreated to a hermitage (*zāwiya*) near Isfahan and donned the Sufi robe. No doubt this



decision was hastened by the breakdown of the truce between the Ḥanafites and the Shafe'ites, probably at the time of the death of [Khwarzamshah Jalāl-al-Din Mengübirni](#) (1231) and the onset of the Mongol invasion. After surviving the capture of the city, Kamāl-al-Din was apparently tortured and killed by the Mongol soldiers on 2 Jomādi I 635/21 December 1237 (Dawlatšāh, p. 169; the date of 635 is first given by Ebn al-Fowaṭi, IV, p. 129). His tomb still exists in the old district of Jubāra, but plans to construct a more impressive mausoleum during the Pahlavi era never materialized.

Kamāl-al-Din is said to have composed some 20,000 verses (Ebn al-Fowaṭi, IV, p. 129), but in Baḥr-al-‘Olumi’s edition there are only 15,000 (see the bibliography below for subsequent additional findings). His Arabic poetry, if it ever existed, has been lost. Kamāl-al-Din wrote *tarkib-bands*, *qeṭ‘as*, *ḡazals*, *robā‘īs*, and *qaṣidas*. However, he did not (*pace* Jan Rypka, p. 214) write a *maṭnawi* (an apparent confusion with the 13th-century mystic Kamāl-al-Din ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Kāšāni, based on Ritter, p. 105, n. 20). The bulk of Kamāl-al-Din’s *Divān* is comprised of mystical, exhortatory—and most importantly—eulogistic panegyrics. These are dedicated to various praised patrons (*mamduḥs*), 41 in total, who can be classified in four categories: (1) kings and emirs such as the [Khwarazmshahs Tekiṣ b. Il-Arslān](#), Jalāl-al-Din Mengübirni, and his brother Ġiāt-al-Din Piršāh; the Atabeg of Fārs Sa‘d b. Zengi and his son Abu Bakr; the Šabānkārā ruler Moḡaffar-al-Din b. Mobārez; the Bavandid heir Šaraf-al-Moluk Ḥasan; the Pahlavān mamluks Ay-Toḡmiš and Mengli; the Khwarazmian governor of Isfahan, Noṣrat-al-Din Ebn Karmil (on these figures, see Durand-Guédy, 2010; (2) Persian civil servants, mostly viziers of the Khwarazmshahs in Isfahan; (3) notables of Isfahan, mainly the Šā‘eds (Abu’l-‘Alā’ and his son Mas‘ud— Kamāl-al-Din composed 33 and 32 poems for them respectively), but also the Koḡandis, probably during the truce between the two factions; (4) others, including poets and mystics.

Kamāl-al-Din paid tribute to the older masters of the Persian panegyric, such as Sanā‘i and [Anwari](#), but he thought that no other contemporary poet had mastered the craft (*ṣan‘at*) of poetry as well as he (*Divān*, p. 335, v. 5689), especially in inducing *ma‘āni* “intricate meanings” (*Divān*, p. 266, v. 4514). Indeed, his virtuosity manifests itself through his choice of rare and awkward words in the *radif* (such as *ramad*) of very long panegyrics, and also by his capacity to bring fresh, mostly original, topics (*maḏmun*) into each verse (Glünz, 1993, pp. 153-255). Although his poems may not have been fully appreciated by his patrons, his talent brought him posthumous fame. Authors



as varied as Nāşir-al-Din Ṭusi, ‘Aṭā-Malek Jovayni, and Ruzbehān Ḳonji quoted his verses (a complete list of quotations in Baḥr-al-‘Olumi, p. lxxvi). Hafez (p. 1039) mentioned his name in a poem where he ‘responded’ to one of his panegyrics (Mo‘in, p. 35), and so did Salmān Sāvaji. Jāmi claims that no other poet has reached such a degree of refinement, though he also points to the concomitant loss of clarity (p. 104). Moreover, Kamāl-al-Din exerted a long lasting influence over future generations of panegyrists writing in Persian and Turkish, which continued well into the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Bayāzid II (Glünz, 1996, p. 51). In modern times, Kamāl-al-Din has long been considered as a “second-rate poet” (Nafisi, p. 158). However, recent scholarship has contributed to establishing him as a pioneer of the ‘Erāqi style (*sabk-e ‘erāqi*), and perhaps even as a forerunner of the Indian style (*sabk-e hendi*, Glünz, 1993, p. 28).

Editions and translations. The first editions of Kamāl-al-Din’s *Divān* were printed in India, first by Malek-al-Kottāb (in 208 pages, n.d.), then as a facsimile of the copy of M. ‘Ali Kaşkul-e Şirāzi (Bombay, 1889-90; repr. Tehran, 1997-98 with an index of the verses). A critical edition of the *Divān* based on seven manuscripts and containing about 15,000 verses with an extensive introduction was compiled by Ḥoseyn Baḥr-al-‘Olumi (Tehran, 1970). Fragments attributed to Kamāl-al-Din have been published subsequently (Şarvāni; ‘Ābedi). Kamāl-al-Din’s poetry has been translated into English (Gray and Mumford), French (Şafā), and German (Glünz 1993).

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