



## ĶAMRIYA

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**ĶAMRIYA** (pl. *ķamriyāt*), derived from the Arabic *ķamr*, wine, technically applied to poems with thematic contents chiefly about wine, wine-making, wine-drinking, and its various other aspects.

*Background.* In addressing the typology of poetry, Ḥosayn Wā'eż Kāšefi (d. 910/1504-5) defines *ķamriyāt* as “poems describing the attributes and states of wine, the beauty of the cupbearer’s face, and the ambience of wine gatherings” (p. 37; see also Mo’taman, p. 224). This article focuses on the first of these characteristics; for the second see [SAQI-NĀMA](#). Synonyms for *ķamr* used in Persian with varying frequency are *bāda*, *may* (more commonly in today’s Persian, *mey*), *šarāb*, *nabiđ*, *mol*, *šahbā’*, and *begmāz*. The number of its Arabic equivalents, a few of which, such as *rāḥ* and *raḥiq*, are also used in Persian poetry, rather infrequently though, goes well beyond one hundred (see Deḥķodā, s.v. *ķamr*, *bāda*, *šarāb*). From its early stages of development in the latter half of the 9th century, Persian poetry contained several anacreontic themes. However, the tendency toward composing wine poetry in the Islamic era could not have happened overnight nor could it be attributed wholly to the influence from Arabic poetry, as might incorrectly be assumed (e.g., Rastegār Fasā’i, 2009, III, pp. 52-53). Of course, geographical proximity and cultural exchange between Iran and the Arab world, especially following the Arab conquest of Iran and the rise of Islam there as its dominant religion, did help Persian poetry receive certain elements from Arabic literature, causing some measure of imitation on the part of Iranians (Daudpota, p. 163; Yamin, p. 63; Maḥjub, p. 91). Umar M. Daudpota (pp. 133-44) maintains that in wine-poetry,



as in other genres, Arabic poets were the models for Iranian poets. He substantiates his argument by juxtaposing Arabic poems with those written in Persian under their influence. The following verse by Abu 'Obāda Boḥtori (d. 284/897) is just one of many examples:

*Yokfi al-zojāja lawnohā faka'annahā*

*Fi'l-kaff qā'ematon be-ḡayr enā'en.*

Its (of wine) color hides the glass, so that it seems

To stand on the palm without a vessel (tr. Daudpota, p. 139).

According to Daudpota, several Iranian poets have rendered this conceit in Persian verse, including [Kesā'i Marvazi](#):

*Ān šāfi-ī ke čun be kaf-e dast bar nehi,*

*Kaf az qadaḥ nadāni ni az qadaḥ nabiḍ.*

So clear it is that when you put it on the palm of your hand,

You will neither know the palm from the cup, nor the cup from the

wine (tr. Daudpota, p. 139).

Nonetheless, this all could be related mainly to formal features and a limited amount of anacreontic motifs, not to the essence of the relation between poetry and wine, something rooted in the long history of humans, as they are both somehow connected with the excitement and thrill of the soul and the departure of man's self from his selfhood into the world of "the unconventional." A study of the myths and tradition of various peoples bears witness to their beliefs in the mystical effects of wine and the significance of vines in their daily life (Lesān, p. 48; Ṣadiqi, pp. 49-50; Mo'in, 1945, pp. 52-54; Yamin, p. 70).

Historical facts bear witness to the prevalence of wine and wine-drinking in ancient Iran (see Daryae, pp. 42-43), as does Iranian mythology. According to [Abu'l-Qāsem Ferdowsi](#), [Jamšid](#) was the first Pišdādi king who had a wine-drinking table set up (I, p. 44, verse 54). In his *Lobāb al-albāb*, [Sadid al-Din 'Awfi](#) states, "It is said that wine came into being in Jamšid's reign" ('Awfi, I, pp. 21-25; see also Rāwandi, pp. 432-34). In a fascinating ode, the poet Manučehri (d. 432/1041) speaks of wine as "Jamšid's daughter, who had been imprisoned in the Zoroastrians' house for 700 to 800 years, and now the poet is setting it

free from prison” (pp. 143-45; see also *Nowruz-nāma*, pp. 65-70, quoted in Mo’in, 1959, I, pp. 440, 447, 450-51; Jonaydi, pp. 4-7).

Given the long record of Iranians’ interest in wine, it is no wonder that it came to be one of the favorite themes of poets from the very beginning. Manuĉehri’s poem on making wine for the celebration of the *Mehragān* feast (pp. 197-205) and the fact that *Kaykāvus b. Eskandar ‘Onsor-al-Ma’ali* (pp. 67-70), *Nezām-al-Molk* (pp. 173-74), and Moĥammad b. ‘Ali Rāwandi (pp. 416-28) each devoted a separate chapter to the etiquettes to be observed at wine-drinking gatherings all demonstrate that the early Persian composers of wine poems had fair knowledge of the custom of wine making and wine drinking in the remote time of Iran’s long history. Conceding the Arabic influence on Persian wine poetry, especially during the spread in Iran of Arabic language and literature in the Omayyad and early ‘Abbasid caliphate (for more information on this, see Yamin, pp. 66-69; al-Kik, pp. 52-61; for a fairly comprehensive scholarly analysis of Arabic wine poetry from the Jāheliya to the early ‘Abbasid period, see Kennedy), it is also noteworthy that some of the major writers of Bacchic poetry in Arabic, such as Abu Nowās of Ahvāz (d. between 198-200/813-15) and Baššār b. Bord (d. 167/783) were Iranian in origin. Some of them even boasted of their Iranian parentage (Daudpota, p. 173). One would be tempted to hypothesize a probable echo across time in these wine-loving poets’ compositions from their wine-loving ancestors.

*Beginning of poetry in Persian.* Recorded evidence shows that the description of wine in the early Islamic era appeared for the first time in the compositions of poets in the Samanid period (250-389/864-999). The first significant and extensive extant piece of wine poetry from this period is the ninety-two distich *qaṣida* by the celebrated poet-musician Rudaki of Samarqand (d. 329/940-41), which became a model for many wine poetry composers after him. This so-called “father of Persian poetry” presents a most delightful and vivid description of wine in its various stages, from the moment that grapes are picked from the vine to the time when their delicious red juice is brought to a magnificent royal gathering at the court of the poet’s patron, the Samanid amir Naṣr b. Aĥmad (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 317-19). Rudaki’s similes and metaphors in describing wine are pleasantly vivid and tangible; for instance, note the following, where he compares wine with a “melted ruby” (tr. Edward Cowell, in Browne, I, p. 45):

Bring me yon wine which thou might’st call a melted ruby in its



cup,  
Or like a scimeter unsheathed, in the sun's noon-tide light held up.  
'Tis the rose-water, thou might'st, say, yea thence distilled for  
purity;  
Its sweetness falls as sleep's own balm steals o'er the vigil-wearied  
eye.

In a relatively few poems remaining from other Samanid poets and those from the early Ghaznavid time, one can see some *kamri* themes expressed in simple charming language, such as two verses by Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Ali Lowkari and in poems written by [Abu-'l-Mo'ayyad Balki](#), [Ṭāher b. Faḏl Čāgāni](#), Abu'l-'Alā' Šuštari, Abu 'Abd-Allāh Moḥammad Jonaydi, Kesā'i Marvazi, [Abu Šakur Balki](#), 'Amāra Marvazi, and Rawnaqi of Bukhara (Šafā, I, pp. 403-8, 421-22, 428-29, 438-39, 441, 446-47, 452; Maḥjub, p. 93). After Rudaki, [Baššār Margāzi](#) seems to have composed one of the finest and most comprehensive descriptions of wine. His well-constructed and beautifully expressed 31-distich poem represents an almost perfect *kamri* ode (see Hušyār, pp. 24-25), which was no doubt one of the models followed by the Ghaznavid wine poet Manučehri Dāmḡāni (for the complete text of Baššār's *kamriya*, see Mo'in, 1955, pp. 51-55; Šafā, I, p. 452). Wine poetry reached its zenith in Manučehri's lively odes (*qašida*) and stanzaic poems (*mosammaṭ*), with their fascinating imagery and expressions for describing grapes, vineyards, the process of making wine, and so on..

Wine poetry after Manučehri did not sustain its wealth and breath as such, but it was never abandoned in Persian poetry; rather, it has preserved its significant place in some way or other up to the present time. In fact, a great portion of Persian poetry (lyrics and love songs, in particular) depends on wine poetry without which it would be of little vigor and spirit. Interestingly enough, whenever the poet speaks of joy and happiness, wine is usually one of the key elements, and conversely, whenever there is a murmur of sorrow, its only cure is wine. The poet finds in it the increase of joy and the decrease of sorrow. In short, some kind of *kamriya* has, to a greater or lesser extent, remained a fixed component of Persian poetry. Even pious poets such as Ḥakim [Sanā'i](#) (d. ca. 525/1130; see Šafi'i Kadkani, pp. 12-13, 28-29, 106-9) and [Kāqāni Šervāni](#) (d. 595/1198; *Kāqāni Šervāni*, I, *qašida* no. 124, of which the entire amatory prologue [*nasib*] is a detailed description of and request for wine; see also his *ġazals*, II, nos 293, 347, 348, 385, 793) sing wine songs.



The introductory part of *qaşidas*, the *nasib*, that contains descriptions of wine, cupbearer (*sāqi*), and wine-drinking gatherings at homes, in rose gardens, or by green fields, has proved to be one of the liveliest and most charming *nasibs* in Persian poetry. Sarāj-al-Din Qomri (d. 687/1228), a poet rather inclined to wine poetry, has devoted the *nasibs* of several of his *qaşidas* (nos 7, 8, 15, 23) to descriptions of wine. The first portion of one of the *qaşidas* of ‘Obayd Zākāni (d. 771/1369) is entirely devoted to wine and its benefits (pp. 61-62). Badr Čāči, a 14th-century poet, composed a lavishly ornate *qaşida* filled with metaphors in praise of the patron’s cup and wine (pp. 33-34). The 577-couplet *matnawi*, entitled “Dastur-nāma,” composed by Nezāri Qohestāni (d. 721/1321), is in reality a versified praise of wine and the etiquette of wine drinking (*Divān*, pp. 264 ff.; see also the editor’s note on p. 254). Among other poets who have demonstrated greater proclivity toward wine poetry and created delightful compositions in this genre mention should be made of Yağmā Jandaqi (d. 1276/1859), in quite a number of his *ğazals* (e.g., nos. 12, 21, 36, 38, 109, 128), and Mirzā Ḥabib Qā’āni (d. 1273/1856), in the *nasibs* of several of his *qaşidas* and some stanzas of his *mosammaṭs*. Among contemporary poets, Moḥammad-Taqi Malek-al-Šo‘arā’ Bahār (d. 1951), in addition to verses in *kamriya* genre here and there, has an extensive *qaşida* modeled in meter and rhyme on Baššār Marğazi’s *kamriya*, entitled “Šab o šarāb” (Night and wine); he has also composed a *qaşida*, called “Waşf-e anğur” (Description of grapes) in the same mood as Rudaki’s *qaşida* mentioned above (Bahār, I, pp. 118-19). There are few *ğazals* in the *Divān* of ‘Emād Korāsāni (d. 2003) in which at least one or two verses are not assigned to wine and wine drinking (see, e.g., pp. 113, 117, 135, 241, 293).

*Poetical forms.* From the very inception of Persian poetry, the motif of wine has been so appealing to poets that it has virtually been used in any conventional verse form. Although *qaşidas* completely dedicated to the theme of wine and wine drinking are relatively few, those with their *nasib* in the *kamriya* genre are abundant. There are countless wine-related themes and imagery created by hundreds of poets throughout the twelve-century long history of the Persian *ğazal*. However, poets have not demonstrated equal interest in such themes. With his many *kamri ġazals*, Hafez stands out among Persian poets. Of numerous *robā’is* composed from the early days of Persian poetry up to the present time, a substantial portion have *kamri* contents, but those attributed to Omar Khayyam seem to have a particularly different character. Wine in his poems, though most often referring to true and not metaphorical wine, assumes a special role in the context of his outlook on life



here and now, and, therefore, must be seen in the context of his overall philosophical concerns and qualms. As he says in one of his *robā'is*:

When I am dead, wash me with wine,  
Say my funeral service with pure wine;  
If thou wouldst see me on the resurrection day  
Thou must seek in the dust of the tavern door (tr. Daudpota, p. 144).

Stanzaic forms, *mosammaṭ*, *tarkib-band*, and *tarji'-band* do not end with Manuṭehri; during the long history of Persian poetry, practically any poet using such poetical forms has devoted the entirety or parts of them to *kamriya* themes; the mystical *tarji'-band* by *Vahši Bāfqī* (d. 991/1583, pp. 331-37), a long *tarji'-band* by 'Abd-Allāh Kāmel Jahromi (d. 1028/1619; 'Abd-al-Nabi Faḡr-al-Zamāni, pp. 707-18), and parts of Qā'āni's *mosammaṭs* are just a few of many examples. The volume of *kamriya* poetry in *matnawi* form is quite considerable, but what has the greatest share of *kamriya* in this form are *sāqi-nāmas*.

*Thematic aspects.* Depending on under what real or imagined circumstances the poet is composing a *kamriya* poem, its contents may vary in certain respects, although the basic ideas normally remain the same. The poet may start with the vineyard and its keeper, depicting the several months from late spring through mid-autumn during which grapes gradually turn from sour green to yellow sweet, are picked from grapevines, and taken to traditional "wineries," where they are dumped in a *čarkošt* (a tank-like container for crushing and squeezing grapes), then poured into large earthen jars (*kom*), and kept for 40 days, according to Hafez (*Divān*, p. 342), or three months, according to Manuṭehri (*Divān*, verse 1940), at the end of which the pure shining red wine is ready to drink. Sometimes the poet chooses to describe the happy circle of close friends drinking wine privately or at a tavern. In a number of panegyric *qašidas*, the *kamriya* poetry in the *nasib* part of the *qašida* varies and often includes a graphic depiction of convivial gatherings at his patron's palace or at the magnificent residences of dignitaries such as viziers or military commanders, having a happy time with wine. However, the poet's *kamri* description may be addressed to the cupbearer or even to an imaginary audience (see, e.g., Rudaki's well-known 92-distich ode and his description of its royal setting in *Tāriḡ-e Sistān*, pp 317-19; cf. Ḥāfez, *ḡazal* no.

308; many of Manučehri's *qašidas* and *mosammaṣ*, e.g. pp. 6-7, 21-22, 177-81).

Wine drinking may take place in early morning or at sunset, outdoors by a river under the shade of trees, or indoors away from the suspicious eyes of judges and *moḥtasebs* (bazaar supervisors) who disapprove of wine; thus the content of the poet's wine song changes accordingly. Still, *ḵamriya* poetry sometimes takes a symbolic form, serving as a vehicle for expressing philosophical reflections and mystical experience (see further below).

*Terminology and expressions.* *Ḷamriya* poems have led to the creation of hundreds of names, figurative uses of language, poetic allusions, and metaphoric expressions. Apart from its ordinary literal names, *ḵamr* has received through poets an exceptionally great number of designations, many of which emphasize a specific quality of wine, including color, scent, kinds, taste, flavor, smooth flow, medical effects, and many other real or imaginary characteristics. To mention just a few examples from among many attributes: *golrang* or *suri* (red rose-colored), *zard* (yellow), *nāb* (pure), *nušin* or *širin* (sweet), *talk* (bitter), *zolāl* or *rowšan* (translucent), *šafaqi* (of twilight color), *kohan* (aged), *poḵta* (fully ripe, mature), *ḵām* (raw), *do-sāla* (two-year old), *jānbakš* (exhilarating, invigorating), *keradsuz* (that burns or razes wisdom), *behešti* (paradisiacal), *dinārgun* (color of gold coins, yellow), *šobḡāhi* (suitable for drinking in the morning), *mardafkan* (overpowering). As the production of wine (prohibited in Islam) was generally attributed to Zoroastrians, there appeared expressions such as *šarāb-e gabr* or *mey-e majus* (both referring to choice wine made by Zoroastrian wine makers).

What is more, grapevines and grapes have created a variety of poetic images, resulting in a whole range of similes, metaphors, and figurative descriptions of wine, such as: *doḵtar-e raz* (the grapevine's daughter), *kudak-e angur* (the grape's toddler), *farzand-e majus* (the Zoroastrian's child), *čašma-ye ḵoršid* (the sun's fountainhead), *ḵun-e ḵorus* (rooster's blood), *čašm-e kabutar* (pigeon's eye), *ašk-e šorāhi* (cup's tears), *la'l-e moḡāb* (melted ruby), *gol-e našāt* (the flower of joy), and *šo'la-ye tāk* (the flame of the grapevine). Poets in favor of wine have called it *Ṭsā-ye har darmān* (curing every disease as Jesus did) and *āb-e ḡayāt* (water of life), and it has also been denounced as *omm al-ḵabā'eṭ* (mother of all evils). Among other designations showing the specific kinds of wine are *bāda-ye poštḡār* (spicy wine), *bāda-ye bipošt* (wine with no spice in it), *bāda-ye sarjuš* (alluding to pure wine), *seyaki* or *moṭallaṭ* or *se mani* (all referring to the wine two thirds of which have already evaporated, making it stronger), etc. (see *Deḡkodā*, s.v. *mey* and *šarāb*).



Traditionally, wine was stored, purchased, or consumed at particular places, variously named in Persian as *mey-kāna*, *meykada*, *kom-kāna*, *komestān*, *šarāb-kāna*, *bāda-kāna*, and *kammār-kāna* (the wine seller's house). Certain individuals (*kammār*, *meyforuš*, *šarābforuš*, or *šarābi* [wine-seller], *pir-e meyforuš*, [Zoroastrian wine-seller]), would take wine from the *kom* (vat), measure it with *peymāna* and *raṭl* (measuring cup) and sell it. Wine was brought to wine drinking gatherings in *qarāba*, *sabu*, *minā*, and *šorāhi*, normally made of glass containers, poured by the cupbearer (*sāqi*, *šarāb-dār*, or *piāla-dār*), into the cup (*jām*, *piāla*, *sāgar*, *šarāba*, *kāsa*, or *sātekin*) and given to wine-drinkers (*bāda-peymāyān*, *bāda-gosārān*, *bāda nušān*, *šarāb-kvārān*, *sāgar-kašān*) and sufferers from hangover (*komār-āludagān*). The cupbearer may give some people as little wine as they could only “wet their throats” with it and become a little happy, while he would give some others as much as they get unconsciously drunk (*mast-e lāya'qel*), turning their heads left and right (*sarandāz*) because of being heavily drunk, or *šarābāluda*, (lit., soaked in wine). Therefore, there is a limit to the amount each group of tavern-goers (*mey-kānarow*) can and should drink, defined by the seven lines drawn on the side of the cup. The most susceptible must start from the seventh or lowest line (*kaṭṭ-e forudina*); and a little stronger people can begin with *kaṭṭ-e kāsegar*. Then come *kaṭṭ-e ašk*, *kaṭṭ-e azraq*, *kaṭṭ-e Bašra*, *kaṭṭ-e Baḡdād*, and finally *kaṭṭ-e jowr* or *kaṭṭ-e awwal*, which represents the group who are able to drink the most. Those who can reach this final line are referred to as *haft kaṭṭ* (lit. ‘seven-liner’; see Dehḡodā, s.v. *kaṭṭ*; Mo'in, 1959, p. 446).

*Kamri poetry and Sufism.* Until the 11th century, the expressions wine and wine-drinking were used in their basic literal sense; and wherever there was mention of this pure, clear, and invigorating drink, that intoxicating juice of grapes was intended. With the spread of Sufism and the use of poetry in expounding mystical thoughts, the *kamri* terminology also took on figurative mystical connotations (Rastegār, 1993, p. 181; on the entry into the domain of Sufism of *kamri* expressions, the reaction of the orthodox layers of the society to this heresy, and the early Sufis widely using such expressions, see Purjawādi, 1991, pp. 5-11; for the Sufi poets' intentions of admiring wine and wine drinking, especially those of Hafez's satirical anacreontic poetry, see Yaṭrebi, pp. 430-45).

Although relying on “the common knowledge of earthly drunkenness to evoke an awareness of the kinds of effects Divine Love produces” Jalāl-al-Din Moḡammad Mawlavi Rumi (1207-73) makes a clear distinction between this



“flawed worldly” intoxication and its “purified version,” which leads to “inner gnostic awareness;” the former being “real”, the latter “ideal.” Thus ordinary intoxication “must be sacrificed to attain a higher form of awareness.”

According to Rumi, “the vulgar drink wine from the inside, but the gnostics drink it from the outside.” In fact, Rumi employs the rhetoric of real inebriation to describe ideal intoxication (Kueny, pp. 112-13).

All the same, the use of *kaṃri* language did continue in its denotative sense as well, leading to the point where the distinction between literal and figurative language was very difficult or even impossible (or desirable) to make. What made the situation even more complicated was that some poets included both real and figurative wine in their compositions. Some critics of Hafez maintain that figurative interpretations for some of his drinking verses is hardly conceivable, which possibly stems from the intricate mixing of metaphor and non-metaphor in his poetry. Indeed, it has been this possible mixing that has caused a number of scholars to write numerous treatises explicating the symbolic meanings of *kaṃri* vocabularies. For instance, part of Sa’d-al-Din Maḥmud Šabestari’s *Golšan-e rāz* is in fact the exposition of some such symbolic meanings, which have been further elaborated by Šāhdā’i of Shiraz (d. 871/1466) in his *Nasāyem-e Golšan* (pp. 334-45), and Moḥammad Lāhiji (d. 912/1506) in his *Mafātiḥ al-ejāz* (pp. 601-9; see also Tahānavi, p. 733; Nurbakš, I, pp. 100-169). Šabestari (pp. 100-102), Moḥammad Širin Maḡrebi (pp. 6-8), and [Hātef Ešfahāni](#) (third stanza of his *tarji‘-band*, p. 7) make it clear that what *ahl-e ma’ni* (people of meaning) or *ahl-e ma’refat* (people of gnosis) have in mind by using words such as *mey*, *sāqi*, *kaṃrābāt* (tavern), and suchlike are esoteric meanings, which “they allude to only implicitly” (for more on the metaphorical uses and Sufi symbolism, see Lewisohn, Chap. 6).

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