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ḴAMSA OF AMIR ḴOSROW

***ḴAMSA* OF AMIR ḴOSROW**, a quintet of poems in the mathnawi (*maṯnawi*) form, composed by Amir Ḵosrow as a response to Neẓāmi's immensely popular *panj ganj* (Five Treasures). Amir Ḵosrow was the first poet to compose a *ḵamsa*, initiating a tradition that continued for centuries. Under the patronage of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century, the *qaṣida* and the *ḡazal* forms had begun to flower in Indo-Persian court literature but no poet had yet attempted to write narrative poetry on a large scale. After his innovative efforts in writing about contemporary historical events in narrative verse, Amir Ḵosrow undertook the *ḵamsa* project, not only to pay homage to Neẓāmi, but also to create a body of literature that had its inspiration from, and relevance to, his own cultural milieu. He sought to give a distinct identity to Persian poetry produced in India and in this process was greatly influenced by the Indian literary and folk traditions of storytelling. Written when he was at the pinnacle of his literary career, the poems in Amir Ḵosrow's *ḵamsa* were not commissioned by any patron, and it would seem that the initiative to produce them came entirely from the poet's own ambitions. Amir Ḵosrow wrote his *ḵamsa* quickly between 1298 and 1302, in contrast to Neẓāmi who labored over his poems for years. The poems are each in the same meter as Neẓāmi's mathnawis, and the titles are cleverly changed so as to be reminiscent of, yet distinguishable from, the original ones. Ḵosrow's double dedication of each poem to both his spiritual master Neẓām-al-Din Awliyā (d. 1325) and the ruler of Delhi Sultan ʿAlā-al-Din Ḵalji (r. 1296-1316) reflects the high standing of the Češti Sufis (see ČESTIYA) in the social and literary life of his time. He also interspersed references to his family members in the poems,

providing the only source of information about his personal life, a feature that is also found in the works of Neẓāmi.

Amir Ḵosrow was highly conscious of the fact that he would be compared by his own peers and by posterity to his great predecessor, and in each of the five poems he mentions Neẓāmi by name and makes statements about the art of poetry and the practice of literary *imitatio,* illuminating the way this concept was understood by Persian poets of the time. Although he playfully complains that Neẓāmi had consumed the fine wine from the goblet of the subject matter of the stories and left the dregs for others, he is nevertheless confident of his own abilities as a poet. Later poets attempting their own *ḵamsa* s declared how they were inspired by both these poets, sometimes even preferring the *ḵamsa* of Amir Kosrow to that of Neẓāmi. The latter is known for the beauty of his language and the subtlety of his expression, while Amir Ḵosrow's strengths lie in his fast-paced narrative, lighthearted tone, and his fondness for wordplay and double entendre; he often puns on Persian words that have Hindi homonyms. Amir Ḵosrow was more interested in the technique of storytelling than in exploring the psychological dimensions of his characters, therefore it is held that "his poems lack the maturity and spiritual depth of Nezāmi's" (Bürgel, p. 171). Amir Ḵosrow's disengagement from the question of kingship in these poems, a topic that was paramount in Neẓāmi's work, may have been his response to the volatile political scene in Delhi, but this topic has not been satisfactorily explored. Amir Ḵosrow also authored five other mathnawis, not as a quintet but separately, whose topics were not from Persian legend or inspired by a poet before him, but that deal with historical events of his own time. These five works, the *Qerān al-saʿdayn, Meftāḥ al-fotuḥ, ʿAšiqa, Noh sepehr* and *Toghlaqnāma,* have received more attention from historians who have focused more on their factual historical content rather than on exploring their literary merits.

Maṭlaʿ al-anwār. The first poem in Neẓāmi's *ḵamsa* is *Maḵzan al-asrār* (The treasury of Secrets); its equivalent in Amir Ḵosrow's quintet is *Maṭlaʿ al-anwār* (The Rising Place of Lights). It was completed in 1298-99 in only a fortnight, as he claims at the end of the work. The twenty didactic chapters (*maqālāt)*, comprising 3,310 lines in the meter *sariʿ* (-xx-/-xx-/-x-),cover a variety of subjects dealing with Islamic, ethical, and courtly matters such as speech, mystical love, generosity, and the duties of kings, followed by short anecdotes illustrating each point. Of the twenty tales in *Maṭlaʿ al-anwār,* some are the kind of stories often found in mystical poems, and feature figures from Islamic

lore such as Musā, Ḵeżr, Šebli, and ʿIsā, while others are more general in nature, including two animal fables. In recounting his tales, the poet uses his Indian background either as a source or as a backdrop, as in the tale illustrating the virtues of devotion in which a Muslim pilgrim learns about true piety from a Brahman crawling toward his idol temple. In the twentieth *maqāla,* he gives advice to his seven-year-old daughter and expresses his views regarding ideal womanhood.

Širin o Ḵosrow. He next wrote *Širin o Ḵosrow* in 1299, reversing the order of the names in the title taken from his model. The work comprises 4,124 lines in the meter *hazaj* (x—/x—/x–). With its origins in the pre-Islamic Iranian past, this poem describes the vicissitudes of the love of Ḵosrow Parviz (r. 590-628), the Sasanian king, and Širin, presented here as the queen of Armenia. The depiction of Ḵosrow Parviz's youthful folly, prominent in Neẓāmi's version, is not treated by Amir Ḵosrow; the poet chose not to establish the background for the development of the protagonist's character, but rather to proceed at once to the love story. Although he did not change the basic plot of the tale, there are several variations from Neẓāmi's version, especially in the details of character portrayal. Overall, his focus is not on kingship, and his female characters are not particularly strong or remarkable individuals. The portrayal of Širin as a shrewd woman is closer to Ferdowsi's characterization of her than to the more sympathetic one by Neẓāmi. The story opens with the death of King Hormoz (r. 579-90) and the accession of Ḵosrow Parviz to the throne of Persia. The usurpation by Bahrām Čubina is followed by Ḵosrow Parviz's falling in love with Širin, first through a portrait of her provided by his friend Šāhpur, then with the actual person. However, on grounds of political expediency he has to marry Maryam, the daughter of the Qayṣar of Rum, but after her death Ḵosrow returns to Širin, who chides him for his fickleness. His subsequent marriage to Šekar is brought to an end when Širin, in a cunning move, has her rival murdered. The episode of the love of Farhād, here the son of the Ḵāqān of China, for Širin is valorized in a way that continued in later Indo-Islamic poetic traditions. Širuya's love for Širin is also omitted; here he is her stepson and usurper of his father's throne. Amir Ḵosrow probably simplified the basic plot in order to be able to narrate the story as dramatically as possible.

Majnun o Leyli. The *Majnun o Leyli* was also written in 1299. It comprises 2,660 lines in the meter *hazaj* (–x/x-x-/x–) and is the shortest poem in the *ḵamsa.* Once again, the poet inverted the names in the title to distinguish his work

from that of his predecessor. Amir Ḵosrow's version of the Arabian story of Qays and Leyli is considered the finest work in his *ḵamsa* (Mirza, p. 199). The changes that he made in the plot are consistent with his dramatic purpose that was mentioned above. Qays and Leyli are children from two rival tribes who fall in love with each other in school. The transformation of Qays into Majnun, the crazed, obsessed lover of Leyli, is the central theme of the poem. Some of the major features in Ḵosrow's retelling of the story are as follows: the visit of Majnun and his father to Mecca is replaced by astrologers predicting at his birth his doomed love; instead of Leyli being married off by her family, Majnun weds Ḵadija, his friend Nawfal's daughter, but the marriage is not consummated; Majnun's affection for a stray dog is a poignant moment in the story, symbolizing his degradation; and in the end, Majnun jumps into Leyli's open grave, where they are buried together. At the beginning of the poem, the poet advises his son Ḵeżr against becoming a poet, while at the end he mourns the recent deaths of his mother and his brother Qotlōḡ.

Āʾina-ye Eskandari. The popular narrative of Alexander's exploits has its origins in Hellenistic texts that passed into Persian and existed both in prose and in verse. Ḵosrow's version is called *Āʾina-ye Eskandari* (The Alexandrine Mirror); it was composed in 1299-1300 and contains 4,450 lines in the *motaqāreb* meter (x–/x–/x–/x-). *Āʾina-ye Eskandari* describes the adventures of Eskandar, usually equated with Ḏuʾl-Qarnayn mentioned in the Qurʾān, and hence considered to be a prophet by Muslims, while he was on his campaigns in the east. In Neẓāmi's portrayal of the legendary hero the emphasis is on justice and kingship, with long passages of psychological analysis and philosophical discourse involving Plato and Aristotle, along with epic-style encounters with the Russians, the Chinese, and an Amazon warrior. The search for the water of life (*āb-e ḥayāt)* was the ultimate test in Eskandar's career. Amir Ḵosrow's treatment of all these topics differs considerably from that of Neẓāmi; for one, *Āʾina-ye Eskandari* is not divided into two parts as is the *Eskandar-nāma.* In an extensive analysis of his predecessor's portrayal of Eskandar, Amir Ḵosrow declares at the beginning of his work that his story will be different; his Eskandar is not a prophet and philosopher but an adventurer and a scientist of sorts. Eskandar's campaign against the Ḵāqān of China and his romantic encounter with the warrior princess Kanifu, disguised as a man on the battlefield, are important elements in this story. The conquest of Persia and the death of Darius are left out. After various adventures that include visiting the land of the monstrous Yājuj and Mājuj (Gog and Magog) and razing Zoroastrian temples in Azarbaijan, Eskandar embarks on a sea

voyage with a distinguished retinue that includes Ḵeżr, Elyās, Arasṭu (Aristotle), Bālinās (Apollonius of Tyana) and Aflāṭun (Plato). Eskandar's quest for the water of life is not so much a spiritual journey as an attempt to measure the depth of the ocean. Descending into the deep sea in a glass diving bell, Eskandar learns of his limited time on earth from an angel and returns from his travels to die as an old man. In the technical details concerning the astrolabe and the art of mirror-making found in this work, Amir Ḵosrow reveals an expert's knowledge that goes beyond a superficial employment of themes (Piemontese, "Le submersible Alexandrin"). Each major section of the work ends with a brief *sāqi-nāma* and a short tale. At the beginning of this poem, the poet offers advice to his son Hājji.

Hašt behešt. With *Hašt behešt* (Eight Paradises), composed in 1301-1302 in 3, 350 verses in the meter *ḵafif* (-x–/x-x-/xx-), Amir Ḵosrow completed his *ḵamsa.* This last work is a collection of stories told to the Persian king Bahrām Gur (Bahrām V; r. 421-439) on the seven days of the week, starting on Saturday, by seven princesses representing the seven climes of the world (Indian, Nimruz, Slavic, Tatar, Rumi, Arabian and Ḵʷārazmian), each associated with one of the seven planets and dressed in clothes and residing in a palace colored differently for each day: black, saffron, green, red, violet, sandalwood, and white. There are eight stories in *Hašt behešt,* one more than in Neẓāmi's *Haft peykar,* to surpass symbolically his predecessor Neẓāmi, although the first tale is actually the frame story involving Bahrām Gur on a hunt. Amir Ḵosrow's stories are longer and faster paced than are Neẓāmi's, full of witty wordplay, and are based on complex plots that involve magic and adventure. For the plots and details the poet draws upon his Indian background, perhaps even from oral sources (Sharma). Bahrām Gur's struggle to become a just ruler is not a central topic; his rule is already established when Amir Ḵosrow's story opens. Bahrām Gur is hunting with his companion Delārām and shows off his archery skills by changing the sex of an onager. He is offended by her comment that his feat is nothing special and sends her into exile. The most striking difference here is that Neẓāmi's character Fetna, who undertakes a rigorous training regimen to prove her physical prowess to Bahrām Gur, is felicitously changed to Delārām, who is learning the art of music in order to prove her mettle. She masters the twelve *parda* s of classical Persian music and her playing has a magical effect on gazelles. This has been regarded by scholars as an indication of Amir Ḵosrow's own profound interest and involvement in the music of his day. Then seven pavilions are built and the princesses attempt to distract the king from hunting. It was in the stories of

magic and adventure that the poet excelled, as the one told on Thursday by the Arabian princess about the hero Rām who regains his patrimony and finds his beloved by receiving special gifts from three wise men: an eye ointment that makes one invisible, a magical spell that puts people to sleep immediately, and a *div* who does his bidding. The Friday story, told by the Ḵʷārazmian princess, involves a magical talisman that laughs when it hears someone telling a lie. The supernatural story, told on Monday by the Slavic princess, of the metamorphosis of a spirit into a human or animal is also found in the *Ṭuṭi-nāma* (Bürgel, p. 171). Bahrām Gur disappears during a hunt at the conclusion of the work. At the beginning of the poem, the poet offers advice to his infant daughter ʿAfifa. The second story of the three sons of the King of Serendip was freely translated into Italian by Christoforo Armeno in 1557 and has the distinction of being the first Persian tale appearing in a European language. Subsequently it was also translated into various other languages (Piemontese, “Les Huit Paradis”).

Manuscripts and Editions. Amir Ḵosrow’s *ḵamsa* was read and imitated by later poets as often as Neẓāmi’s work, most famously by Jāmi, Navāʾi, and Maktabi, and due to the rich content of its stories, was often illustrated sumptuously. After Neẓāmi’s quintet and Ferdowsi’s *Šāh-nāma,* it was the most frequently illustrated literary work (Brend, p. xxiii). In fact, both *ḵamsa* s were often copied together, with Ḵosrow’s text in the margins of Neẓāmi’s poems. Numerous manuscripts survive of Ḵosrow’s *ḵamsa* transmitted as a complete text or with only the text of one or more poems. These manuscripts have their provenance from all regions of the pre-modern Persophone literary world, indicating the extent of the readership of this work. The earliest manuscripts, both the illustrated and the un-illustrated, are from late fourteenth-century Persia, while the earliest Indian manuscript is not from Delhi, as would be expected, but from the Western-Central regions, with paintings in the style of Gujarat or Mandu miniature painting. John Seyller lists all the known illustrated and un-illustrated manuscripts in his study of a richly illustrated Mughal copy of the work (pp. 143-58). A remarkable homage to the poet is in the form of a manuscript dated 1355, now in the Abu Rayhān Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, Tashkent (inv. 2179), in which there are three mathnawis copied by Hafez (Ḥāfeż) of Shiraz, whose signature appears in the colophon. *Āʾina-ye Eskandari* has been translated into Italian, while *Širin o Ḵosrow* has been translated into Uzbek, Azeri, and Georgian. The poems were lithographed individually in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; critical editions were prepared by scholars from the former Soviet Union (see the

bibliography), where Amir Ḵosrow's writings have received a great deal of attention. As with all of Ḵosrow's other works, there is no recent scholarly edition of the *ḵamsa.* Although it has received attention by art historians, the *ḵamsa* as an independent work has not been studied in detail from a literary point of view. The individual poems of it have been analyzed in a few articles by various scholars and two monographs in Persian by Maḥjub on *Hašt behešt* and Yusofi on *Širin va Ḵosrow.* On the whole, much of the recent interest and scholarly work on Amir Ḵosrow's *ḵamsa* has been from outside of India, in spite of his iconic status in the Subcontinent.

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