



## ḲAMSA OF NEZĀMI

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**ḲAMSA OF NEZĀMI**, the quintet of narrative poems for which Neẓāmi Ganjavi (1141-1209) is universally acclaimed. It contains the didactic poem *Maḵzan al-asrār* in around 2,260 couplets in *sari'* meter; three epic romances: *Ḳosrow o Širin* in around 6,500 couplets in *hazaj* meter, *Leyli o Majnun* in around 4,600 couplets in *hazaj* meter, and *Haft peykar* in about 5130 couplets in *kafif* meter; and the *Eskandar-nāma*, which can be regarded as an epic interlaced with didactic observations and consists of two formally separate parts, in all about 10,500 couplets in *motaqāreb* meter.

After the author's death, his poems in the *maṭnavi* form began to appear in codices assembled as an ensemble generally known as *Ḳamsa* (Quintet) or also as *Panj Ganj* (The five treasures). A large number of manuscripts of the *Ḳamsa* have survived (listed in Monzavi, pp. 2685-96; Rādfar, pp. 5-29, and de Blois, 1994, pp. 451-79). The oldest dated manuscript among the extant copies of the entire *Ḳamsa* is dated 763/1362 and belongs to the Bibliothèque nationale (Supplément persan 1817) in Paris. There are also a few dated copies belonging to earlier periods, but they are incomplete.

The first attempt at a critical edition was made by Waḥid Dastgerdi (Tehran, 1934-39, with several reprints). It contains some helpful explanatory notes, but the attempt at presenting a critical edition is marred by the arbitrary inclusion or exclusion of verses in the text. Since 1947, critical editions of all poems have been prepared by a team of Azeri scholars, following a scheme organized by E. E. Berthels and his colleagues in 1941 (cf. de Blois, 1994, p. 451). More recently, richly annotated editions of the poems have been published by



Behruz Ṭarvatiān. There is a complete translation of the *Ḳamsa* in Russian verse in 5 volumes published in Moscow in 1985 and reprinted in Baku in 1991. There is a vast bibliography on Nezāmi's *Ḳamsa* (cf. Rādfar, pp. 239-374).

De Blois has brought the traditional relative chronology of the poems of the *Ḳamsa* into question (de Blois, 1994, pp. 438-46; idem, 1997, pp. 585-91). On the basis of the comparison of the manuscripts, the identification of the dedicatees and other textual data, he has suggested the following dates of completion for the poems: *Maḳzan al-asrār* likely in or shortly after 561/1166 (therefore about a decade earlier than the usually accepted date: cf. Chelkowski, p. 77); *Kosrow o Širin* between 571/1176 and 582/1186, with the epilogue added sometime between 582/1186 and 587/1191 (for further details on the chronology of this poem, see Orsatti, 2006); *Leyli o Majnun* in 584/1188 (de Blois does not take the possible additions dated up to 588/1192 [cf. Rādfar, p. 71] into account); *Eskandar-nāma* in 590/1194; *Haft peykar* in 593/1197. Thus *Haft peykar* is probably the last poem of the five composed by Nezāmi, though in most manuscripts it is placed before *Eskandar-nāma*. It must be borne in mind, however, that in the oldest *ḳamsa* written in response to that of Nezāmi, the *Ḳamsa* of Amir *Ḳosrow*, completed in 701/1301-02, hence prior to the extant dated manuscripts of Nezāmi's *Ḳamsa*, the order of the last two poems is: first, *Ā'ina-ye Eskandari* (the response to *Eskandar-nāma*), followed by *Hašt behešt* (the response to *Haft peykar*). Ṭarvatiān lays stress on the time gap that often occurs between the date of completion and the date of dedication in Nezāmi's poems, a gap explicable in terms of the complex political situation of the time, which created difficulties in choosing patrons (Ṭarvatiān, Introduction, pp. 51-52).

Nezāmi drew inspiration from several works of Persian literature: *Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqiqa* of Sanā'ī, *Vis o Rāmin* of Gorgāni, Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*, *Varqa o Golšāh* of 'Ayyuqi, and *Siāsat-nāma* of Nezām-al-Molk, among others. Also oral tradition, Arabic anecdotes, and historians such as Ṭabari are among his sources. However, Nezāmi does not try to imitate his predecessors. His way of proceeding is to deal briefly with episodes that the previous poets had treated, focusing instead on new material while introducing important formal innovations (see the entries for individual poems).

The influence of Nezāmi's work on the subsequent development of Persian literature has been enormous. Not only each of his poems, but also the *Ḳamsa* as a whole became a pattern that was emulated in later Persian poetry (and also in other Islamic literatures). The imitations (*naḏiras*) of the *Ḳamsa* may be



attempts to reply to every original poem, following their subject as well as their meter and other formal features, or they may be collections of *maṭnavis* that contain only some imitations of Neẓāmi's poems. The first and most renowned response to Neẓāmi's *Kamsa* was, as pointed out above, by Amir Ẕosrow Dehlavi. Other well-known *kamsas*, more or less complete, composed in response to Neẓāmi were written by Ẕvāju Kermāni, Jamāli, Hātefi, Jāmi, who extended to seven the total of poems, and Navā'i in the Chaghatay language (for a list of other *kamsas*, see Rādfar pp. 205-8).

The stories in Neẓāmi's poems have provided the Persian art of the miniature with an abundance of subject matter: his *Kamsa*, together with Ferdowsi's *Šāhnāma*, were the most frequently illustrated literary works.

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