



KAMSA OF JAMĀLI

KAMSA OF JAMĀLI, a suite of five mathnawis (*matnawis*, poems in couplet form), composed in response to the *Kamsa* by Neẓāmi (1141-1209). This *Kamsa* exists in a unique manuscript in the India Office Library, London (ms. Ethé 1284; cf. Ethé I, cols. 735-36). The titles of the poems are: *Toḥfat al-abrār* (ff. 1v-29r), *Mehr o Negār* (ff. 29v-86r), *Maḥzun o Maḥbub* (ff. 86v-132r), *Haft owrang* (ff. 132v-179r), and *Tāriḳ-e Eskandari* (179v-210r: the manuscript is seriously incomplete at the end). This manuscript has drawn the attention of historians of Islamic art (Robinson, 1952, p. 7; Stchoukine, pp. 60-61; Robinson, 1976, pp. 16-23; Robinson, 1991, pp. 31-33; Robinson, 1993 I, p. 18) for its six miniatures (on ff. 14r, 24r, 75r, 101v, 125v, 205r) but so far little attention has been paid to the text apart from an initial note by M. D. Kazemof (1993-94), and a study by P. Orsatti based on a complete reading of the manuscript (1996; edition in preparation). The manuscript is dated and localized: the second and third poems of the *Kamsa* bear a subscription by the copyist, dated in Baghdad, 8 Ramaẓān 869/4 May 1465, and Moḥarram 870/August-September 1465, respectively. The following inscription is given in the center of the illuminated *sarlawḩ* (headpiece) of the first poem (f. 1v): *Kamsa men moṣannefāt ḩazrat al-jamāliya al-aḩmadiya qoddesa serrohu* (Quintet, a work by His Amiable (*jamāliya*) and Prophetic (*aḩmadiya*) Excellency, may his secret be sanctified). The poet's *takalloṣ* (pen-name), Jamāli, appears in many places throughout the text, especially at the beginning and end of each poem where the poet talks about, and addresses, himself. Judging from the inscription of the first *sarlawḩ* just quoted, it is also possible that his "proper" name, the *esm-e 'alam*, was Aḩmad. It is also clear that when the manuscript was copied,



Jamāli was no longer alive.

The only information we have concerning Jamāli, his life, and his work can be deduced from the text of his five poems. Indeed, many poets bearing the *takalloṣ* Jamāli are known from *taḍkeras* (collective biographies of poets) and from other sources, but none of them can be identified as the author of this *Kamsa*. Jamāli must have been writing between the end of the 14th and the first half of the 15th centuries. The dates of composition of three of his poems are given: the second poem, *Mehr o Negār*, was completed in early spring 805/1403 (f. 85v); the date (814/1411-12) of the third poem, *Maḥzun o Maḥbub*, is inscribed first in the form of a chronogram, and then in full in the text (f. 132r); the fourth poem, *Haft owrang*, was composed in 820/1417-18 (f. 178v). The titles of the individual poems appear in the prefaces, where the poet talks about himself and his work. The title of the last poem, however, is not cited explicitly. In the preface to the latter, Jamāli, after quoting the titles of the four previously composed poems, says: *konun āmadam tā be lafz-e dari/nehām rasm-e tāriḳ-e eskandari* (Now I am about to express, in the Persian language, the way of the Story of Alexander, f. 187r). Therefore *Tāriḳ-e Eskandari* could be the title of the fifth poem. In many parts of the work it emerges that the poet lived in Tabriz. In the last three poems, Jamāli laments the decadence of Persian Iraq and the fact that in his country he had enjoyed no esteem and had no patrons or generous rulers to whom he could dedicate his poems.

The names of the rulers to whom his poems were dedicated can be deduced from various hints as well as from a few explicit declarations. Judging from some allusions to Khorasan and to the eastern regions of Persia (f. 5), and to the extension of the ruler's dominions, which stretched "from Cathay (i.e. China) to the coasts of Rum (i.e. the Ottoman empire)" (f. 32v), one can argue that the first two poems were dedicated to Timur (r. 1370-1405). The third poem, composed in 814/1411-12, is explicitly dedicated (f. 90r) to Timur's grandson Ġiāt-al-Din Bāysonḡor (d. 1433, see [BĀYSONḡOR, ĠIĀT-AL-DIN](#)), son of Šāhroḳ, at that time little more than a boy; the fourth poem, *Haftowrang*, is dedicated to a Ġiāt-al-Din (f. 134v), who could also be identified as Bāysonḡor. The dedicatee of the last poem, composed after 820/1417-18, the date of the fourth poem, is not explicitly mentioned, but Jamāli states that the poem is adorned with his name (f. 184v). If it is true that the title is *Tāriḳ-e Eskandari*, "Story of Alexander," although Eskandar is not the hero of the poem, one might assume that Eskandar was the name of the dedicatee: this could refer to the Qara Qoyunlu Eskandar (r. 1420-38), but not to Timur's grandson



Eskandar, a patron of the arts, and especially of the arts of the book (Richard, 1996), who was put to death in 1414. It is therefore possible that Jamāli started his career as a poet in the period following the decline of the Jalayerid dynasty. He became associated with the Timurid rulers, remaining faithful to the dynasty even when Tabriz, going through a period of turmoil, became the capital of the Qara Qoyunlu rulers (1410-68). But in his old age Jamāli abandoned his loyalty to the Timurid dynasty and dedicated his work to a member of the dynasty that had for many years ruled over western Persia. The beautiful illuminated copy of Jamāli's *Kamsa* was probably a posthumous tribute to the poet on the part of a descendent of the Qara Qoyunlu dynasty: possibly Pir Budāq, governor of Baghdad (put to death in 1466).

Jamāli's poems are composed in the tradition of the *jawāb* (response), which implies adopting the formal parameters (meter and narrative structure) of the model, while the subject of the story is generally different (G. Ju. Aliev, 1985, pp. 9-13). Jamāli follows his model, Neẓāmi's *Kamsa*, not only in choosing the same meters, but often also in replying to each episode of Neẓāmi's poems. On the contrary, characters and setting are completely different. The first poem, *Toḥfat al-abrār* (The gift of the Pious Ones), contains some 2,900 lines; it was composed in reply to *Maḳzan al-asrār* by Neẓāmi, and, like the latter, is divided into 20 *maqāla* (chapters) of ethical-didactic content, each illustrated by examples. The second poem, *Mehr o Negār*, comprises some 5,800 lines, in reply to *Kosrow o Širin* by Neẓāmi. The protagonists are King Mehr of Isfahan and the beautiful Negār, descendent of the Sasanian king Khosrow I Anošervān, known as "the Just" (r. 531-79), who had his court at Madā'en, ancient [Ctesiphon](#) in present-day Iraq. Jamāli thus reverses the dynastic situation represented in Neẓāmi's poem, making the female protagonist, Negār, a descendent of the ancient royal dynasty of Persia. *Maḥzun o Maḥbub*, with some 4,700 lines, was composed in reply to Neẓāmi's *Leyli o Majnun*. This story is also set in Arabia but the characters are different and the plot is more involved. The fourth poem, *Haft owrang*, (The seven Stars of the Great Bear), was composed in reply to the *Haft peykar* by Neẓāmi, and comprises some 4,700 lines. The technique used in Jamāli's replies to Neẓāmi is here carried to extreme lengths: although Jamāli keeps to the external form and to the single episodes of the original poem, he changes the characters and the setting completely. The protagonist of the *Haft owrang*, indeed, is not Bahrām but Dārā, son of Alexander/Eskandar, and the story providing the framework for the seven tales recounted by the seven princesses is in some way a continuation of the story of Alexander. The fifth poem is a response to



Nezāmi's *Eskandar-nāma*, but the end is missing. The extant part, probably not even a third of the whole, totals about 3,150 lines. In this poem Jamāli continues in the same way as in the preceding poems: the protagonist here is not Alexander, but Anušang (or Manušang), king of Iran, and the struggle which occupies the entire extant part of the poem is not against Darius but against the *Kāqān*, i.e. the king of Turān. In the preface to this last poem of the *Kamsa*, Jamāli dwells on his work and on his relationship with Nezāmi (ff. 185v-186v). Nezāmi's account of the story of Alexander, Jamāli says, was perfect. Therefore, he collected a vast number of stories from the elders and decided to relate the story of a different king. His poem has only the external form of his model but, he proudly declares, he has replied point by point to Nezāmi's subtleties. Jamāli seems to have resorted mainly to oral sources, the tales of the elders. At only one point does he refer explicitly to written sources, stating that he had checked the dates of the manuscripts he consulted: *ze har dāstāni bari yāftam / čō tārik-e har daftari yāftam* (f. 187r).

Jamāli's intention was to revivify Nezāmi's work. Since Nezāmi had already put into verse the most beautiful stories, relating them in a peerless manner, Jamāli decided to change the characters while maintaining the external form of his model. In doing so, he probably provided fuel for criticism, against which he attempts to justify himself in many parts of his work. As far as sources are concerned, he worked mainly from the narrative material contained in the *Kamsa* by Nezāmi, but he also reworked old written and oral stories (the tales of the elders). Apart from Nezāmi and, especially in his last poem, Ferdowsi, he also quotes the *Hašt behešt* by Amir Ƙosrow of Delhi (d. 1325, see AMIR ƘOSROW DEHLAWI), and *Homay o Homāyun* by Ƙvāju Kermāni (1290-1352). But, he says, he found in his own mind and heart the inspiration needed for the construction of the plots. Indeed, in some places (e.g. f. 134r, in the preface to *Haft ovrang*) he describes the composition of his poems as a purely spiritual process: for a while he took to polishing the surface of his heart until it looked like the cup that shows the world; then God's hand composed thousands of rare images for him and he used that substance to embellish all the stories generated by his imagination.

Jamāli, indeed, uses traditional narrative material, but he modifies it in order to express his own moral attitude toward the major topics on which the plots of the poems turn: love, sovereignty, the problem of keeping one's feelings under control, relationships between men and women, fathers and sons, etc. Sometimes, simply by moving or inverting few elements of the plot, choosing a



different version of the story, or eliminating episodes that did not accord with his own moral attitude, he provides the text with a totally different meaning from that of his model, giving a different answer, *jawāb*, to the moral problems dealt with by Neẓāmi.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

G. Ju. Aliev, *Temy i sjuzhety Nizami v literaturakh narodov Vostoka*, Moscow, 1985.

H. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1903-37.

M. D. Kazemof, "Hakim Neẓāmi-e Ganjavi wa Jamāli-e Tabrizi," in M. Tarwat, ed., *Kongre-ye beyn-ol-melali-ye bozorgdāšt-e nohomin sade-ye ta wallod-eḥakim Neẓāmi- eGanjavi III*, Tehran, 1993, pp. 1-3.

Paola Orsatti, "The *Ḥamsah* 'Quintet' by Ğamālī: Reply to Nizāmī Between the Timurids and the Qarā-qoyunlu," *Oriente moderno* 76 (=N. S. 15), 1996 (=M. Bernardini, ed., *La civiltà timuride come fenomeno internazionale II*), pp. 385-413.

Idem, "Le poème *Xosrow va Širin* de Neẓāmi et ses répliques par Amir Xosrow et Jamāli," *Stud. Ir.* 32, 2003, pp. 163-76.

F. Richard, "Un témoignage inexploité concernant le mécénat d'Eskandar Solṭān à Eṣfahān," *Oriente moderno* 76 (=N. S. 15), 1996 (=M. Bernardini, ed., *La civiltà timuride come fenomeno internazionale I*), pp. 45-72.

B. W. Robinson, *Persian Paintings (in the Victoria and Albert Museum)*, London, 1952.

Idem, *Persian Paintings in the India Office Library: A Descriptive Catalogue*, London, 1976.



Idem, *Fifteenth-Century Persian Painting: Problems and Issues*, New York and London, 1991.

Idem, *Studies in Persian Art*, 2 vols., London, 1993.

Ivan Stchoukine, *Les peintures des manuscrits timûrides*, Paris, 1954.