



KĀQĀNI ŠERVĀNI I. LIFE

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i. Life

The date of Kāqāni's birth can be deduced from a chronogram (*Divān*, p. 64, v. 13) and is corroborated by other references in his *Divān* (Reinert, 1964-65, pp. 126-28). Born to a Muslim father and an initially Nestorian mother who had converted from Christianity to Islam (*Toḥfat al-'Erāqayn*, pp. 215-16), he was a product of the culturally complex milieu of the Caucasus. Attached to the local court of the Šervānšāhs and residing at their capital Šamāka (Shamakha) for the major part of his life, he dedicated a substantial number of his panegyrics either in the form of a *qaṣida* or a strophic poem (*tarji'band*) to its rulers Manučehr and his son Aḳsetān (see [AḲESTĀN](#)), who succeeded him in 1160 (Kouymjian, 1974, p. 344), as well as to two of their female family members and a couple of others related to their court. The Šervānšāhs bore the title *kāqān*, from which Kāqāni derived his pen name (*taḳalloṣ*). A large number of other rulers, officials, scholars, and shaikhs were also among the dedicatees of his poems (see below). The only reliable source for his life is his own work. Although there are accounts of him in biographical works on poets (*taḏkeras*) from 'Awfi onwards (Storey/de Blois, V/2, p. 398), the information offered by them, when not confirmed by findings in Kāqāni's own works, cannot be considered as trustworthy. The exact date of his death remains uncertain, ranging from 1186 to 1199 in different *taḏkeras*, and other sources are also inconclusive. (See Sajjādi, 1977, pp. 150-51, on an inscription on a gravestone being a forgery; Storey/de Blois, V/2, p. 386, on a *qeṭ'a* [occasional or topical



poem] cited in Joveyni's *Tāriḳ-e jahāngošā*; Afšār, Introduction to *Ḳatm al-ḡarā'eb*, p. ix, n. 1, quoting Šafi'i-Kadkani on a prose notice found in a 14th century miscellany with 591/1195 as the death date.) One cannot consider as authentic traditional stories that describe [Abu'l-'Alā' Ganjavi](#), another poet at the court of the Šervānšāhs, as either Ḳāqāni's teacher or father-in-law, and the poet [Falaki](#) as being a fellow pupil with Ḳāqāni. Both poets are mentioned in Ḳāqāni's works, but he does not refer to these particular facts (Storey/de Blois, V/2, pp. 247-48).

From a long passage in the *Toḥfat al-'Erāqayn* (pp. 217-21) we learn that Ḳāqāni had received his early literary and scientific training from his uncle Kāfi-al-Din 'Omar, a physician who died when Ḳāqāni was twenty-five (lunar) years old. This passage from the *Toḥfat al-'Erāqayn* may, for once, offer us relatively unambiguous information, but in most cases, his poems, although rich in autobiographical details and historical references, should be used as a historical source with due caution. Poetical statements, taken out of their context, and disregard of the use of rhetorical figures such as hyperbole, have led biographers astray more than once. Jan Rypka's entry on the poet in *History of Iranian Literature* contains several examples of this (Beelaert, 1995, pp. 55-57). More recently, Ġaffār Kandli's work (see bibliography) shows little awareness of the caution required in using poetical source material. The letters of Ḳāqāni that have come down to us (see below) represent only a fraction of those he must have written, and offer only occasional biographical help.

Nevertheless, with the material at hand, it is possible to identify some other important events in Ḳāqāni's life, but the actual chronology must remain mostly provisional, and even the relative chronology is anything but certain. There is, however, sufficient evidence to support the idea that Ḳāqāni was a precociously sophisticated poet, and several poems can be dated to his early youth, before he was twenty-five years old. In a short self-praise (*fakriya*) poem in couplet form (*Divān*, p. 913), Ḳāqāni proclaims that he is not yet twenty (*do dah*) lunar years old, but that he surpasses others in accomplishment (*fazl*). There seems to be no poem that can be dated with absolute certainty from after 1185, but even so his poetical career of some forty years, yielding only poems of high quality, is impressive.

A periodization of his life can be roughly established, with such landmarks as his first pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*; around 1156), the death of the Šervānšāh Manučehr (1160), the death of his first wife and his son Rašid-al-Din (ca. 1175),



his second ḥajj (apparently in the same year), and his subsequent retirement from court life to live in Tabriz. Important in Kāqāni's life was his yearning for a journey to Khorasan, and it is the subject of several of his poems. This yearning was for reasons both of devotional (such as visiting the sanctuaries of Imam Reżā and the mystic Bāyazīd Bestāmi, *Divān*, p. 406, vv. 11-13 and p. 910, v. 14) and of more personal nature (such as his dissatisfaction with Šervān, *Divān*, p. 744, v. 11). It seems that on two occasions his wish was almost fulfilled, but only once, after 1175, did he set out on an actual journey, and this too was aborted after reaching Ray.

Kāqāni's relationship with the two Šervānšāhs did not run a smooth course, and in many of the qaṣidas dedicated to them he gives vent to feelings of discontent (Beelaert, 2002, pp. 69-71). Some poems can plausibly be taken as referring to actual imprisonment, possibly twice in his life. Not all references to an 'imprisonment,' however, are to be taken literally: they may refer also either to the impossibility of leaving 'the prison house' of Šervān (*ḥabsgāh-e Šervān*), due to personal circumstances, or to the oppressive nature of social life at court. His famous qaṣida beginning *Falak kaṣrowtar ast az kaṭṭ-e tarsā* (*Divān*, pp. 23-28; tr. and commentary Minorsky, 1945; commentary occupying an entire monograph by Kazzāzi, 2007), dedicated to a Christian (see below), may be a brilliant example of a literary genre in which he excelled, namely the 'prison poem' (*ḥabsiya*), but the intercession asked for concerns a permission to visit Jerusalem (there is no proof that he ever did), and not a plea for release from imprisonment.

Dedicatees (mamduḥs). All in all some thirty-five persons are dedicatees of Kāqāni's qaṣidas and tarjī'āt (listed in the Introduction to the *Divān*, pp. xxxiv-li); dozens of others were the dedicatees of shorter poems and addressees of letters. These people came broadly from the region he lived in, namely Šervān (Shirvan), Azarbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, eastern Anatolia, northern Iraq, and northwestern Iran, as well as from faraway Khorasan.

Foremost, Kāqāni dedicated poems to the Šervānšāhs Manučehr and Aḳsetān and two women of the court, Manučehr's sister, 'Eṣmat-al-Din, and Aḳsetān's wife, Şafwat-al-Din, who seem to have interceded on his behalf. His mamduḥs include some famous rulers from other dynasties as well, such as the Saljuqids Moḥammad b. Maḥmud (r. 1153-1159) and Rokn-al-Din Arslānšāh b. Toḡrel (r. 1161-1176); the Ildegozid (see [ATĀBAKĀN-E ĀḌARBĀYJĀN](#)) Qezel Arslān (r. 1186-1191), the dedicatee of Kāqāni's poems when he was still the governor of Azarbaijan as the "king of the West" (*malek-e maḡreb*) during the reign of his



brother Jahān-Pahlavān; and the [Kvārazmšāh Atsiz Ġarča'i](#) (r. 1127-56). Other mamduḥs belonged to minor dynasties, such as the ruler of Darband, Sayf-al-Din Moẓaffar b. Moḥammad (r. ca.1136–ca.1164-70). Important among his mamduḥs, in the last period of his life, was Šams-al-Din Maḥmud b. 'Ali, who, as a *ra'is*, was in charge of Arjiš (near Lake Van) on behalf of the king of Armenia (*Šāh-e Arman*).

Some of his mamduḥs have not yet been identified with certainty. Important among these is Noṣrat-al-Din Leyālāvāšir (or Keyālāvāšir), an *eṣfahbad*, said by Kāqāni to rule in Māzandarān, and who is in most manuscripts the dedicatee of one of his most ambitious qaṣidas (pp. 133-40, with *bar-afkanad* as *radif*; extensive commentary, occupying an entire monograph by Kazzāzi, 1989). Kāqāni dedicated to him a number of other poems, including a long qeṭ'a, thanking him for the substantial award of two thousand *dinārs* (pp. 922-24), and mourned him in another qaṣida (on him, see Kandli, 1995, pp. 396-99). The most famous case of a mamduḥ whose identity has been debated for a long time is the Christian ruler “Ezz-al-Dawla,” to whom Kāqāni dedicated his *ḥabsiya* beginning with *Falak kaḏrowtar* referred to above. He had been identified by Minorsky (1945) as one of the Byzantine Comneni, Andronicos I; other Comneni, namely prince Isaac (d. 1152) and Manuel I, had been suggested as well. These identifications now seem doubtful since Kandli (1969, p. 340 and 1970, pp. 50 ff., esp. 53) drew attention to the fact that he has to be identical with a person Kāqāni mentions in one of his letters (*Monša'āt*, p. 15, letter to Nāṣer al-Din Bāku'i; about him see below) as Bāqer Qamā'en (or Qemār) Zākāni. In this letter the person is called *miāna-ye 'eqd-e gowhar-e Boqrāṭiān*, with the implication therefore that he was affiliated to the [Georgian Bagratids](#).

Kāqāni also dedicated poetry to a number of officials attached to other courts. Among them is the well-known Bahā'-al-Din Moḥammad, head of the correspondence department (*divān-e enšā'*) of the Kvārazmšāh Tekeš. For Kāqāni the most important among these officials was Jamāl-al-Din Mawṣeli, the well-documented vizier of the Zangids in Mosul. A man born and raised in Isfahan, perfectly bilingual in Persian and Arabic and well-known for his generosity towards the *ḥaramayn*, Mecca and Medina. He was the dedicatee of Kāqāni's only mathnawī, *Toḥfat al-'Erāqayn*, which has a pilgrimage as subject (see below), as well as of one qaṣida and a number of shorter poems (Beelaert, 2000, pp. 115-25). With some of these dedicatees, Kāqāni may only have had a formal and official relationship; and he may have dedicated poems to them for



solely pecuniary motives, but one has the impression that he strove to find people worthy of his praise and that perhaps, as in the case of Jamāl-al-Din Mawṣeli, there was also a bond of friendship with some of them.

It is in his relationship with eminent religious figures and men of learning that we see the clearest evidence of close personal ties. For instance, Kāqāni seems to have been much attached to a shaikh residing in Ganja, Nāṣer-al-Din Bāku'i (d. probably not much later than 1163), to whom he dedicated several poems and whose death he mourned in a number of elegies. A long letter to him (*Monša'āt*, pp. 1-18) has also survived. With Najm-al-Din Simgar, a Sufi master who had a *kānaqāh* in Darband, to which Kāqāni retired at least once, he seems to have had a more intimate relation as well. Kāqāni praises him extensively in one of his *qaṣidas* and in the *Toḥfat al-Erāqayn* (pp. 226-30). He also mentions him in some letters, and one letter was written from Ebn Simgar's *kānaqāh* (*Monša'āt*, pp. 293-96). Many of the figures not belonging to any officialdom but mentioned by him do not appear in any other sources.

Kāqāni appears to have had relations with other poets of his time, some living far away, although this is not always referred to directly by him. He does indeed refer to Rašid-al-Din Waṭwāṭ (among others, *qaṣida*, pp. 29-31) and Falaki (a *qeṭ'a* mourning his death, pp. 918-19), but he mentions neither Aṭir-al-Din Aḳsikati (q.v.; d. ca. 1211) nor Jamāl-al-Din Eṣfahāni (d. ca. 1192), although they cite him or his poetry in their *divāns* (e.g., among others, Aḳsikati, *qaṣida*, pp. 64-65; Jamāl-al-Din, *qaṣida* pp. 85-88).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See at end of part II.