



KĀR-NĀMA-YE BALĶ

KĀR-NĀMA-YE BALĶ, a short *maṭnavi* by Sanā'i of Ghazna (d. 1131), containing panegyric as well as satirical verses addressed to, or describing, people from various layers of Ghaznavid society. As in his other *maṭnavis*, Sanā'i uses the meter *kaḥf-e mosaddas-e maḥḍuf* in the *Kār-nāma*. The presence of a strong element of satire in the poem accounts for the alternative title, *Moṭāyeba-nāma* (Book of satire), used in some manuscripts, although it is certainly not the original title.

This poem—the first that Sanā'i wrote in the *maṭnavi* form—is a topical work written shortly after he had left Ghazna (see [ĠAZNI](#)) to seek new patrons at [Balĳ](#) (Balkh), which was at the time within the Saljuq domain. As most of the persons eulogized in the poem were living in the Ghaznavid capital, the poet's intention could have been to prepare the ground for an eventual return there. The exact date of its composition is not known, but the terminus ante quem must be 1115, the year of the death of Sultan Mas'ud (III) b. Ebrāhim, who is the first person praised in the poem. Belonging to the genre of topical poetry, it bears similarities with a few other works written in the same meter by Sanā'i's contemporaries, and in particular with an untitled *maṭnavi* by [Mas'ud-e Sa'd-e Salmān](#) (d. 1121) describing, in a similar vein, the court of the Ghaznavid viceroy at Lahore (*Divān* II, pp. 787-817; de Bruijn, pp. 196-200). These poems all share a common concern with important matters in the professional careers of the poets themselves.

Availing himself of a device often used in poems couched in an epistolary mold, Sanā'i begins by invoking the services of the wind, urging it to return to



Ghazna to survey the society that the poet has just left behind. The panorama is arranged according to the social status of the persons described (cf. de Bruijn, pp. 39-56 for a detailed account). It opens with the praise of the Ghaznavid Sultan and the princes of his house; followed by that of the officials serving in the administrative offices of the realm, the *Divān*. The poem then moves to the parade ground, the *mejdān*, of the Ghaznavid army and its commanders, and then proceeds to mention the eunuchs of the palace. One of the officials Sanā'i addresses directly is Teqat-al-Molk Ṭāher b. 'Alī, the head of the Sultan's department of correspondence (*divān-e rasā'el/enšā'*) and one of the poet's most important patrons in his early years. His plea, the most poignantly personal lines in the poem, is on behalf of Sanā'i's own father, dam, beseeching the dedicatee to take the old man under his care. The survey continues with the depiction of representatives of the religious establishment. Several of these had already been recipients of his panegyrics in the early years of his career in Ghazna.

In contrast to the high praise heaped upon these theologians, jurists, and preachers, the lower clergy from the countryside and Sufi impostors (in particular a group of female devotees) are severely chastised, though the latter are clearly distinguished from the true seekers of the mystical path. Of special interest is Sanā'i's description of the literary scene, which he ironically calls "the world of the soul" (*Ālam-e ruḥ*). This section culminates in the depiction of a banquet attended by poets, among whom praise and satire are distributed evenhandedly. The names of most of these poets are not recorded elsewhere, with the exception of the 'Alid poet Šaraf-al-Din Moḥammad Nāṣer, whom Sanā'i singles out reverently as "a candle amongst the descendants of the Prophet." Sanā'i wrote a panegyric to him; and a *qaṣida* by Moḥammad Nāṣer himself is cited in 'Awfi's anthology *Lobāb al-albāb* (II, pp. 267-70; see also de Bruijn, p. 56; de Blois, V, pp. 420-21). The lines containing the name of the well-known poet 'Oṭmān Moḳtāri of Ghazna (d. after 1119) occurring in the printed text, is undoubtedly a spurious insertion (cf. *Maṭnavihā-ye ḥakim Sanā'i*, pp. 168-69). Many of these minor poets were probably Sanā'i's professional rivals during the early stages of his career. Following this sketch, Sanā'i relates his perilous journey north over the [Hindu Kush](#) and the problems he encounters in this new environment in search of a suitable patron until he eventually encounters a certain 'Abd-al-Ḥamid, an otherwise unknown figure, to whom the poem is finally addressed.

The length of the *Kār-nāma-ye Balk* varies substantially in the different



manuscripts containing Sanā'i's poems. As no critical edition of the text has yet been established, the number of lines cannot be given exactly. The oldest extant copy, preserved in the Istanbul manuscript Bağdatlı Vehbi (No. 1672, dated 552/1157), has 433 lines, which is probably close to the original length. In spite of its brevity, the poem can be regarded as a significant specimen of topical poetry offering an interesting view of a medieval court poet at the outset of his career, as well as providing, more specifically, a key document for the biography of Sanā'i himself.

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