



ḲAYĀL, MIR MOḤAMMAD-TAQI

ḲAYĀL, the pen name of **MIR MOḤAMMAD-TAQI JA'FARI ḤOSAYNI** (d. 1173/1759), Indian author of a collection of historical and fictitious stories composed in Persian in fifteen volumes over fourteen years (1155-69/1742-56) and titled *Bustān-e kayāl*. Little is known of his life beyond what he himself tells us. The following is extracted from the lengthy autobiographical statement in the preface to his work quoted by Moḥammad-Ja'far Maḥjub (1983, pp. 52-57).

Ḳayāl was born in Aḥmadābād (Gujarat), and sometime during his teenage years he moved to Šāhjahānābād (Old Delhi). From his childhood days, Ḳayāl had a passion for stories. In Šāhjahānābād, Ḳayāl, who had learned Arabic (and, presumably, Persian), used to attend a coffeehouse frequented by artists and intellectuals. There he met a certain storyteller, in all probability a salaried narrator at the Mughal court (cf. his sarcastic remark, in Maḥjub, 1983, p. 55), who boasted of being the best in the field. This man was in the habit of retelling old tales with some modifications, which, in Ḳayāl's opinion, merely made them less pleasant. The storyteller had no knowledge of Arabic or Persian, but he enjoyed listening to Ḳayāl's reserved comments, which he did not understand but believed to be in praise of his performance. The storyteller continued to boast of his art while narrating the tale of Amir Ḥamza (see Meredith-Owens, in *EI2*) and other stories. Ḳayāl clashed with this narrator, accepted a challenge from him, and soon recited a story without



revealing that he himself was its author. The storyteller at first joined the audience in praising the story, but once he learned who the author was, he started criticizing it, saying that a story is pleasant if it is narrated in Indian, but quite unpleasant in Persian. He also reprimanded those who praised Ḳayāl. This incident encouraged Ḳayāl to narrate more stories, always disguising his authorship. He was also busy writing a story for one of his acquaintances.

Ḳayāl composed the first volume of *Bustān-e kayāl* at the same time that he was writing for others. He had written about one-fourth of the work when Nawwāb Rašid Khan Bahādor, probably of Delhi, read parts of the tale and liked it. He praised Ḳayāl's work and ordered him to complete it. Ḳayāl wholeheartedly committed himself to writing *Bustān-e kayāl* and worked on it every day. In 1742, after completing the first volume, which he titled *Farmāyēš-e rašidi*, he presented it to Nawwāb Rašid Khan. Nawwāb's elder brother, Nawwāb Ešhāq Khan Bahādor, who greatly enjoyed reading it, rewarded Ḳayāl with gifts and special favors. Ḳayāl soon finished the next two volumes and presented them to Nawwāb, who showed it to the Mughal emperor. Here ends the tale of Ḳayāl's life as recounted by him. All we know of the rest of his life is that, sometime during the 1750s, he left the royal service and went to Bengal, where he completed the last volumes of his book. He died in Murshidabad (Moršedābād), three years after the completion of *Bustān-e kayāl* (Farḥat-Allāh Beg, pp. 219-31).

Bustān-e kayāl comprises fifteen volumes, being the second largest cycle of tales after *Dāstān-e Amir Ḥamza*. Ḳayāl divided his story into two parts, each part containing many interwoven tales. The first part deals with the legendary adventures of the ancestors of Abu Tamim Ma'add b. al-Manšur al-Mo'ezz le-Din Allāh (r. 341-65/953-75), the fourth Fatimid ruler and the fourteenth Isma'ili Imam. The second part tells the story of a great king who ruled long before the birth of the Prophet MoḤammad. In brief, the king longed for a son and asked his vizier to cast a horoscope and predict his future. The vizier told the king that soon he would become the father of male twins, but warned that they would be destined to face many hurdles. He gave the king two amulets to tie around the arms of the elder son. After about nine months, the twins were born, and the vizier's advice was followed. The elder son was named Ḳoršid Tājbaḳš and the younger Badr-e Monir, and they differed from each other in habit and character. The elder brother was fond of merrymaking, whereas the younger loved riding, hunting, and other manly activities. Once Badr-e Monir



was hunting with his entourage when he saw a beautiful marble throne in a lonely jungle. He sat upon it, and the throne flew away with him and disappeared. The elder brother visited a grand palace in a dream for six consecutive nights and fell in love with a princess there. He left his home, along with his fellows, to seek the princess. Both brothers became involved in different talismans (*ṭelesm*; see J. Ruska and B. Carra de Vaux [C. E. Bosworth]), a kind of *mundus imaginalis* or imaginary world, which they conquered and where they gained a huge amount of wealth. After many adventures they returned to their homeland laden with jewels, gold, and the *Šam'dān-e solaymāni* (Solomon's candelabrum). They summoned Ḥakim Asqalinos (probably an imaginary name, conceived by the author to make it sound like the name of a Greek sage) and asked for his guidance. Asqalinos predicted that "a Prophet will be born in Deserta Arabia after many centuries, and one of his descendants, al-Mo'ezz le-Din Allāh, will marry two girls from your progeny." They ordered the Ḥakim to make a *ṭelesm* and put all their wealth in it, "so that Mo'ezz could conquer the *ṭelesm* and prove himself a worthy husband of the girls of our family." (Farḥat-Allāh Beg, pp. 227-29). Asqalinos acted upon the order and recorded all the past incidents in a book entitled *Šah-nāma-ye koršidi*. It was necessary for Mo'ezz to get the *Šam'dān-e solaymāni* and read the book in its light. In the meanwhile, Mo'ezz continued to conquer the *ṭelesm*. When he had accomplished this, he married Maleka Nowbahār, who was of the lineage of Koršid Tājbaḡš and Badr-e Monir, and they lived happily ever after.

In all probability, Kayāl was very close to the Isma'ilis. This is apparent in the symbolism presented as an undercurrent throughout the story. Scholars have not yet properly studied these symbolic ramifications, but should such a study ever be undertaken, it would show the Isma'ili tendency of the author.

The complete text of *Bustān-e kayāl* has not yet been published, although an abridged version titled *Bustān-e kayāl mawsum be Ṭarab al-majāles* was published in Bombay in 1309/ 1891 and in Lahore in 1916 and 1964 (Aršad, pp. 194-229). It has been translated into Urdu several times. Some of these Urdu versions have been published, but many remain unpublished (see Jayn, pp. 598- 658; Zaidi, pp. 204-6).

For manuscripts of *Bustān-e kayāl*, see *Cat. Bodleian*, nos. 9-23; *Cat. Bankipore*, nos. 749-65; Rieu, II, pp. 770- 72; Meredith-Owens, 1968, p. 46, no. Or. 11577; Ethé, nos. 833-45; Pertsch, pp. 993-94, no. 1040; Aumer, *Cod. Pers.* 57-58; Monzawi, *Noskaha* V, pp. 3742-45; idem, *Persian Manuscripts in Pakistan* VI,



pp. 1053-57; Ross and Browne, p. 53, nos. LXII-LXVII; Ivanov, p. 132, no. 305; Yazdāni pp. 37-42.

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See also Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman, “Classics Revisited,” in *Annual of Urdu Studies* 8, 1993, available at <http://www.urdustudies.com/pdf/08/21classics.pdf> <http://www.urdustudies.com/pdf/09/20SURclassics.pdf> <http://www.urdustudies.com/pdf/13/12salimClassics.pdf> (all accessed on 24 March 2013).