



KESĀ'I MARVAZI

KESĀ'I MARVAZI (also vocalized Kasā'i) (b. Marv, 27 Šawwāl 341/6 March 953), Persian poet of the second half of the 4th/10th century. His full name was probably Abu'l-Ḥasan Majd-al-Din 'Ali b. Moḥammad, as it is mentioned in Bāḳ-arzi's *Domyat al-qaṣr*, but some later sources (e.g., Āḍar, II, p. 660; Hedāyat, III, p. 1134) give Abu Eshāq as his patronymic (*konya*; cf. Riāḥi, 1996, p. 18). The honorific term *ḥakim*, which often precedes his name, indicates his reputation as a poet of wisdom. The "solitary scholar" (*al-mojtahed al-moqim be-nafsehi*), to whom Bāḳ-arzi refers, is almost certainly to be identified with this poet. Sadid-al-Din Moḥammad 'Awfi (II, p. 33) interprets the pen name "Kesā'i" as a reference to his ascetic way of life ("*kesā'-e zohd dar bar dāšt*"; 'Awfi, II, p. 33). This term can, however, be explained otherwise as a derivation from the same Arabic word "*kesā*" "piece of clothing," pointing to the craft of a tailor (Şafā, I, p. 441; Neẓāmi 'Aruzi, commentaries, p. 91).

The sources more or less agree on his origin from Marv, and he must have spent most of his life in that city. Further biographical information is almost completely lacking, but we do have a precise dating of his birth, provided by the poet himself in the opening lines of a famous poem lamenting old age: *be siṣad-o čehel-o yak rasid nawbat-e sāl / čahār šanba-o seh ruz bāqi az Šawwāl* ("The year had arrived at three-hundred and forty-one:/ a Wednesday, and three days before the end of Šawwāl," i.e. 16 March 953). In the same poem he states that he had reached the age of fifty. Some modern scholars have concluded (e.g., Foruzānfar, 1971, p. 39; Şafā, I, p. 442; Edārači, pp. 288-89) that he must have therefore died in or shortly after 1000-01, but the exact date of



his death is not recorded.

In the days of Kesā'i, the area of Khorasan was in political turmoil. The Samanid kingdom was falling apart, while the Ghaznavids, the first Turkish dynasty in Persian history, were establishing their rule. The poet seems to have found protectors in both camps. The satirist poet Moḥammad Suzani Samarqandi (d. 1173-74) alludes to the patronage lavished on the poet by Abu'l-Ḥosayn 'Obayd-Allāh b. Aḥmad 'Otbi (k. 982), the vizier of the Samanid Amir Nuḥ b. Maṣṣur (Riāḥi, 1969, p. 444). In one of the fragments of his poetry quoted by 'Awfi (q.v.; II, p. 34), Kesā'i praises Sultan Maḥmud of Ghazna. He in fact seems to have written panegyrics praising powerful men during most of his literary career, a matter that he evidently bitterly regretted later on in life (see the verse in Asadi, 1986, p. 87).

A *divān* of Kesā'i was still extant until the mid-12th century and held in high esteem, but afterwards it fell into oblivion ('Abd-al-Jalil Qazvini, p. 231; Riāḥi, 1969, p. 446). Only a few complete poems have been preserved. The rest consist of short pieces, probably only fragments from larger poems, which were saved because they were of some interest to lexicographers and anthologists. To the former belonged Asadi Ṭusi (q.v.), the author of the *Loḡat al-fors* (11th cent.), and to the latter, the anthologist 'Awfi (early 13th century). Kesā'i is also cited several times by the early Persian rhetorician Moḥammad Rāduyāni. The first collection of Kesā'i's poetry, compiled by Hermann Éthé on the basis of a number of biographical anthologies (*taḍkeras*), is now outdated; new material has been published by 'Ali-Akbar Dehḳ-odā, Moḥammad Dabirsīāqi, and Moḥammad-Amin Riāḥi. Two religious poems came to light only recently: one, a dirge on the martyrs of Karbalā, was found in an album added by the anthologist Taqi-al-Din Kāši as an appendix to his *Ḳolāṣat al-aš'ār*, compiled between 1585 and 1607 (cf. Riāḥi, 1996, pp. 65-72), and the other is a *qaṣida* in honor of the Imam 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, which was found in a manuscript of the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul (Riāḥi, 1969, pp. 447-49; idem, 1996, pp. 44-50, 89-92).

Kesā'i wrote poems in Arabic as well as Persian. Despite the fact that little of his work has survived he is regarded as a fine lyricist to this day. This appreciation is based in large part on the images of nature in the fragments that have reached us (cf. Šafi'i Kadkani, pp. 430-33). A remarkable example is this fanciful vignette of a water lily (*nilufar*) on the surface of a pond:

Nilufar-e kabud negah kon miān-e āb,



Čun tiġ-e ābdāda o yāqut-e ābdār;
 Hamrang-e āsmān o ba kerdār-e āsmān,
 Zardi-š bar miāna čō māh-e dah o čahār;
 Čun rāheb-i ke do roḡ- u sāl o māh zard,
 Wa'z meṭraf-e kabud redā karda o ezār ('Awfi, II, p. 35).

Observe the blue water lily, in the midst of water,
 Like a tempered blade or a lustrous ruby,
 Same as the sky in color and as with the sky
 Bearing yellow (or yellow yoke) at its center, just like a full moon.
 Or resembling an ascetic monk with cheeks yellow, all the year round;
 Like monk who has made of azure cloth, his trousers and gown.

To writers closer to his age, however, Kesā'ī was foremost a religious poet, notably to Bāḡ-arzi and to 'Awfi (II, p. 33), and the latter notes that “most of his poems treat asceticism (*zohd*), admonition (*wa'z*), and the virtues of the members of the House of the Prophet (*ahl-e bayt-e nobowwat*).” In the *divān* of the Isma'īli poet Nāṣer-e Ƙosrow (d. ca. 1072), a number of *qaṣidas* are concluded by a reference to Kesā'ī as a respected predecessor whom the younger poet claims to have surpassed. This instance of rivalry between religious poets has led to speculation about the branch of Shi'ism to which Kesā'ī adhered. The claim made by 'Abd-al-Jalil Qazvini, the author of the *Ketāb al-naqz*, in the mid-12th century, that he was an Imami seems to be more likely than the conclusion that he was an Isma'īli, which was drawn by Moḥammad Mo'in (Nežāmi 'Aruzi, commentaries, p. 97) and Sa'id Nafisi (I, pp. 26, 37-38; cf. his commentaries to his ed. of the *Lobāb al-albāb*). The exchange of poems between Kesā'ī and Nāṣer-e Ƙosrow, quoted by Režāqoli Khan Hedāyat (III, pp. 1135-37) from the *Ƙolāṣat al-aš'ār* of Moḥammad-Taqi Kāši is an anachronistic forgery, assembled from poems belonging to the *divān* of Nāṣer-e Ƙosrow (see Nežāmi 'Aruzi, commentaries, p. 93; Šafā, I, pp. 444-45; Edārači, pp. 391-93, 474-75).

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