



MAS'UD-E SA'D-E SALMĀN

MAS'UD-E SA'D-E SALMĀN (b. Lahore 1046-49?, d. 1121-22), Persian poet of the later Ghaznavid period. The first major Indo-Persian poet, Mas'ud-e Sa'd-e Salmān is best known for the poetry he wrote in prison and in exile. Although later traditions about his life are unreliable, his *divān* provides a considerable amount of autobiographical information. His father, Sa'd-e Salmān, came to Lahore from Hamadān in order to serve the Ghaznavids as *mostawfī* (Bayhaqi, p. 501). He therefore enjoyed a privileged position at the court when he was not out of favor, and was patronized by five Ghaznavid rulers in total, as well as by members of the elite of the time. The older poet [Abu'l-Faraj Runi](#) was a mentor to him, while his younger contemporaries Sanā'i and Moktāri were staunch admirers of his poetry.

The appearance of Mas'ud-e Sa'd on the literary scene can be dated to 1076-77, when he composed a *qaṣida* for the governor of the Indian provinces, Sayf-al-Dawla Maḥmud, son of Sultan Ḥāher-al-Din Ebrāhim (r. 1058-99). Since his professional career was linked to the Ghaznavid expansion in northwestern and northern India, his *divān* is an important source of information for historians writing about this period. As a warrior-poet, he wrote several *fath-nāmas*, describing the Ghaznavid victories over Indian cities, such as Kanauj, Narayan, and Agra. The reason why Mas'ud-e Sa'd fell out of favor with Sultan Ebrāhim is not entirely clear from his poetry, nor do the historiographical sources provide a satisfactory narrative of the events. The most plausible explanation has been pieced together by Mehdi Nuriyān on the basis of the scattered references to it among Mas'ud-e Sa'd's poems (1993, pp. 155-65). On



an official visit to Ghazna, after defeating the court poet Rāšedi in a poetry competition, he is said to have boasted about his triumph, and thus aroused the displeasure of several courtiers, including his patron, Prince Maḥmud. Subsequently, when his property in Lahore was confiscated, he asked for permission to leave for the *ḥajj*, but his request was denied; in fact, it raised suspicions that he may have been attempting to join the rival Seljuq court, a charge against which he defended himself vehemently. When he attempted to gain the intercession of Sultan Ebrāhim directly, this actually worked against him, because Prince Maḥmud had fallen from the Sultan's favor, and being connected with him, Mas'ud-e Sa'd was sent to prison in 1089-90. He spent the next ten years as a prisoner and in exile in three remote fortresses, Dahak, Su and Nāy (in present-day Afghanistan), from where he continued to write poetry in the hope that his patrons would remember him and gain his release. After Sultan Mas'ud III pardoned him in 1099, Mas'ud-e Sa'd was appointed viceroy of Jālandar in eastern Punjab (Panjāb), where he wrote a *matnawī* describing a festive courtly gathering. But the following year, his patron Abu Naṣr-e Pārsi was removed from office along with all his dependents, and as a result Mas'ud-e Sa'd spent seven years in the Indian prison of Maranj. After being pardoned by Sultan Mas'ud III in 1106-07, he was appointed the royal librarian in Ghazna, where he remained active as a court poet and finally received the recognition he had craved for.

The early poetry of Mas'ud-e Sa'd consists mostly of *qaṣidas* in the style of the older Ghaznavid poets, especially 'Onṣori, but he also mentions older poets like Rudaki and Labibi as his models. His prison poetry, referred to as the *ḥabsiyāt*, accounts for almost a third of his entire extant output, and is rightly considered his best work. The autobiographical *ḥasb-e ḥāl* sections imbedded in the *qaṣidas* and *qaṭ'as*, which describe his abjectness and loneliness, especially in those poems addressed to the Nāy prison and to his hometown Lahore, are considered masterpieces of classical Persian poetry. Some of these poems are addressed to his patrons in Ghazna, while others are without dedications, and tend to be of a more personal nature. In such poems, Mas'ud-e Sa'd's frequent use of his name (*taḳalloṣ*) shifts the focus of the audience from the patron to the poet, thus drawing attention to his plight.

After release from his second term of incarceration in 1106, Mas'ud-e Sa'd continued to write panegyric poetry for the Ghaznavid rulers Širzād, [Alp Arsalān](#) and Bahrām. His body of work from this period is that of a mature poet, with occasional references to the suffering he endured in the past. It is



also in this period that he expanded his repertoire of forms of panegyric to include the *tarkib-band*, *mosammaʿ*, *ḡazal*, *mostazād* and *robāʿī*. His poetry is particularly distinctive for its innovation in a range of classical forms and genres. The poems written on the Persian names of the days of the week and month, and the names of the months of the year, (pp. 939-55) are unique in the canon of classical Persian literature. He also wrote a *mostazād* that may be the earliest work of its kind (p. 783). His *Šahr-āšub*, which is a cycle of poems in the *qaṭʿa* form describing youths engaged in various trades, may be the first example of a continuous form of this genre (pp. 915-35). According to 'Awfi's account, Mas'ud-e Sa'd wrote poems in three languages—Persian, Arabic and Hindi (p. 733). It is uncertain which language Hindi would have signified at this time in India, and given the fact that there are no extant verses in any Indic language by the poet, 'Awfi's claim is extremely dubious. While one can find the occasional line in Arabic among the approximately 16,000 lines of verse in his *divān*, there is no separate body of poetry extant in this language. The poem by Ḥariri (q.v.) in which he praises Mas'ud-e Sa'd's Arabic poetry (Minovi, pp. 10-11) may therefore be spurious. An abridged prose *Šāh-nāma* has also been wrongly attributed to Mas'ud-e Sa'd (Storey, p. 414).

The question of the influence of Mas'ud-e Sa'd's Indian environment on his creative powers and the extent to which his innovation in poetic forms derived from his exotic environment is a complex issue. There is no evidence of any direct borrowing of Indic poetic forms, although his location on the fringes of the Persian world, and in a place where there were strong cross-cultural currents present, certainly was a catalyst for him. His poetry was widely read at least until Amir Ḳosrow's time, but after that he seems to have been neglected until the *bāz-gašt* revival of Ghaznavid poetry in Persia. Most of the surviving manuscripts of his *divān* date from the late Mughal or Qajar periods. He especially influenced Malek-al-Šo'arā' Bahār, whose *qaṣīda* on Tehran evokes Mas'ud-e Sa'd's well-known poem on Lahore. There are several early accounts of his life, beginning with Neẓāmi 'Aruẓi's dramatic version and including Dawlat-šāh's fictitious biography, but the most reliable source remains the poet's own *divān*.

Mas'ud-e Sa'd's *Divān* was edited by Rašid Yāsemi (Tehran, 1939) and a critical edition was prepared by Mehdi Nuriyān (Isfahan, 1985). A number of editions of selected poetry by Mas'ud-e Sa'd have also appeared in recent years.



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