



## NOZHAT AL-MAJĀLES

**NOZHAT AL-MAJĀLES**, an anthology of some 4,000 quatrains (*robāʿi*; a total of 4,139 quatrains, 54 of which have been repeated in the text) by some 300 poets of the 5th to 7th/11th-13th centuries, compiled around the middle of the 7th/13th century by the Persian poet Jamāl-al-Din Ḳalil Šarvāni. The book is arranged by subject in 17 chapters (*bābs*) divided into 96 different sections (*namaṭ*). The anthology also includes 179 quatrains and an ode (*qaṣida*) of 50 distiches written by the author himself, who is also credited with one lyric (*ḡazal*) in Moḥammad Jājarmi's *Mo'nes al-aḥrār*.

As stated in Jamāl-al-Din's own ode at the end of the book, he compiled his anthology in the name of 'Alā'-al-Din Šarvānšāh Fariborz III (r. 1225-51), son of Goštāsb and dedicated it to him. It has reached us in a unique manuscript copied by Esmā'il b. Esfandiār b. Moḥammad b. Esfandiār Abhari on 25 Šawwāl 731/31 July 1331, and is presently bound together in one volume with the *divān* of Faḳr-al-Din 'Erāqi at the Süleymaniye Library in Turkey (no.1667) among Wali-al-Din Jār-Allāh's collection. This manuscript embraces some 77 leaves (fols. 41a-118a), each page having 27 lines. The first few leaves of the book, which had probably embodied a preface in prose, have been lost. Fritz Meier (p. 117) and Christian Rempis (1935, p. 179) have erroneously taken Esmā'il b. Esfandiār, the copyist, to be the author of the book.

The manuscript of *Nozhat al-majāles* was first described by Hellmut Ritter (pp. 223-33). Three years later, in 1935, Rempis extracted and published the quatrains of Omar Khayyam (Ḳayyām) recorded in the anthology, and in 1963 Fritz Meier performed the same task for Mahasti's quatrains. The first Persian



scholar to use this anthology was Moḥammad-‘Ali Foruḡi, who obtained a copy of the manuscript and incorporated 31 quatrains of Khayyam found there in his edition of the *Robā‘iyāt-e Kayyām* (pp. 35-44). Sa‘id Nafisi (pp. 176-77) wrote on the *Nozhat al-majāles* and extracted the names of the unknown poets of Arrān and Šarvān who were mentioned in the anthology. Moḥammad-Taqi Dānešpažuh, in his article describing this anthology, rearranged the list of names extracted by Nafisi according to the names of the poets’ hometowns and also gave the list of the subject matter in each section of the book (pp. 573-81).

*Nozhat al-majāles* belongs to an era when quatrains were very popular and formed substantial sections in the *divāns* of major poets of the time such as Anwari, ‘Aṭṭār, Sanā‘i, Kāqāni, Rumi, and Kamāl-al-Din Esmā‘il. [Sadid-al-Din Moḥammad ‘Awfi](#) (d. ca. 1232-33) remarked in his biographical anthology *Lobāb al-albāb*, that many poets wrote only quatrains. At about 1192, approximately a hundred years before the compilation of *Nozhat al-majāles*, a similar anthology of quatrains entitled *Majma‘ al-robā‘iyāt* had been compiled in Ankara by Abu Ḥanifa ‘Abd-al-Karim b. Abi Bakr, an incomplete copy of which is now at the library of Ḥālat Afandi (Ateş, pp. 94-133). [Jājarmi](#) also devoted the twenty-eighth chapter of his *Mo‘nes al-aḥrār* (comp. 1340) to *robā‘is*, comprising 470 quatrains. In another recently discovered anthology, entitled *Safīna-ye Tabriz*, a major part called “*Ḳolāṣat al-aš‘ār fi’l-robā‘iyāt*” contains 498 quatrains arranged in 50 sections (*bāb*). Most of them, however, are selected from *Nozhat al-majāles* and in a number of cases offer a more reliable reading (Afšār, pp. 535-38).

*Nozhat al-majāles* is a very valuable source for identifying the authors of many quatrains which had been wrongly attributed to major poets or whose authors had not been identified at all. For example, eighty quatrains published in Badi‘-al-Zamān Foruzānfar’s edition of Rumi’s *Divān-e Šams* are now proven to belong to other poets, due to their inclusion in this anthology. The same is true about nine quatrains attributed to Hafez in some old manuscripts of his *divān*.

Another significant merit of *Nozhat al-majāles* is that it contains the quatrains of a number of poets whose collected works are no longer extant. For instance, the thirty-three quatrains by Khayyam and the sixty quatrains by Mahasti found in this anthology are among the oldest and most reliable collections of their works. *Nozhat al-majāles* also comprises many quatrains by such scholars and mystics as [Avicenna](#), Aḥmad Ġazāli, Majd-al-Din Baḡdādi, and [Aḥmad-e Jām](#), who had never been recognized as poets, and such poets and



writers as Neẓāmi Ganjavi, [Asadi ʿUṣi](#), [Faḵr-al-Din Asʿad Gorgāni](#), and ʿOnṣor-al-Maʿāli Kaykāvus, who had been known only by their major works and hardly any poems had been ascribed to them; as well as quatrains by a number of rulers and statesmen, including the Saljuk sultan ʿOḡrol, Atsız K̄wārazmšāh, Fariborz Šarvānšāh, Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Jovayni, Malek Zawzan, Solaymānšāh of Iva, Amir Kāmyār, and ʿAlāʾ-al-Din Kabud-jāma.

The most significant merit of *Nozhat al-majāles*, as regards the history of Persian literature, is that it embraces the works of some 115 poets from the northwestern Iran (Arrān, Šarvān, Azarbaijan; including 24 poets from Ganja alone), where, due to the change of language, the heritage of Persian literature in that region has almost entirely vanished. The fact that numerous quatrains of some poets (e.g. Amir Šams-al-Din Asʿad of Ganja, ʿAziz Šarvāni, Šams Sojāsi, Amir Najib-al-Din ʿOmar of Ganja, Badr Teflisi, Kamāl Marāḡi, Šaraf Šāleḡ Baylaqāni, Borhān Ganjaʾi, Elyās Ganjaʾi, Baḵtiār Šarvāni) are mentioned together like a series tends to suggest the author was in possession of their collected works. *Nozhat al-majāles* is thus a mirror of the social conditions at the time, reflecting the full spread of Persian language and the culture of Iran throughout that region, clearly evidenced by the common use of spoken idioms in poems as well as the professions of the some of the poets (see below). The influence of the northwestern Pahlavi language, for example, which had been the spoken dialect of the region, is clearly observed in the poems contained in this anthology.

It is noteworthy, however, that in the period under discussion, the Caucasus region was entertaining a unique mixture of ethnic cultures. Kāqāni's mother was a Nestorian Christian, Mojir Baylaqāni's mother was an Armenian, and Neẓāmi's mother was a Kurd. Their works reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region. [Ḥobayš b. Ebrāhim Teflisi](#) paraded his knowledge of different languages by mentioning the name of the drugs in his medical dictionary, *Taqwim al-adwia* in several languages, including Persian, Arabic, Syriac, and Byzantine Greek. This blending of cultures certainly left its mark on the works of the poets of the region, resulting in the creation of a large number of new concepts and terms, the examples of which can be noticed in the poems of Kāqāni and Neẓāmi, as well as in dictionaries.

In contrast to poets from other parts of Persia, who mostly belonged to higher echelons of society such as scholars, bureaucrats, and secretaries, a good number of poets in the northwestern areas rose from among the common people with working class backgrounds, and they frequently used colloquial



expressions in their poetry. They are referred to as water carrier (*saqqā*), sparrow dealer (*oşfori*), saddler (*sarrāj*), bodyguard (*jāndār*), oculist (*kaḥḥāl*), blanket maker (*leḥāfi*), etc., which illustrates the overall use of Persian in that region. Chapter eleven of the anthology contains interesting details about the everyday life of the common people, their clothing, the cosmetics used by women, the games people played and their usual recreational practices such as pigeon fancying (*kabutar-bāzi*; p. 444), even-or-odd game (*ṭaq yā joft bāzi*; p. 446), exercising with a sledgehammer (*potk zadan*; p. 443), and archery (*tir-andāzi*; p. 444). There are also descriptions of the various kinds of musical instruments such as *daf* (tambourine; see [DAF\[F\]](#) and [DĀYERA](#)), *ney* (reed pipe), and *čang* ([harp](#)), besides details of how these instruments were held by the performers (pp. 150-63). One even finds in this anthology details of people's everyday living practices such as using a pumice (*sang-e pā*) to scrub the sole of their feet and *gel-e saršur* to wash their hair (pp. 440-41).

*Nozhat al-majāles* suffers from certain structural shortcomings. The overriding concern of the author has been to arrange the quatrains strictly according to their contents, therefore paying little heed to the names of the poets of the verses. This has occasionally led to the attribution of a particular quatrain to two different persons. The scribe has not been very careful in doing his work either. He has apparently transcribed all of the available poetry first and then added the names of their poets so haphazardly that the name of a poet is sometimes mentioned either further down or further up than the place where his quatrains are located. Some of the errors and oversights have been identified in the edited version, and, following the publication of the text, Sayyed 'Ali Mir-Afzali pointed out a number of other errors missed by the editor (see bibliography).

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