



PUR BAHĀ' JĀMI, TĀJ-AL-DIN

PUR(-E) BAHĀ' JĀMI, TĀJ-AL-DIN (born in Jām, Khorasan; d. ca. 1284?), poet, pun master, satirist, and often scathing social commentator. Very little biographical detail is recorded for him; he is known simply by his pen name (*taḳalloṣ*) Pur Bahā', in reference to his father's name, Bahā'-al-Din (Minorsky, 1964a, p. 295). The few recorded details of his life have been gleaned from dates and references given in his work and from knowledge of his patrons, the most exalted of whom were the Jovayni brothers.

Pur Bahā' was born into a family of administrators who had seen better times and who instilled a pervasive sense of injustice in the resultant biting and vindictive satirist. He was a native of **Jām** in Khorasan and his youth was spent in Herat. Since the time of the 10th-century Sāmānids, his family had held positions of local influence in the province as judges (*qāẓi*) and scholars, though during the poet's lifetime the post of *qāẓi* in his family's particular case had become a titular adornment carrying little if any legal or political clout. In an ode addressed to Naṣir-al-Din Ṭusi, the poet admits to his own unsuitability for the post of *qāẓi* but pleads for a relative, Ṣāḥeb-al-Din, to be appointed deputy governor (*nā'eb*) of Jām. He claimed that the family's decline had been brought about by the arrival of a newcomer from Bākārz, Qāẓi 'Emād-al-Din, who had been able to assume the role of governor (Minorsky, 1964b, p. 295; Ṣafā, pp. 661-62, n. 1).

It is this same 'Emād-al-Din Mālīni who earns the invective and ridicule in Pur Bahā's often Rabelaisian verse, his *maṭnawī* in particular where six verses are devoted to this arch-enemy, whom he labeled 'Emād-e Lang (the Lame 'Emād;



Pur Bahā', pp. 9-10, vv. 79-84; Hoffman, pp. 438-40, lines 98-103): "Inauspicious like an owl; hungry like a raven; a thief like a magpie; ill-omened like a crow; like a crane, all neck and legs; a bat, all talons and claws" (Pur Bahā', p. 10, vv. 83-84; Hoffman, p. 440, lines 102-3). In other verses and poems 'Emād-al-Din's reputation is made to pay a high price for 'usurping' the poet's ancestral position as governor of Jām; Pur Bahā' even suggested that the governor's harem was open to paying guests. The poet felt free to malign and slander officials and especially the clergy in a similar fashion, generally employing coarse language and imagery to emphasize his point (Jājarmi, pp. 896-915)

An interest in literature was evident from his youth, and two poets, Mawlānā Rokn-al-Din Qobā'i and Sa'id Heravi, exerted an influence during these early years in Herat. While in Khorasan as a panegyrist poet, he made an impression at the court with the governor, who at the time enjoyed the favor of the young Il-khanid prince, [Arġun Khan](#) (r. 1284-91) and who had matrimonial links with the powerful [Jovayni](#) brothers. The governor, 'Ezz-al-Din Ṭāher Faryumadi (d. ca. 668/1270), who was married to the daughter of Bahā'-al-Din Jovayni, and his son Wajih-al-Din Zangi appreciated his stinging satire and presumably approved of its content. During this period, the poet acted as panegyrist (*maddāḥ*) for a number of high Il-khanid officials who served under [Abaqa Khan](#) (r. 1265-82), and this experience served him well when he moved westward to Isfahan and Tabriz. The targets of his satire were often those whom he continued to perceive as having usurped the position of his family.

After leaving Khorasan, the poet is known to have spent most of his life in Tabriz, Isfahan, and Baghdad, where he achieved particular fame as the panegyrist for the Jovayni family, most noticeably for the historian and governor of Baghdad, 'Alā'-al-Din 'Aṭā-Malek (q.v.), the prime minister, [Şāḥeb Divān Šams-al-Din Moḥammad](#), and the notorious governor of Isfahan and son of Šams-al-Din, Bahā'-al-Din. Pur Bahā' was also favored by the extremely influential Našir-al-Din Ṭusi, to whom he would allude in his work. However, Pur Bahā' was not writing in a vacuum, and the transformed empire emerging from the divisive civil war of 1260 was culturally vibrant and dynamic. The Toluid Mongols in the east as well as the west oversaw a shared cultural renaissance (see Allsen, pp. 210-11), which was surprisingly liberal in many respects, and the Yüan elite indulged a taste for satire equally biting as that found at the Il-khanid court, as one example can demonstrate. With religious figures and tax collectors the target of the satirists' pens in the western branch



of the Toluid empire, in the east in the popular Yüan opera, the revered army found itself the butt of disdainful mockery. Mongol generals prided themselves on their mastery of military tactics with a pomposity readily open to ridicule: “Complete is my mastery of the Seven Stratagems and the Four Manoeuvres; the Four manoeuvres, they are the Heavenly Manoeuvre, the Earthly Manoeuvre, the Manly Manoeuvre, and the Horse-Manoeuvre” (*t’ien lüeh, ti lüeh, jen lüeh, and ma-liao*; Crump, p. 432).

Even though Pur Bahā’'s pen could sing sweetly, the grating tones of his words could be equally cruel, the mix of praise and rebuke being his trademark style. The poet often danced on a delicately balanced wire, and though he undoubtedly had powerful friends, he just as assuredly had many powerful and patient enemies. Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi refers to him briefly in his list of eighty-nine of the most celebrated poets of Persian and Pahlavi languages, describing him as a panegyrist of Šams-al-Din Jovayni and other notables of the period (Mostawfi, p. 724; tr. Browne, no. 17, p. 743). After his patrons met predictably bloody ends, references to the poet cease and it is doubtful whether he survived the bloody turmoil of the Il-khanid court during the 1280s and 1290s.

Since Pur Bahā’ was so closely identified with the Jovayni family, it is likely that he suffered a similar fate to his illustrious patrons and that if he did not lose his life he most certainly would have lost his fortune. Tact was not a trait associated with the poet, and he was vicious with those who challenged or threatened his interests or those of his patrons. As noted above, a distinctive characteristic of the poet was to combine praise and vitriol in the same work, lauding his patron while later insulting someone who had crossed him. He concluded most of his odes (*qaṣida*) with the following words, “in praise (*madḥ*) of so-and-so and in mockery (*hajw*) of so-and-so.” When Majd-al-Molk, a member of the powerful Qazvini family and rival and enemy of the Jovayni brothers, finally lost the fight against his hated foes and met a particularly gruesome fate, Pur Bahā’ was there, ready with a clever ditty. “He [Majd-al-Molk] wanted his hand to reach as far as Iraq; his grasp couldn’t reach but his hand did arrive” (Waṣṣāf, pp. 108-9, ed. Āyati, pp. 68-69). Aware that Majd-al-Molk had always hoped to extend his grip on power and influence as far as Baghdad, the poet’s whimsical words refer to the fact that Majd-al-Molk was sliced up in the course of his execution and his body parts were sent to various parts of the kingdom. Pur Bahā’ enjoyed the irony of Majd-al-Molk’s hand achieving this ambition but presumably not the rest of his body or mind.



What is particularly noteworthy in Pur Bahā's work, is his use of Mongolian and Turkish idioms, many of which are rarely found in other literary works of the time (Martinez, pp. 130-52). Though his usage is highly stylized in works such as the so-called "Mongol Ode" ("Qaṣida-ye moḡoliya"; see Minorsky, 1964a) the frequency and ease of use of such Mongolian and Turkish terms suggest that such language was in much more common employment than has generally been credited despite the existence of other texts employing Turco-Mongol terminology. Naṣir-al-Din Ṭusi's "On Finance" (see Minovi and Minorsky) is just such a text using numerous Mongolian and Turkish terms which do not appear in later Persian writing. The text was targeted at as wide an audience as possible, though actually executed on the orders of the Il-khan, presumably Abaqa. It is likely that the language in most common usage amongst the population of Iran under the Mongols was a hybrid of Persian, Turkish, and Mongolian. This would support the view that in his work Pur Bahā often reflects the street lexicon prevalent during the Mongol era.

Though Persian had become the lingua franca of the Toluid Mongol empire, employed in commercial and government circles in China as well as Iran and Turkestan, it is doubtful whether the Persian in common usage was the sophisticated language of Jovayni, much less the excruciatingly obscure phraseology of Waṣṣāf. The "barbaric harmonies" of Pur Bahā, as Minorsky has described them (1964a, p. 275), are more likely to have reflected the language that would have been heard from Dali, capital of Yunnan, to Tabriz, and spoken in the bazaars of Kāšḡar and in the bath-houses of the Toluid capital, Kānbaliq. His "Mongol Ode," so noticeably rich in Turco-Mongol idioms, was dedicated to Šams-al-Din Jovayni, prime minister of the Il-khanate and brother of the sophisticated and historian, 'Aṭā-Malek (Minorsky, 1964a, p. 276) so it must be presumed that these quintessentially Persian brothers would have had no problem following the clever inter-lingual word-play and Turco-Perso-Mongol punning.

Whereas in poems such as his account of the earthquake in Nishapur, where he refers to the good-works of Abaqa Khan and describes **him** as the "Nušīrvān of our time, Abaqa, the lord of the world, the sovereign of the earth, the world conqueror, foe-binder" (Browne, III, p. 114; Faṣiḥ K^vāfi, II, p. 340), Pur Bahā is suitably respectful of his superiors, he is elsewhere not afraid to launch into vicious tirades against the government and their policies and to address such words to the highest officials. In an address to his patron 'Aṭā-Malek Jovayni, governor of Baghdad, he makes an impassioned and vitriolic



attack on the excessive taxes imposed by the Mongols and paid to the Ilkhanate state (ed. and tr. Minorsky, 1964b, pp. 299-305). He complains that “The census, that in thirty years was taken once, Now every two or three days launches (some new) *qopčur*” (poll tax; ed. and tr. Minorsky, 1964b, pp. 299, 303, v. 4). Such is the zeal of the tax collectors that “A chick has not yet put its head out of the shell, When *qobčur* has been fixed both on the cock and the hen” (ed. and tr. Minorsky, 1964b, pp. 301, 304, v. 22). So great is the distress and lamentations of the victims of Arğun Khan’s tax regime that the *qobčor* itself feels the affliction of the people. “Because of the burning prayer of the oppressed, *Qobčur* itself is raising its sighs and cries to the (throne) of the Almighty” (ed. and tr. Minorsky, 1964b, pp. 301, and 305, v. 34). Pur Bahā’ was obviously very unhappy at having to pay these taxes, but it is rare that eulogies and fulsome praises are composed about tax collectors or about the pleasures of filling the state’s coffers with the pecuniary sweat of one’s own labor. It is perfectly natural to resent parting with hard-earned wages and to dislike an efficient and thorough system that evidently did not allow or encourage shirking or evasion of payments due. That Pur Bahā’ was allowed and felt confident enough to compose such satirical ditties and then to present them to the high government officials who were responsible for the collection and spending of much of those monies, says much for the indulgence and tolerance of the regime under which he lived. One reason for the indulgence that the poet enjoyed was his undisputed skill as a poet. Minorsky stresses Pur Bahā’'s competence and sensitivity as a wordsmith and notes that though he has become rather an obscure and minor figure from this period, at the time the poet and his work were well known and widely appreciated (see Minorsky, 1964b).

Doubtless there was room and reason for complaint, but Pur Bahā’'s words cannot be taken as a serious assessment of the financial health of his times. Whether Pur Bahā’ is describing the absence of his patron who, in the “Mongol Ode,” is addressed as if he were a beauty luxuriating in confectionery (*tozğu*) and surrounded by houris and peris, indulging and improvising in the use of new and foreign terms, eulogizing his masters (ed. and tr. Minorsky, 1964a, pp. 277-79, 287-91), complaining of his harsh and unjust lot in life, attacking his enemies (e.g., see Minorsky, 1964b, p. 297), or even composing panegyrics to his own penis (Jājarmi, II, pp. 897, 902) and elaborating the advantages of young boys over women, Pur Bahā’ is invariably wildly extravagant, and his words cannot be taken at face value. His diatribe against the *qobčor* was addressed to ‘Aṭā-Malek Jovayni and his main aim must have been to amuse



and humor his rich and powerful patron and possibly at the same time to convey the message that the taxes were not exactly popular. Disgruntled taxpayers have been around as long as rapacious tax collectors, but it is not always that these malcontents are allowed the luxury of giving public voice to their chagrin.

In one particular *maṭnawī*, the “Kār-nāma-ye awqāf,” Pur Bahā' demonstrates a number of characteristics for which he has since become famous, such as his use of non-Persian vocabulary, a close knowledge of the local administration, and the minutiae of *waqfs* and taxation, with biting satire, ribald humor, and very lewd imagery. At least two manuscripts of this work exist, each attributed to different authors. The 13/14th century Tehran manuscript upon which Iraj Afšār bases his edition is attributed to Tāj-al-Din Nasā'i, while the second manuscript produced in 1620 and housed in the British Museum (Or. 9213) names the author as Pur Bahā'. No further information or references to Tāj-al-Din Nasā'i have been established, while two main factors support the supposition that the “Kār-nāma” is the work of Pur Bahā'. Firstly, the dedication of this work to 'Ezz-al-Din Ṭāher Faryumadi and his son is in keeping with the dedications found in a number of other panegyric works in Pur Bahā's *Divān*; and secondly, the region with which the poem is concerned is closely associated with Pur Bahā' and a target of some of the poem's invective can comfortably be identified with a known enemy of Pur Bahā', 'Emād-al-Din, whom he calls 'Emād the Lame and the Jackass 'Emād of dung (*Mardak-e kar 'Emād-e sargini*). The later British Museum manuscript contains lines not found in the earlier work and the verse order also differs considerably. Birgitt Hoffmann has translated this *maṭnawī* into German and has provided an introduction and summary of the poem followed by a clearly labeled transcription and translation to allow for an effortless comparison of the manuscripts' lines.

In the “Kār-nāma-ye awqāf,” dated 24 Rajab 667/29 March 1269, and dedicated to 'Ezz-al-Din Ṭāher Faryumadi (Pur Bahā', pp. 5-22; Hoffmann, pp. 409-85), he lampoons the administrators of *waqfs* and cruelly satirizes the hypocrisy found among mullahs and many members of the religious classes. In this *maṭnawī* in particular, he names some targets of his verbal venom such as 'Emād-al-Din, Sayf-al-Din Bektemor, Ḥāji Nasā'i, and Fakr Lanba the beggar and refers to actual places, and to anyone acquainted with the area it must have been possible to recognize actual people to whom the disgraceful deeds were attributable. The intimacy of his knowledge of the region suggests



personal acquaintance with both the actors involved and the details of the administration cited. He also details the technicalities of the financial abuses that he saw as prevalent in the administration of the *waqfs*. Such intimate understanding of the working and manipulation of the system strongly suggests a personal acquaintance with the intricacies of *waqf* collection and distribution at the deepest level. The poem is a prolonged attack on the abuses and corruption that surrounded the administration of the *waqf* at every level and the resultant tainting of the institution itself. His declaration that to bestow a *waqf* is an act against religion (p. 20, v. 298; Hoffmann, p. 478, line 350) is the shocking conclusion at which his twisting and barbarous tale eventually arrives. His advice to his fellow citizens is to leave the maintenance of God's servants, the theologians and ulema, to God, "The daily bread of the clergy is God's responsibility" (Pur Bahā', p. 18, v 260; Hoffmann, p. 472, line 309).

This long, drawn-out *matnawī* allowed Pur Bahā' the opportunity to indulge his passion for unveiling corruption and hypocrisy amongst the ulema and the *waqf* controllers in particular. That these verses were then distributed at the highest courts would suggest that his audience had sympathy with, if not approval of, his views. He has little faith in the clerics' promises of rewards in heaven, but he is cautious in his attacks on religion. "Do not prefer 'credit to cash' [*nasya-rā bar naqd magzin*] and strive, Not to be divorced from pleasure for a moment" (ed. and tr. Minorsky, 1964a, pp. 286, 291, v. 13). Even though the Mongol rulers were still infidels at this time, the majority of courtiers and even many among the Mongol elite would have been Muslim and would not have tolerated open attacks on Islam itself. Indeed one explanation for Pur Bahā's possibly irreverent use of the word "interregnum" (*fatrat*) in 667/1269 (Pur Bahā', p. 20, v. 315; Minorsky, 1964b, p. 294) in reference to the fifty years of Mongol rule in Iran, is that the poet is gently, even jocularly, suggesting that the Mongol rulers are close to conversion to Islam. His attacks are very clearly directed at the hypocrisy and un-Islamic behavior of many of the clergy and not necessarily at the religion itself.

Like the satirist of the later and post Il-khanid period, 'Obayd Zākāni, Pur Bahā' delighted in scornfully insulting the religious classes and their hypocrisy and abuse of power. Even the revered Naṣir-al-Din Ṭusi is mentioned perilously close to profanely, as when the verses refer to "favours from God or K̄vāja Naṣir" (Pur Bahā', p. 16, v. 215; Hoffmann, p. 464, line 264). Whether the poet was working in the pay of a rich and powerful benefactor with his own



agenda, following instructions to attack the reputations of local dignitaries, or whether like the satirist 'Obayd Zākāni he was writing from a personal sense of outrage cannot be known. It is known, however, that Pur Bahā's palace connections were higher placed than were 'Obayd Zākāni's, who spent much of his time in Shiraz and who suffered greatly from penury and debt. Pur Bahā' was more personal than the later satirist, who directed his venom more at the manners of the aristocracy as a class and at stupidity in general, a trait that he greatly despised.

Pur Bahā' was also linked with Homām-al-Din Tabrizi, the Sufi poet and boon companion of the Šāḥeb Divān, whom he met while visiting Tabriz with Wajih-al-Din, the son of a major patron, the Persian governor of Khorasan Tāher Faryumadi (Dawlatšāh, p. 137). It is interesting to speculate what such a lofty figure as Homām-al-Din, whose mind it could be imagined to have been preoccupied with weighty spiritual matters, would make of this popular poet's discourse and advice on such matters as the relative advantages and drawbacks of selecting women rather than young boys as sexual partners, a debate expressed in crude and lewd language. The poet's arguments suggest personal experience of both sides of the debate (Jājarmi, p. 902; Sprachman, pp. 28-39).

Pur Bahā' was a poet very closely associated with administration apparatus ([Divān](#)) and with the Jovayni brothers in particular. His present fame rests in many ways on his diatribes against the harsh taxation system imposed on the country by the ruling Il-khanid regime. Minorsky edited and translated one of his poems in praise of 'Alā'-al-Din 'Aṭā-Malek, and suggested that this work validated the criticisms that the Šāḥeb Divān Rašid-al-Din Faḏl-Allāh was later to make concerning the pre-Ġāzān Khan administration (Minorsky, 1964b, pp. 298, 299-305).

Pur Bahā', like many others of his countrymen, resented paying taxes and no doubt found it a great strain on his resources. He, however, appears to have been quite unafraid to address long poems of extravagant complaint to his exalted patrons. His praise is spiked with impudence when, in this poem deriding the severity and unfairness of Il-khanid taxation, he notes that his patron is "The Lord of the viziers, 'Alā' al-Daula w'al-Dīn, Whose justice (has) levied *qopčur* on the whole world." Whereas Rašid-al-Din could be accused of self-interest and ulterior motives in his stinging criticism, Pur Bahā's only motive would appear to be to ease the sting in his own pocket. Later he also notes that it was not only the Persians who suffered from such tax burdens but



that Mongol lords were also required to pay their dues. “In thy time the kingdom has become such that, on the order of the sheep, The shepherd’s dog collects *qopčur* from the wolf” (ed. and tr. Minorsky, 1964b, pp. 299-305, vv. 36, 41). That Pur Bahā’ felt confident enough to write such hard hitting verse lacking in the usual panegyric filigree says as much about the poet’s audaciousness as about his patrons’ liberality and tolerance. Even irreverent references to Mongol rule as an “interregnum” (Minorsky, 1964b, p. 294) appear to have gone unchallenged. Pur Bahā’, for all his poems of complaint and woe, recognized providence when he encountered it. He ends a poem, written in 1271 in praise of the “just Abaqa” for his restorative work on the city of Nishapur, with the following lines: “Three things, I pray, may last for aye, while earth doth roll along: The Khwāja’s life, the city’s luck, and Púr-i-Bahá’s song” (Browne, III, p. 115; Faṣiḥ K̲v̲āfi, II, p. 340).

Another poem uncharacteristically free from satire or attack summarizes the poet’s personal views on life. It may have been written after his fall from grace, when he saw the cruel face of fate finally beckoning; but if he is the author, he reveals a carefully hidden side to his personality. He explains his view on life in this untypically bucolic verse, a view probably popular at the Persian courts in the 13th century. The opening verses claim that he has never intended nor knowingly given any distress or grievance to anyone, a dubious claim from one famed for his barbed pen and vitriolic phrase. He continues in images reminiscent of an earlier poet.

“I am content to sit quietly in a corner,

Free from sorrow and exempt from blame and quarrel;

I am fond of a few small things in the world, ...

A cheerful place, new clothes, a pleasant smell,

A good face, a few books of wisdom, and a backgammon board,

A true friend, a sound of strings, a cup of wine,

A pot of fat meat, a hot loaf, and [a draught of] cold water”

(ed. and tr. Minorsky, 1964a, pp. 286, 291, vv. 6-9).

No one collection contains all Pur Bahā’s work, and his verses remain



scattered. However, the job of identifying his work is made easier by the very idiosyncratic style that he employs in almost all his work. Even though his one long *maṭnawī*, the “Kār-nāma-ye awqāf,” appears under another author’s name on the earliest extant manuscript, the style, content, and personal references clearly indicate it as belonging to Pur Bahā’s *Divān*. His work appears in anthologies, biographical dictionaries, and historical chronicles, among them Dawlatšāh’s collection of Persian verse, which contains the so-called Mongol Ode (Dawlatšāh, pp. 181-85), the historical chronology of Faṣīḥ Aḥmad K̄vāfi (II, pp. 337, 340), the *Tadkera-ye haft eqlim* of Amin Aḥmad Rāzi (p. 694), and the *Mo’nes al-aḥrār* of Badr Jājarmi (pp. 896-919).

The largest collection of Pur Bahā’s work can be found in the *Ketāb-e Pur Bahā’* dated 1029/1619-20, which was compiled on the instruction of the Qoṭbšāhis of Haydarabad. This manuscript comprises forty-one *qaṣidas*, thirteen fragments (*moqaṭṭa’āt*), one strophe-poem (*tarkib-band*), the *maṭnawī* called “Kār-nāma-ye awqāf,” two lyrics (*ḡazal*), and seventy-three quatrains (*robā’i*), altogether totaling 25,216 verses. With the exception of the quatrains, his poetry is devoted to panegyrics and satire, or quite often a mixture of both, while Sanā’i and Suzani Samarqandi remained his favorite poets and admired models.

Modern studies of the poet are surprisingly few, especially considering the detailed descriptions that he affords the workings of the *waqf* system and the widespread abuse with which it was riddled, a situation to which others merely allude. Edward G. Browne notes the association the poet maintained with the upper echelons of the Il-khanid court and alludes to the lewd nature of his more popular verses. Minorsky’s studies and translations of the Mongol ode and Pur Bahā’s tirade against Mongol taxation put the poet firmly back center stage, but only one other study, Birgit Hoffman’s analysis and German translation of the “Kār-nāma-ye awqāf” has provided any kind of serious follow-up.

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