



QĀSEMI-E ḤOSAYNI-E GONĀBĀDI

QĀSEMI-e ḤOSAYNI-e GONĀBĀDI, Moḥammad Qāsem (d. 982 /1574), poet and scholar of the [Safavid](#) period.

LIFE

Much biographical information about Qāsemi's early life remains ambiguous. His name has been mentioned as Moḥammad Qāsem (Āḍar Bigdeli, p. 61), and that of his father as 'Abd-Allah, who was known as Amir-Sayyed Gonābādi (Amir 'Ališir Navā'i, p.139; Šafā, 1993, V/2, p. 718). He lived in the district of Jonābaḍ (see [GONĀBĀD](#)), in Khorasan (Rāzi, II, p. 311;), and he has been variously referred to as *Jonābaḍi*, *Jonābadi*, *Gonābādi* or *Gunābādi*. In a letter ascribed to him and extant in a manuscript collection entitled *Maṭnaviyāt*, he refers to himself as Qāsemi-e Ḥosayni-e Jonābadi of a sayyed descent, originally from Tabriz (*Maṭnaviyyāt*, folios 251 and 535; see also Golčīn-e Ma'āni, p. 421). According to Nafisi, Qāsemi was among the descendants of Shah Qāsem Anvār, a noted Sufi poet (Nafisi, I, p. 508). His date of birth has not been mentioned in any source, and no details are available on his education. However, according to Qāsemi himself, he was "fully engaged in learning and concentrated the entirety of [his] effort on acquiring knowledge, especially mathematics, in which case [his] thinking soared to the firmament" (*Maṭnaviyāt*, p. 251). Sām Mirza Šafavi (p. 39), Vāleh Dāğestāni (p. 1782), and Aḥmad 'Ali Aḥmad (p. 136) considered him as prominent in knowledge, piety,



intelligence and wisdom, and first in poetry, prosody, riddles, and mathematics.

Qāsemi considered himself a disciple of ‘Abd-al-Allāh Hātefi, the nephew of ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmi and the author of *Teymur-nāma*, whose style was often emulated by later poets (Bernardini, 2004, p. 56; Moẓaffar, p. 644; Šafā, 1982, p. 6). Qāsemi credits Jāmi as the most skilled in the composition of *maṭnavi* (*Šāh-Esmā‘il-nāma*, pp. 167, 351; for a history of the origins of this imitative literary form see Šafā, 1995). Qāsemi studied mathematics and logic with Ġiāt-al-Din Maṣṣur Daštaki Širāzi (Abrahams, p. 2), a scholar and philosopher who served for a brief period as one of two *šadrs* (chief clerical overseers) under the Safavid Shah Ṭahmāsp I (Sanbhali, p. 270; Šadiq Ḥasan Khan, p. 326; Šafā, 1993, V/2, p. 718). Following what was a family tradition, Qāsemi took employment as a *kalāntar*, but he soon delegated the position to his brother Amir Abu’l-Faṭḥ (Sām Mirza, p. 39) and opted instead for a life of asceticism (see DARVĪŠ). He also crafted his estate, estimated at about two thousand *tomān* at the time, into an endowment to the shrine of ‘Ali b. Musā al-Rezā in Tus (Rāzi, II, pp. 311-14).

Qāsemi spent a few years at the court of Shah Esmā‘il I and, upon the king’s death, joined the court of Shah Ṭahmāsp I (Šafā, 1993, V/2, p. 718), who is best remembered for his patronage and revival of Persian adab and cultural life. According to a *farmān* (decree), which appears on folio 3 of *Afzal al-tavāriḳ* (q.v.) and is inserted immediately after the narrative of the accession of Shah Ṭahmāsp on 19 Rajab 930/23 May 1524, Qāsemi was appointed the court’s poet laureate (Malek-al-šo‘rā’) and the shah’s special companion at royal assemblies. “This arrangement of material is clearly intended to emphasize the timing of Qasemi’s appointment which coincided with the Shah Ṭahmāsp’s accession or soon after” (Abrahams, p. 5; see also Melville, 2006). Although the precise duration of his tenure at the court of Shah Ṭahmāsp is not known, Qāsemi is certain to have completed his book while still attached to it in 1534.

However, with Shah Ṭahmāsp’s escalating religious fervour, and his distaste for the arts and literature that he had previously patronized, many artists and poets found themselves seeking refuge in India—an exodus that would continue for the remainder of the Safavid period (Matthee, 2008). Qāsemi, who was not properly rewarded by the king for his *Šāh-nāma-ye Navvāb-e ‘Āli*, which he had composed in praise of Ṭahmāsp I himself, traveled to Bhakkar in Punjab in his final years. There he composed a eulogy in *motaqāreb* meter (see ‘ARŪŽ), entitled *Šāh-nāma-ye Kāni* (Qomi, I, pp. 443-46), in praise of the local



emir, Sultan Maḥmud Khan. (For the life and reign of Sultan Maḥmud Khan, see Badā'uni, II, p. 121; Tatavi and Āṣef Khan Qazvini, pp. 740-41; see also Abrahams, pp. 11-12.) Qāsemi's anger at his unfair treatment by Shah Ṭahmāsp is documented in both primary and secondary sources (Rumlu, p. 462; Šafā, 1364: 718, 72).

Although many manuscript copies of Qāsemi's works have survived, not much biographical information is available on his final years. Qāsemi, as set out in his introduction to the *Zobdat-al-aš'ār*, also traveled to Najaf and Mecca (*Maṭnaviyāt*, p. 535; Golčīn-e Ma'āni, p. 442). An encounter with Qāsemi in Kashan has been recorded by 'Alā-al-dowla Qazvini in his *Nafāyes-al-maāter*, as reported in Āgā Aḥmad 'Ali Aḥmad's (ca. 1783-1873) *Haft Āsmān* (p. 136).

WORK

Qāsemi was a prolific poet with many of his works extant. The introduction to his *Zobdat-al-aš'ār* (*Maṭnaviyāt*, p. 535) enumerates his works in the following order:

(1) *Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma*. The book, also known as *Šāh-nāma-ye Qāsemi*, is a versified historical narrative in rhymed couplets in praise of the conquests of Esmā'il I, composed upon the order of his son Ṭahmāsp I. As substantiated in most extant manuscripts of the book, *Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma* consists of 4,352 lines (see Monzavi, IV, pp. 2956-58). Qāsemi himself counts 4,000 couplets in the book: "The lace of this magnificent jewel/ is four thousand [couplets] / Endowed with an ocean of blessings/ a slight addition would be permissible" (*Bovad 'eqd-e in gowhar-e ābdār / ze ru-ye 'adad čār-bāra hezār / az ānjā ke daryā-ye feyżam 'atāst/bar ān andaki gar fozudam ravāst; Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma*, p. 357).

According to Qāsemi himself the composition of the book was completed ten years after the death of Esmā'il I in 1533: "If you graciously spare the head of *naẓm* ["verse"] / you shall be led to its date" (*Be loṭf az sar-e 'naẓm' agar bogdāri/ ravān pey be tāriḳ-e ān āvari*). Should one omit the first letter in the word *naẓm*, that is, spare its head, the sum of the numerical values of the remaining two consonants is 940, or 1534 in the Gregorian calendar. (For numerical values associated with the Semitic alphabet, see [ABJAD](#).)

Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma can be divided into twenty-one segments or chapters. It begins with the customary brief passage in praise of the Prophet and his



descendants, a florid eulogy of Esmā'il I, several lines in praise of Ṭahmāsp I, the patron of the work, as well as Ebrāhim Mirza Šafāvi, the grandson of Esmā'il I and the son of the learned and resourceful prince, Bahrām Mirza, who is also remembered as a patron of the arts. There are also verses in praise of Hātefi, and Amir Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Nuri Kamāl, a vizier of Ṭahmāsp I and a member of the Nur-kamāliya order, whom Qāsemi addresses as *Ḥāzrat-e Āšef-panāhi*. Then follows the accounts of Shah Esmā'il's life, his many battles, including the battles with the Turkmans and the Uzbeks, and his conquest of Baghdad. The work ends with a number of couplets on the demise of Esmā'il I, and a "Sāqi-nāma," in praise of wine and cupbearers, as well as an index of Qāsemi's works. The large manuscript production of the book attests the widespread attention it had received. (For a provisional list of the manuscripts of the *Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma*, see Bernardini, 2003, pp. 17-18; see also *Fehrest-vāra-ye dast-neveštā-ye Irān*, ed., Moštafā Derāyati, Tehran, 2010).

Qāsemi's well-crafted descriptions of battle scenes and figures in a refined and non-convoluted language in his *Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma*, coupled with his use of innovative similes and metaphors, have inspired a critic to praise his poetry as a shining star in the gloomy nights of Iran's literary decline under the Šafavids (Salmāsizādeh, p. 1519). However, the imagery he employs, although exquisite, more befits lyrical poetry than that of a historical epic and is often rendered in conflict with the scenes he describes (Šafi'i-Kadkani, p. 199). Golč'in-e Ma'āni, quoting from *Taḍkera-ye Kolāšat-al-aš'ār* by Mir-Taqi-al-Din Kāšāni (d. 1607), holds that the recurrence of inaccessible similes and stories in *Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma* exact a toll on the flow and fluency of the poem (Golč'in-e Ma'āni, p. 417). Renditions of mythological, astronomical, folkloric, and religious themes abound in the book. Passages in praise of the Shi'ite Imams, in particular 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, are rendered with utmost passion (Keyhāni, pp. 9-11). Some of his verses are colored with philosophical overtones and border on parables and proverbs (*Šāh Esmā'il nāma* pp. 381-84).

(2) *Šāh-nāma-ye Navvāb-e 'Āli*. After completing *Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma*, Qāsemi undertook the composition of *Šāh-nāma-ye Navvāb-e 'Āli* in praise of Ṭahmāsp I himself and titled the two versified chronicles together as *Šāhanšāh-nāma* (*Maṭnaviyāt*, p. 521; Šafā, 1982, p. 7). It begins with praise for the Prophet, a description of the Prophet's celestial ascent (see *Me'rāj*), a panegyric for Ṭahmāsp I, a brief section on reasons for composing the work, and it continues with forty segments on Ṭahmāsp I's life and reign. Among the insightful parts of the book are Qāsemi's discussion of domestic political events and Ṭahmāsp



I's conflicts with the Qezelbāš commanders in their pursuit of power; the Uzbek attack by 'Obayd-Allah Khan to conquer Khorasan and Ṭahmāsp I's heroic recovery of the conquered lands; his battle against the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent (d. 1566); the account of how Suleiman's son, Bāyazid, sought refuge at Tahmāsp I's court, and how he was eventually handed over to his brother, the later Sultan Salim II (see [OTTOMAN-PERSIAN RELATIONS i](#)).

Šāh-nāma-ye Navvāb-e 'Āli consists of 5,569 couplets and most probably was completed in 1543 (Şafā, 1982, p. 7; Kazānadārlu, p. 470). It is preserved in a manuscript of *Maṭnaviyāt* dated 981/1573 and housed in the library of the Shrine of Imam Reza (folios 387-533). No print edition of the book is available.

Qāsemi's renditions of the major events during the reigns of Esmā'il I and Ṭahmāsp I, as held by a critic, "bear traces of political use of history put in practice by the Timurid and Safavid sovereigns during the 15th-17th centuries" (Bernardini, 2003, pp. 7-8). Lines of his *Šāh-nāma* are quoted as references in historical texts, including *Aḥsan-al-tavāriḳ* by Ḥasan Beg Rumlu (pp. 40-41), *Tāriḳ-e Ilči Neẓām-Šāh* by Ḳoršāh b. Qobād-al-Ḥosayni (pp. 9-10), and *Javāher-al-aḳbār* by Budāq Monši-e Qazvini (p. 39; see also *Šāh Esmā'il nāma*, pp. 191, 196-97).

The book also offers significant information on the city of Qazvin, its horse riding arena, and Ṭahmāsp I's wedding ceremony, as well as biographical data on some noted princes and figures (*Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma*, pp. 156, 183, 269; *Maṭnaviyāt*, pp. 415, 451, 455, 459, 517, 521). Mention should also be made of Qāsemi's glorified depiction of wine and winedrinking ceremonies, either as separate passages in the text or as three to four lines in praise of cupbearers and singers at the end of the different chapters of the book (*Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma*, pp. 346-50, *Maṭnaviyāt*, p. 529; see also Faḳr-al-Zamāni-e Qazvini, pp. 173-80; Keyhāni, pp. 11-14). The recurrent appearance of musical terms in the book displays Qāsemi's familiarity with music and musical instruments. The book also includes passages in praise of spring (Bahāriya), as well as several elegies.

(3) *Leyli o Majnun*. A narrative poem of 2540 lines in *hazaj* meter (1570), the book is an imitation of Neẓāmi Ganjavi's *Leyli o Majnun*, and revolves around unrequited love. It begins with passages in praise of the Prophet and the Shi'ite Imams and is dedicated to Ṭahmāsp I. Copies of the manuscript are housed in the library of the Shrine of Imam Reẓā in Mašhad (no.8383), the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris (Şafā, 1993, V/2, p. 723), and the Central



Library of the University of Tehran (Kāzānadārlu, pp. 472-74). As indicated in his preface to the *Zobdat-al-aš'ār*, Qāsemi was later commissioned by Abu'l-Faṭḥ Mirza, the king's nephew, to compose a second version of *Leyli o Majnun*—a book that he considers as a second eye to the first narrative (Golčīn-e Ma'āni, p. 422).

(4) *Guy o čowgān* (The ball and the polo stick). Also known as *Kār-nāma*, the book, a *matnavi* in *hazaj* meter, was commissioned by Ṭahmāsp I in 1540; it includes passages in praise of religious figures, description of the sky and the earth, as well as Shah Ṭahmāsp's playful engagement with the game. The book, although allegorical in many ways, does not seem to be inspired by Mowlānā Maḥmud 'Ārefi Heravi's *Hāl-nāma* (1438), which is also known as *Guy o čowgān* and tells the tale of a dervish's pure love for a prince which ends in the dervish's self-immolation at the prince's feet. A copy of the manuscript is housed at the library of the Shrine of Emām Rezā in Mašhad (No. 8383), and a second one at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris (Šafā, 1993, V/2, p. 723).

(5) *Ḳosrow o Širin*. Commissioned by Sām Mirza, and completed in 1543, *Ḳosrow o Širin* is an imitation of the second book of Neẓāmi's *Ḳamsa* and chronicles in refined language the love story of a Persian king and an Armenian princess. It is composed in *hazaj* meter and comprises 3,000 couplets. Copies of the book are available in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, the Central Library of the University of Tehran, and the Malek National Library in Tehran.

(6) *Šāhroḳ-nāma*. A narrative poem in *motaqāreb* meter, the work was commissioned by Tahmāsp I in 1543; it chronicles, in 5,000 lines, the life of the Timurid prince Šāhroḳ (r. 1405-47). A copy of the book is housed in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris (Šafā, 1993, V/2, p. 721), and another in the British Library (Rieu, II, p. 661).

(7) *'Omdat-al-aš'ār*. Qāsemi mentions in his preface to the *Zobdat-al-aš'ār* (p. 422) that he composed the *'Omdat-al-aš'ār* during his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1557. The library of the Shrine of Imam Rezā in Mašhad houses an extant copy of the book.

(8) *Zobdat-al-aš'ār*. The *Zobdat-al-aš'ār* (1568), a compendium of didactic and mystical poems in *sari'* meter, is an imitation of *Maḳzan al-asrār*, the first narrative in Neẓāmi's *Ḳamsa*, to which Qāsemi, in his preface to the book, also refers as *Javāb-e Maḳzan al-asrār*. The book, as again indicated by Qāsemi in



his preface (*Maṭnaviāt*, folio, 535) is inspired by Salmān-e Sāvoji's *Jamšid o koršid* (see [JAMŠID II. IN PERSIAN LITERATURE](#)). The library of the Shrine of Imam Reżā in Mašhad houses a copy of the book.

The influence of Neẓāmi and his *Eskandar-nāma* on Qāsemi's poetic corpus is attested to by his language and syntax, and more significantly by his inclusion of numerous lines in praise of the Prophet and his ascension, as well as the recurrent appearance of passages in praise of wine and wine cupbearers throughout his work (Şafā, 1995, p. 366). Qāsemi himself is the first to acknowledge Neẓāmi's impact on his poetry: "Very much like Neẓāmi, I am an upholder of the verse / I am an admirer of the second Alexander" (*Neẓāmi-sefat nazm rā bāniyam / tanā-k'ān-e Eskandar-e tāniyam; Šāh-Esmā'il-nāma*, p. 166, line 615).

In addition to works of verse, Qāsemi wrote an introduction (*moqaddama*), in prose, to the *Zobdat-al-aš'ār*, in which he enumerates his works (*Maṭnaviāt*, p. 535). There is a letter written by Qāsemi to Akbar I the Mughal emperor of India (see also [AKBAR-NAMA](#)), in *Haft Āsmān*, p. 137, by Āgā Aḥmad 'Ali Aḥmad, an Indian-born scholar of Persian language and literature and the founder of Madrasa-ye Aḥmadia in Calcutta, in which Qāsemi introduces his works to the Indian king. The letter comprises an account of his works of verse and bespeaks his unease with the reception of his poems by the dignitaries of the time. Qāsemi's simple and unadorned prose provides an antidote to the long and rhymed sentences by which the literature of the period is generally recognized.

Sām Mirza Şafavi's *Tadkera-ye toḥfa-ye Sāmi* includes several quotes from biographers and scholars of the period, including Amir 'Ališir Navā'i, Amin Aḥmad Rāzi, Loṭf-'Ali Aḍar Bigdeli, Mir-Ḥosayndust Sanbhali, and Āgā Aḥmad-'Ali Aḥmad, in which they praise Qāsemi as a poet of "high aptitude" and "exalted thoughts," as well as a "treasure-trove of concepts," unrivaled in "eloquence, similes and metaphors" (Sām Mirza Şafavi, p. 39).

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