



SĀQI-NĀMA

SĀQI-NĀMA (Book of the Cupbearer), a poetic genre in which the speaker, seeking relief from his hardships, losses, and disappointments, repeatedly summons the *sāqi* (Arazi; Hanaway; Soucek) or cupbearer to bring him wine and the *moğanni* or singer to provide a song. The prototypical form of the genre—an independent poem of 150-300 rhymed couplets in the *motaqāreb* meter—was consolidated in the early 16th century. Many of its basic elements, however, go back to the beginnings of the Persian and Arabic poetic traditions (Kennedy; Yarshater). Anacreontic poetry celebrating the drinking parties of the nobility and cultural elite (*kamriya*) provided a well-established repertoire of topoi and tropes on wine, its vessels, and the servants, entertainers, settings, and manners appropriate to the courtly banquet. Such parties by their very nature depart from the normal routines of daily life and violate the precepts of Islamic law. These transcendental and transgressive implications took on a new significance with the development of Sufi poetry in the 10th and 11th centuries. Utilized in every poetic genre and form, wine emerged as one of the most protean and adaptable image complexes in the literary tradition. It could provide solace for the outcast, open the doors of mystical transcendence, or sanctify the communal festivities of the court.

The defining formal and thematic features of the *sāqi-nāma* first began to take shape in the works of Nezami (Nezāmi) of Ganja (d. 1209). Entitled *Dar šefat-e ḥāl-e k̄viš-o yād-e godāštegān* (Describing the speaker's state and in memory of the departed), the closing section of the introduction of *Leyli o Majnun* is punctuated every seven to ten verses by invocations of the *sāqi* and short



descriptions of wine. Both the themes of this passage and its strophic-like form would figure significantly in the later history of the genre. In *Eskandar-nāma*, this introductory device is deployed throughout the work. Nezāmi marks the transitions between major episodes by short passages of eight to ten verses beginning with the formula *beyā sāqi* (Come, sāqi), in which he calls on the cupbearer for wine and inspiration and reflects on some of the common themes of homiletic wisdom literature—the brevity of human life, the fickleness of fate, and the necessity of severing worldly attachments. Nezami himself, however, may have been drawing on a yet earlier model. In Persian dictionaries of the Mughal period, Moḥammad-Jaʿfar Maḥjub (pp. 77-9) has identified several verses attributed to Faḡr-al-Din Gorgāni, the author of *Vis o Rāmin* (composed ca. 1053), that appear to come from a lost work in the *motaqāreb* meter and contain the telltale phrase *beyā sāqi*. Whatever their sources, the meter, phraseology, and content of the passages from *Eskandar-nāma* would provide the basis for the later prototypical form of the sāqi-nāma.

The summoning of the cupbearer continued to serve as a structural device in the many responses to Nezami's *Eskandar-nāma* written over the following centuries, such as Amir Ḳosrow's *Āyina-ye Sekandari*, Ḳvāju of Kerman's *Homāy o Homāyun*, and Jāmi's *Ḳerad-nāma-ye Eskandari*. The essential step in establishing the sāqi-nāma as an independent genre, however, was taken by Hafez (Ḥāfeẓ) of Shiraz (d. 1392). Among the few works he wrote in rhymed couplets are a series of short poems written in the *motaqāreb* meter addressed to the sāqi and the moḡanni. As Parviz Nātel Ḳānlari points out (Ḥāfeẓ, II, pp. 1050-52), the text of these works is extremely unsettled. It is not clear whether or not the sāqi-nāma and moḡanni-nāma constituted a single poem, and in early manuscripts the length of the sāqi-nāma ranges from 15 to 57 verses. This textual fluidity perhaps made Hafez's poem(s) particularly ripe for later elaboration, and its elegiac tone, mystical overtones, and theme of *ubi sunt* would remain constant elements of the genre.

Over a century would pass before poets took up Hafez's experiment in earnest and the sāqi-nāma was recognized as an independent genre. The key moment came during the period of literary experimentation that accompanied the rise of the Safavid dynasty in the early 16th century. The literary historian and biographer Awḥadi of Balyān (d. ca. 1632) would give much of the credit for creating this new genre to Ḥakim Partovi of Shiraz (d. 1522; see *Meykāna*, pp. 124-40). Containing 281 rhymed couplets in the *motaqāreb* meter, Partovi's sāqi-nāma is several times longer than even the longest version of Hafez's

poem. Partovi's principal contribution was to establish the prototypical internal structure of the genre. The poem opens with a lament on the collapse of social, psychological, and cosmic order. The speaker then calls on the cupbearer and singer to deliver him from this despair; in a passage that occupies nearly two-thirds of the poem, formulaic phrases such as *beyā sāqi*, *bedeh mey*, and *moğanni* serve to organize an account of a quest to transcend the limitations of the finite self. The poem concludes with a eulogy to "the cupbearer of both worlds," 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, the first Shi'ite imam. A similar structure can be found in other early Safavid *sāqi-nāmas* by Şedqi of Astarābād (d. 1545) and Şaraf-e Jahān of Qazvin (d. 1561). Although these poems conclude with a royal panegyric, Safavid ideology drew little distinction between allegiance to the Shi'ite imams and allegiance to the shah. The tripartite structure of these *sāqi-nāmas* closely resembles the *nasib*, *raḥil*, and *madiḥ* of the classical *qaşida*. In both forms, the poem moves from self-alienation through the transcendence of individual ego to a new communal identity. The main difference between the two lies in the middle section. This section gives the *sāqi-nāma* its name and is usually the longest in the poem; the desert journey of the *raḥil* is projected inward and becomes a psychological quest. Wine and music help the speaker sever former bonds, relieve old obsessions, and establish a new sense of purpose. The subjectivity of the journey in the *sāqi-nāma* often takes the form of *ḥasb-e ḥāl*, the poet's account of his own life. The *sāqi-nāma* of Şufi of Māzandarān (d. 1626), for example, contains no *madiḥ*; the speaker instead announces his new identity as a poet and his decision to emigrate from Persia to India.

Though the basic structural pattern established by Partovi underlies most *sāqi-nāmas*, the genre is able to accommodate diverse subsidiary elements, and its boundaries are fluid. A variety of other thematic genres can be integrated into the *sāqi-nāma*. Abu Ṭāleb of Fendarsk (d. after 1712), for example, begins his *sāqi-nāma* with a personal conversation with God, a *monājāt-nāma* (Golč'in-e Ma'āni, p. 39). An extended series of oaths, known as a *sowgand-* or *qasam-nāma*, opens the *sāqi-nāma* of Sālek of Qazvin (d. ca. 1674; Golč'in-e Ma'āni, p. 221-22). In both of these works, the rhyming couplets are interrupted by the insertion of several ghazals. A description of musical instruments, triggered by the summoning of the singer, is featured in many *sāqi-nāmas*; when these instruments begin to speak and lament in the *sāqi-nāma* of Fozuli of Baghdad (d. 1556), the genre merges with the Ottoman *çeng-nāma* (pp. 674-709). Topographical descriptions can also play an important role, as part of either the *madiḥ* or the *ḥasb-e ḥāl*. Fāni of Kashmir (d. 1662), for instance, devotes



several passages to describing the sights of his homeland (Golčīn-e Ma‘āni, pp. 328-29, 348-50), while the sāqi-nāma (in the *hazaj* meter) of the Central Asian poet Sayyedā of Nasaf (d. ca. 1707) consists largely of a walking tour of the city of Bukhara, from the shrine of Bahā-al-Din Naqšband to the throne room of Sobhān-Qoli Khan (pp. 18-38).

All these various elements contribute to the 4,500 verses of the sāqi-nāma of Zohuri of Toršiz (d. 1616), perhaps the single longest exemplar of the genre. Dedicated to the Neẓām Shah Borhān II (r. 1591-95), the work begins with a series of summons to the cupbearer ending with two ghazals and a panegyric to the patron. An account of a banquet at Borhān’s court introduces a long description of Ahmadnegar and its outskirts. In the final portion of the poem, Zohuri celebrates the art of poetry, presents a series of homiletic exempla ending in a private prayer, and closes with a second encomium to Borhān II. The sāqi-nāma of Waḥid of Qazvin (d. 1698-99), dedicated to Shah Soleymān, takes up Zohuri’s model; here, however, the topographical description of Isfahan is followed by a lengthy *šahrāšub*, a tour of the market with amorous descriptions of its craftsmen (see *Golčīn-e Ma‘āni*, *Šahrāšub*, pp. 64-67). Perhaps the last great transformation of the genre is *Moḥit-e a‘zam* (The mightiest ocean), by Bidel of Delhi (d. 1721). In the work’s prose introduction, Bidel acknowledges Zohuri’s sāqi-nāma only to denounce it as the ‘rust merchant of a senseless hangover’ (*zengār-foruṣ-e komār-e bišo‘uri*, III, p. 578). The conventions of the sāqi-nāma in Bidel’s hands become the framework for theosophical meditations and exempla on the illusory phenomena of the material world as emanations of God’s creative force in the tradition on Ebn ‘Arabi.

In spite of their diversity, these sāqi-nāmas share essential formal features: they are written in rhymed couplets and, with an exception or two, in the motaqāreb meter. But the genre could take other forms. ‘Abd-al-Nabi Faḳr-al-Zamāni of Qazvin organized his literary compendium *Tadkera-ye Meykāna* (completed in 1618) on the basis of the sāqi-nāma; earlier poets are included only if they composed one, and contemporary poets who did not are relegated to the book’s brief final section. For ‘Abd-al-Nabi, however, the genre includes not only poems in rhymed couplets, but also poems in the strophic forms of *tarji‘*- and *tarkib-band* that take wine and the sāqi as their principal topic. This form of the sāqi-nāma can be traced back to Faḳr-al-Din ‘Erāqi (d. 1289). His collected works contain two tarji‘-bands (pp. 91-98 and 264-68) with the refrain *dar meykada mikašam sabu‘i / bāšad ke miyābam az to bu‘i* (I drink a jar in the

tavern. / Perhaps I will catch a scent of you), in which most stanzas begin with a vocative call to the cupbearer. Like the *sāqi-nāma* in rhymed couplets, the strophic variety also came into its own in the 16th century. Much of the credit for this development goes to [Vaḥši of Bāfq](#) (d. 1583). His *tarji'-band sāqi-nāma* is a sustained celebration of mystical intoxication with the refrain: *mā gušā-nešinān-e karābāt-e alastim / tā bu-ye meyi hast dar in meykada mastim* (We are recluses in the tavern of the covenant. / While there's even a scent of wine in this wineshop, we are drunk). Vaḥši's example was soon taken up by poets such as Abu Torāb Beyg Forqati (d. 1616), Faḡfur of Lāhijān (d. 1620), and Kāmel of Jahrom (d. ca. 1619). The thematic range of these strophic poems is more limited than their counterparts in rhymed couplets; though one occasionally finds a concluding encomium, these poems tend to treat the imagery of wine and drunkenness as a vehicle for depicting the ecstasies of mystical transcendence. The same may be said of *sāqi-nāmas* in the other form of strophic poetry, the *tarkib-band*, which apparently begins with Šafā'i of Isfahan (d. 1628) and finds its fullest expression in the work of Naẓiri of Nishapur (d. ca. 1613). Though not included in *Tadkira-ye Meykāna*, one should also note the unique form of the *sāqi-nāma* of Ahli of Shiraz (d. 1535; see [AHLI ŠIRĀZI](#))—a series of 101 thematically linked *robā'i*.

Like the image of wine itself, the *sāqi-nāma* is protean, a genre capable of taking on a wide range of forms—a structural marker in an extended narrative, an independent poem of self-transformation in rhymed couplets, a celebration of mystical drunkenness in stanzas—and of assimilating other thematic genres. Its history shows that “classical Persian poetic forms do not have rigid boundaries and often one genre provides material for the genesis of another” (Sharma, p. 83). This statement is especially valid for the period in which the *sāqi-nāma* flourished. Its flexible form gave ample latitude for the innovation and experimentation that were the hallmark of so much Safavid-Mughal poetry, while building on the rich and ancient tradition of anacreontic verse. In its prototype form, the emphasis on the transformation of self-identity seems to allow us into the subjective world of the poet. Since it is a place where the poets’ “anxieties, pains, sorrows, loves, and desires manifest themselves,” Ḍabiḥ Allāh Šafā considers the *sāqi-nāma* “one of the best forms of poetry for linking our spirits with the spirits of our forefathers, bringing friendships and acquaintances from remote times and distant places” (V/1, pp. 619). The genre has perhaps not yet outlived its usefulness. Hušang Ebtehāj (H. A. Sāya) made his brief *sāqi-nāma* of 1973 speak to the political situation of his day by introducing the charged symbol of the blood of Siyāvoš into his



summons for wine (p. 306).

For a music sample, see *Sāqi-nāme* in *Dastgāh Māhur*.

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