

Introduction

“A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm”

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The essays collected in the present volume are the proceedings of the Workshop *Nizāmī Ganjavī. Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of the Khamsa*, which was convened and organised at the University of Cambridge (U.K.) in September 2004 by Johann Christoph Bürgel and myself, with the help of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge and with generous funding by the Iran Heritage Foundation and the Rowshan Institute. A special “thank you” also goes to Asghar Seyed-Gohrab who has immediately accepted to publish these proceedings in the Iranian Studies Series. Nizāmī’s importance in the realm of Classical Persian literature and the richness of his work are insufficiently reflected in the too-discreet flow of specialised scholarly studies they have inspired over the last two or three decades. There are still many aspects of this author’s work that cry out for further analysis or surely even for discovery! It is sobering to reflect that this should still be so, eight hundred years after the poet’s demise, which some place exactly in 1209! And yet, to study Nizāmī is a reward in itself and, as is the case with true geniuses, the fascination he wields for the cognoscenti knows no boundaries.

The study of Nizāmī’s work, due to its influence and resonance, also represents an unavoidable step for the knowledge and understanding of the literary production in the lands under Persian cultural influence, ranging from the remotest corners of the Ottoman empire to the Central Asian regions and to Mughal India. But, in addition, as the present collection shows in abundance, the study of Nizāmī’s work increasingly points to the extent of his debt towards a civilisation stretching far beyond the geographical limits of the Persian cultural world, spanning the Chinese and the Mediterranean worlds, and which incorporates a wealth of knowledge and science predating the Islamic era.

With such a multi-faceted author, one cannot help but wonder: will we ever reach an all-round knowledge of Nizāmī? Not aiming at such a sensational and comprehensive unveiling of the author under scrutiny, the present collection of essays only modestly hopes to present *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm*, paraphrasing the first *bayt* of the *Khamsa*. The volume contains a wide spectrum of literary criticism, which echoes the depth

and variety of the poet's thoughts. As such, I believe it is, by the relative rarity of studies focussing on this poet, a major event for Persian Studies in general. I wish to thank the colleagues of international renown, many of whom have a long-standing relationship with the poet, through translations of his poems or through monographs dedicated to him, for their generosity in providing the essays contained here. The quality of their contributions ensures that *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm* presents the cutting-edge of Nizāmī-studies to date in the Western world. The facets it illuminates, the tantalising mentions of yet other ways of approaching the poet, will surely rekindle interest in his oeuvre by opening up new avenues of study. This volume follows and builds upon the publication in 2000 of *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi. Knowledge, Love and Rhetoric*, the proceedings of the symposium organised at Princeton University by Jerry Clinton and Kamran Talattof in February 1998. This latter volume contains both a summary of Nizāmī-scholarship and a bibliography of international publications on the poet. It was not necessary to repeat either of these and I gratefully refer interested readers to the above work. The few publications that appeared since, during the last decade, are mentioned in the present volume's bibliography.

Let us now glance at the contributions which form this "key to the treasure of the Hakīm"! Three essays treat Nizāmī's work globally: Christoph Bürgel develops for us what might well have been the poet's world-view; Priscilla Soucek looks at a particularly fine manuscript containing the five parts of the *Khamsa*, and Kamran Talattof analyses Nizāmī's global understanding of the concept of "speech". Using her unique knowledge of the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, Renate Würsch too strides across Nizāmī's whole oeuvre, analysing his references to men and animals. The four other *mathnavīs* are the subject of one or several further contributions in this volume. My own contribution focuses on a passage in *Khusraw u Shīrīn* and *Laylī u Majnūn* is the object of Leili Anvar's research. *Haft Paykar* is puzzled over by Patrick Franke, Angelo Piemontese, Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Ziva Vesel. Correcting the lack of interest long displayed for Nizāmī's last work, several authors in the present volume are looking at either one or the other of the *Iskandar Nāma* parts: Gabrielle van den Berg, Mario Casari, Patrick Franke again, and Carlo Saccone. Both Christoph Bürgel and Kamran Talattof also refer to Nizāmī's *Dīvān*, not as well known as the famous *mathnavīs*!

In "Nizāmī's World Order", the Introductory Essay to this collection, Christoph Bürgel shares with us the results of a life-time of research on and around Nizāmī. His familiarity with the poet and with about a century of Nizāmī-studies in the West make his contribution a unique and fitting beginning to the volume. He goes through the various strata of being, from mineral to vegetal to animal to man, angels and God. We discover how Nizāmī sees these, how he characterizes them and installs them in a

comprehensive universal order. They are used by the poet to serve his aim, of which the following three are fundamental: self-knowledge (*Selbsterkenntnis*), the dignity of women (against a social order where woman were described by Ghazali “the slaves of man”) and non-violence. The article gives numerous citations taken from the five *mathnavīs* and also from the lesser-known *Dīvān*. Bürgel shows how animals may function as medium for self-knowledge, though this role is mostly played by woman, “the psychagogue par excellence” in the *Khamsa*!

The bulk of present-day studies on Classical Persian literature focuses on mysticism. It might be correct to say that for the last two decades, the majority of scholars in the field have concentrated on the analysis of mystical Persian poets. Fascinating though this approach might be it regretfully pushes the study of non-mystical authors somewhat in the shadow. Opinions vary on whether Nizāmī belongs to this latter group. It is generally accepted that several of his works display a tendency towards mysticism, while others seem rather to refer to philosophy or morality. It is thus particularly rewarding to look at the contributions by Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Leili Anvar, who approach Nizāmī from a mystical point of view, with the analytical tools and scholarly technique and discourse used to interpret sufi-authors. Nizāmī rises to the occasion and yields interesting points for this interpretative research. In “A Mystical Reading of Nizāmī’s Use of Nature in the *Haft Paykar*”, Seyed-Gohrab convincingly argues that the poet sees nature as an object of reflection that reveals the divine rational order by which man can achieve sublimation, but also as a crypt from which man is supposed to escape. The Brethren of Purity are shown to have had an influence on Nizāmī. Interestingly, Seyed-Gohrab also shows how Sanā’ī’s *Sayr al-‘ibad* is the model which Nizāmī has closely followed in the *Haft Paykar*. “The Hidden Pearls of Wisdom: Desire and Initiation in *Laylī u Majnūn*” contains Leili Anvar’s analysis of the story of Majnūn and Laylī, which Nizāmī has contributed to spiritualize as a “romance of desire” and shows its close links with Ahmad Ghazālī’s *Sawānih*. Desire is a passion that never reaches satisfaction in this world, and is expressed in the theme of hollowness, of movement towards nothingness. Anvar also studies the imagery of Laylī and of the pearl, which is also a metaphor for Nizāmī’s own poetry.

But what about analysing Nizāmī’s words with a view to gauge his attitude to and familiarity with Islamic tenets? This is what underlies the researches of both Patrick Franke and Carlo Saccone. In “Drinking from the Water of Life. Nizāmī, Khizr and the symbolism of Poetical Inspiration in Later Persianate Literature”, Franke studies Nizāmī’s references to the mysterious figure of Khizr. He focuses on this amongst Nizāmī’s abundant imagery drawn from Islamic lore and shows how the poet significantly transforms the theme. Khizr occurs both in the *Haft Paykar*, in his role as rescuer of a hero in times of need, and in the *Sharaf Nāma* in connection

with Iskandar's search for the Water of Life. But Nizāmī is innovative as, in the Prologue to the *Sharaf Nāma*, he also asks Khizr to inspire him with poetic originality. This latter role of Khizr survives in later poetry and will even appear in Goethe's and Iqbāl's verses. In "The 'Wasteland' and Alexander the Righteous King in Nizāmī's *Iqbāl Nāma*", Carlo Saccone discovers the symmetrical composition of four *Iqbāl Nāma* episodes: the building of the wall against Gog and Magog and the Wasteland episode; the meeting of the community of Perfect Men and the meeting of the young Peasant. In the former two episodes, Alexander acts as legislator and protector. But when meeting the Perfect Men and the young Peasant, he reaches the limits of sovereignty and cannot add anything or act in a beneficial way. Saccone thus analyses Nizāmī's view on righteous kingship that goes beyond the accepted Muslim approach. A view which is central in the last *mathnavī*, but which also pervades other works such as *Khusraw u Shīrīn* and *Haft Paykar*.

One of the fields in which Nizāmī is recognized as a master, is that of scientific allusions. Both Ziva Vesel and Mario Casari chose this angle to approach the poet. Triggered by the mention of a scientific author as a reference for the decoration of Bahrām Gūr's palace, or by the details of a trip made by Iskandar to the Pole, these two scholars open up for us vistas on the scientific background Nizāmī could build upon. They also look at Nizāmī's close links with Classical Antiquity, whether through direct perusal of Greek and Latin authors, or through translations available in the Medieval Persian era. In "Nizāmī's Cosmographic Vision and Alexander in Search of the Fountain of Life", Casari reveals how aware Nizāmī is of his classical authors. A close analysis of the numerous naturalistic details in the episode of Iskandar's Search for the Fountain of Life and trip into the Land of Darkness reveals Nizāmī's serious labour of research to include scientific information into his poetical composition. Casari goes beyond Nizāmī's texts and, through a comparative analysis of several sources, proposes an identification of the mysterious "Caspian Straits". Ziva Vesel's essay "Teucros in Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar*" focuses on astronomy. Vesel's familiarity with the scientific works that influenced the Medieval Persian thinkers reveals both the difficulties we experience in correctly understanding Nizāmī's seemingly accidental scientific references and the interest of such an understanding for the wider picture of culture and knowledge in the era. In this case, Vesel asks, does Nizāmī's mention of Tangalūshā refer to decans, to degrees of the ecliptic or are they a reminiscence of an archaic and lost pictorial tradition?

Another moment of stunned discovery occurs for the reader of this volume when tackling "The Enigma of Turandot in Nizāmī's Pentad. Azāda and Bahrām between Esther and Sindbād." Angelo Piemontese's synthetic knowledge delves deep into Nizāmī's sources and through his own wide-ranging study of the Bahrām Gūr romance, detects layers going back not

only to the *Shāh Nāma* but also to Biblical references, to Latin sources and to works circulating in the Muslim world, such as the *Book of Sindbād*. This reveals the *Haft Paykar* as a veritable palimpsest, built of layer upon layer of varied sources. Piemontese's essay that uncovers some of the mystery of the *Haft Paykar*, prompts questions on the aims of this cryptic work, which to my mind still remains unexplained, despite generations of scholars attempting to interpret it.

As Piemontese shows, this technique of building new works upon older ones also illuminates the re-writing of Nizāmī's works, done by Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī. Another illustration of the way in which Nizāmī reworks existing stories is my own study "What is it that Khusraw learns from the Kalīla-Dimna stories?" revolving around the teasing forty Kalīla-Dimna verses occurring at the end of the *Khusraw u Shīrīn* story. Rather than giving essential advice for Khusraw's future career as rightful ruler of Iran, they seem to point to Nizāmī's delight in parody, a hitherto rather neglected aspect of the author. The conclusions reached in this essay also open up a new understanding of the poet's attitude towards his source-texts and his rewriting of episodes taken from famous works such as the *Shāh Nāma*.

In "'Let even a cat win your heart!' Nizāmī on Animal and Man", Renate Würsch takes a look at the references to animals in literature. She uses her unique familiarity with the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, Nizāmī's difficult first *mathnavī*, to propose a deep-going study of the philosophical and religious currents, of the sub-texts one ought to be aware of, when encountering a misleadingly simple mention of cats in the *Khusraw u Shīrīn mathnavī*. She also analyses the role of animals in other Nizāmī *mathnavīs*, concluding that only in *Laylī u Majnūn* does the poet give animals an active participation in the plot.

Another aspect which has focussed scholarly attention in the last decade and helped to better understand the production of manuscripts, is the relation between text and image. Nizāmī's *Khamsa* is one of those popular works which have been copied and illustrated numerous times through the medieval period, both in Iran, Central Asia, Ottoman Turkey and India. Gabrielle van den Berg compares Firdawsī's, Nizāmī's and Amīr Khusraw's descriptions of how Iskandar builds a wall to restrict the invasion by the redoubtable nightmarish tribes Gog and Magog. She analyses the information given by these authors on the appearance of these monsters and gives us a comprehensive list of Nizāmī manuscripts containing illustrations of the episode, in order to discuss the way the painters used these descriptions in their own depictions of the episode.

Priscilla Soucek and Muhammad Isa Waley in "The Nizāmī Manuscript of Shāh Tahmāsp. A Reconstructed History" take us through an in-depth study of the pages of one of the treasure manuscripts of the British Library, Ms OR 2265. It contains seventeen illustrations, of which the fourteen dating from the sixteenth century are amongst the most famous, best

studied and most admired of Persian paintings. But the study of the text folios, hitherto not attempted, gives a detailed explanation of the way this manuscript was put together. The authors sensationally conclude from their study of the historical, literary and artistic issues of the manuscript, that this volume is the result of a combination of different manuscripts that were salvaged to form this particular volume, usually considered a complete creation made for that great patron of manuscripts, the second Safavid Shāh, Tahmāsp I.

Nizāmī is wont to refer to his own art as a poet. Leili Anvar talks about Nizāmī's use of the metaphor of the pearl to refer to his poetry. Patrick Franke has analysed the reference to Khizr as an inspirer on whom Nizāmī calls before starting his work. Christoph Bürgel also mentions Nizāmī's interesting shifts between pride and extreme modesty towards his art as a poet. In "Nizāmī Ganjavī, the Wordsmith: The Concept of *sakhun* in Classical Persian Poetry", Kamran Talattof compares Nizāmī's references to "speech" (*sukhan/sakhun*) with those found in verses by Sa'dī, Rūmī and Hāfiz. This research is a study on Nizāmī's understanding of the term, showing that he ranks his verses with the *Qur'an*. For Talattof, Nizāmī is a philologist rather than a philosopher or a theologian and he concludes that no other Persian poet has engaged so extensively in explaining the concept of the word "speech".

To conclude, as I reflect on the direction into which the present collection of essays seems to be taking Nizāmī-studies, I detect several patterns. It is manifest that Nizāmī's width and depth of knowledge is the most fascinating element for present-day research. He is a reference for those who look for links between the knowledge prevalent in Classical Antiquity and in Medieval Islam. He is also a witness to the refinement of the audience he was writing for, in Western Iran, a region that probably played an especially active role between the Mediterranean and the Central Asian and Eastern worlds. We are also beginning to discover how the author's thoughts, philosophy, aims and interests vary in his five *mathnavīs*, presumably maturing but also catering for the specific tastes of his patrons and target audience and reacting to the events of the times. If we may agree that Nizāmī is not only a poet, but also a thinker, a Hakīm in every sense of the word, then we still need more refined insights into the evolution of key-themes within his oeuvre. Another aspect of importance is Nizāmī's relation to previous authors and his influence on later literature. Several studies in the present volume highlight the references he makes to older literary and philosophical works which were shaping the thoughts of the society he was living in. Further studies into Nizāmī's game of rewriting will doubtless yield interesting insights into the society for which the poet was composing his *Khamṣa*. We also see how he has given his personal interpretation of several concepts, influencing later authors who in turn based their works on – or chose to rewrite – his *Khamṣa*.

And finally, a word on the transliteration and reference systems used in this volume. The citations from the *Khamsa* are all given in Persian script. Within the text of the contributions, the first appearance of specific Persian words is also in Persian script, with a simplified transliteration (giving only the diacriticals that mark long vowels), which is then used for later mentions of the terms. The edition of the *Khamsa* that has been used throughout this volume is the 1372 Tehran *Kulliyat* edition by Vahid Dastgirdi. The *masnavī* initials are first given (MA for *Makhzan al-Asrār*; KS for *Khusraw u Shīrīn*; LM for *Laylī u Majnūn*; HP for *Haft Paykar*; SN for *Sharaf Nāma* and IN for *Iqbāl Nāma*). These initials are followed by the chapter number given in Dastgirdi's edition, followed after the comma by the lines of the relevant *bayt*(s). Where the contributors have specifically used another edition, then these references are given in the footnotes.