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# THE "DAHNAMAS" AND THEIR AUTHORS IN DAVLATSHAH SAMARQANDI'S "TAZKIRAT AL-SHU'ARA"

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**Abstract:** This study provides a comprehensive analysis, on the basis of texts preserved in classical tazkiras—important monuments of medieval Eastern literary studies and source criticism—of the epistolary-poetic genre of "Dahnama" (Ten Letters), which developed widely in Persian-Tajik and Turkic literature in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as well as of the lives and works of the representatives of this tradition. The study examines the "Dahnamas" of Awhadi Maraghi, Ibn Nasuh Farsi, Ibn Imad Shirazi, Ruknuddin Sayin, Mawlana Katibi Turshizi, Yahya Sibak Nishaburi (Fattahi), Arifi Hirawi, Khoja Mahmud Bursawi and other major poets; the addressees of their dedications (viziers, sultans and Sufi masters); their ideological and artistic features; and their use of aruz metre and rhyme devices (tajnis and repeated rhyme). It also brings into scholarly circulation information on the historical and political events reflected in these texts, the literary environment of the court, and the social standing of the authors.

**Keywords:** Dahnama, epistolary poetry, tazkira, tabaqat, Awhadi Maraghi, Ibn Nasuh, Ruknuddin Sayin, Sarbadars, Sultan Abu Sa'id.

The epistolary poem—namely, the "Dahnama" (Ten Letters), written in the form of letters, addresses and dialogues between the lover and the beloved—occupies a distinctive place in the development of classical Eastern literature and poetics. In classical Eastern literature, the tradition of expressing romantic-philosophical, mystical and ethical ideas through figurative language and the medium of the letter was enriched over the centuries. From the fourteenth century onward, examples of this genre, which took shape in Persian literature and later exerted a strong influence on Turkic literature (Khujandi's "Latāfatnāma", Amiri's "Dahnama", Sayyid Ahmad's "Ta'ashshuqnama", etc.), were classified by separate strata in medieval sources and tazkiras [1]. The source-study basis of this research consists of manuscript materials, particularly rare texts taken from the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh strata of classical tazkiras and transcribed and translated from a philological perspective. These texts contain valuable information about the lives of such distinguished masters of the word as Awhadi Maraghi, Ibn Nasuh Farsi, Ibn Imad Shirazi, Ruknuddin Sayin, Ali Durduzd Astarabadi, Katibi Turshizi, Yahya Sibak Nishaburi, Kamaluddin Ghiyas Farsi, Ibn Husam, Arifi Hirawi and Khoja Mahmud Barsahi, their works in the "Dahnama" genre, and the poetic features of their verse [2]. The aim of the study is to examine the presented source materials comprehensively, determine the stages of development of the "Dahnama" genre in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, analyse the poets' ideological-mystical and secular views,

and provide a scholarly account of the historical (the Sarbadars, Mongol sultans and Timurids) and linguo-poetic features reflected in these texts.

In the classical tazkira tradition, the classification of authors into strata (according to historical periods, regions, or social and spiritual status) was a leading method. In the sources under consideration, the poets are likewise arranged according to the following strata:

| Stratum | Author | Dedication / Addressee | Work |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fourth stratum | Awhadi Maraghi | Khoja Ziyauddin Yusuf ibn Asiluddin Tusi | “Dahnama”, “Jam-i Jam” |
| Fourth stratum | Ruknuddin Sayin | Court of Toghay Temur Khan; Sarbadar period | “Dahnama”, Divan |
| Fourth stratum | Amir Khusraw Dehlavi | Sultan Alauddin Muhammad | “Khamsa”, Divans |
| Fifth stratum | Ibn Nasuh Farsi | Vizier Khoja Ghiyasuddin Muhammad ibn Rashid | “Dahnama”, Ruba‘is |
| Fifth stratum | Ibn Imad Shirazi | — | “Dahnama”, Na‘t-i sharif |
| Sixth stratum | Yahya Sibak Nishaburi | Period of Shahrukh Mirza | “Dahnamas”, “Husn va Dil” |
| Seventh stratum | Arifi Hirawi | Vizier Khoja Pir Ahmad ibn Ishaq | “Dahnama” |
| Seventh stratum | Khoja Mahmud Bursawi | Mirza Ala al-Dawla; Sultan Abu Sa’id Guragan | “Dahnama” (with tajnis) |

This system of classification demonstrates that from the beginning of the fourteenth century to the second half of the fifteenth century, the tradition of composing “Dahnamas” in the literary environments of Central Asia, Iran and India represented one of the highest forms of poetic tribute presented to court viziers, sultans and major statesmen.

Awhadi Maraghi and His “Dahnama”. Awhadi Maraghi (d. 738 AH/1338 CE), the eminent sharif and mystic mentioned in the fourth stratum, is identified in scholarly and literary sources as a disciple of Shaykh Awhaduddin Kirmani. According to the source, he was “a contemplative mystic and an ‘arif, who, in addition to attaining perfection in gnosis and spiritual wayfaring, was also accomplished in the exoteric sciences” [4]. Alongside his famous mathnawi “Jam-i Jam” and a divan comprising ten thousand couplets, Awhadi Maraghi composed the “Dahnama”, a major literary and cultural work. It was dedicated to Khoja Ziyauddin Yusuf ibn Khoja Asiluddin Tusi, grandson of Malik al-Hukama Khoja Nasiruddin Tusi. The source emphasizes that Awhadi composed the work “bisyar nazuk va latif” (exceedingly delicate and refined).

The tazkira includes Awhadi’s celebrated twelve-couplet qasida on pages 211–212. Through profound philosophical questions—characteristically ending in the refrain “…chist?” (“what is it?”)—the poem reflects on the creation of existence, the cosmos and the elements (the seven

planets and four elements), knowledge of the self and the Lord, and the contradictory nature of human destiny. The following couplets from the qasida demonstrate the poet's deep contemplation of cosmic order and human contradictions:

پروردگار و نفس بباید شناختن * تا نفس خود چه باشد و پروردگار چیست؟

(One must know the Lord and the self, / so that one may understand what the self is and what the Lord is.)

در یک مگس مجالستِ زهر و نوش چه؟ * در یک مکان مؤانستِ گنج و مار چیست؟

(Why do poison and honey dwell together in a single bee? / What does it mean for treasure and a serpent to coexist in one place?)

The "Dahnamas" of Ibn Nasuh Farsi and Ibn Imad Shirazi. Ibn Nasuh Farsi, a representative of the fifth stratum, was active at the end of the Ilkhanid period, during the reign of Sultan Abu Sa'id Khan. He composed his "Dahnama" for the celebrated vizier Ghiyasuddin Muhammad ibn Rashiduddin (son of the renowned historian Rashiduddin). This "Dahnama" achieved exceptional fame among the learned and intellectually gifted people ("musta'iddan") of the period [5].

Another prominent learned poet, Ibn Imad Shirazi (originally from Khurasan and resident in Shiraz), was likewise known for his "Dahnama". The introduction to his work begins with the classical hamd:

الحمد لخالق البرايا * و الشكر لوواهب العطايا

(Praise be to the Creator of all creatures! / Thanks be to the Bestower of gifts!)

Ibn Imad's qasida in praise of the Prophet expresses the exalted status of Islamic law and the Prophet's (peace be upon him) intercessory station on the Day of Resurrection, embellishing the verse with Arabic quotations.

The "Dahnamas" of Ruknuddin Sayin, Yahya Sibak and Arifi Hirawi

Ruknuddin Sayin (Rukn Sayin), the sixteenth representative of the fourth stratum, was the author of a divan famous in Persian Iraq and of a separate "Dahnama". His "Dahnama" included ghazals and qit'as and earned the praise of learned men for its "matonat va latafat" (firmness and refinement).

Mawlana Yahya Sibak Nishaburi, the sixteenth representative of the sixth stratum (also known by the pen name Fattahi; d. 852 AH/1448 CE), was renowned in the age of Shahrukh Mirza for his exceptional calligraphic and poetic mastery. He versified not one but several "Dahnamas" and also composed the famous allegorical tale "Husn va Dil" ("Asrari va Khumari") [1].

Arifi Hirawi, the fourth representative of the seventh stratum, dedicated a polished "Dahnama" to the Timurid vizier Khoja Pir Ahmad ibn Ishaq. In this work, too, ghazals and appropriate qit'as were assembled in an impressive order.

Khoja Mahmud Bursawi (d. 872 AH/1467 CE), the thirtieth representative of the seventh stratum, was one of the leading figures of the literary environments of Nishabur and Mashhad. He composed a separate "Dahnama" for Mirza Ala al-Dawla. The most significant philological feature of Bursawi's "Dahnama" is his strict observance, throughout the poem, of the art of tajnis and the rules of repeated rhyme [1].

The source cites the following couplet from Khoja Mahmud Bursawi's na't in praise of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

عرش پروردگار میدانش * همچو کوثر هزار میدانش

(The Throne of the Lord is his field; / his thousands of fields are like Kawthar.) The paronomastic use of the words "maydanash / maydanash" in this couplet demonstrates the poet's high mastery of the art of tajnis.

The source texts contain valuable information not only of literary and aesthetic significance, but also concerning the complex socio-political history of Central Asia and Iran in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Stylistic Distinctiveness in the Genres of Qasida, Ghazal and Ruba‘i

An analysis of the poetic examples cited in the source in terms of genre and metre reveals the following important poetic patterns:

Philosophical-cosmological questions in qasidas: Awhadi Maraghi’s qasida is composed in the ramal-i musamman-i mahzuf metre of aruz, while the refrain “chist?” (“what is it?”) at the end of each couplet functions as a poetic and rhetorical question directed toward comprehending the mysteries of existence. Romantic and mystical imagery in ghazals: in the ghazals of Awhadi Maraghi and Arifi Hirawi, the flower-like manifestation of the face, the musk-scented snare of the tress, the fruit of union, and bloody tears express a movement from metaphorical love toward true (mystical) gnosis.

The sources give particular recognition to the poets’ inventive compositions and their mastery in the use of poetic devices.

The “Dahnama” genre, established and brought to maturity in classical Persian literature by Awhadi Maraghi, Ibn Nasuh and Ruknuddin Sayin, exerted a direct influence on Turkic literature in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In Turkic literature, Khujandi’s “Latāfatnāma” (composed around 1353), Amiri’s “Dahnama”, and Sayyid Ahmad’s “Ta‘ashshuqnama” are closely connected with Persian “Dahnamas” in genre, structure and poetics [6].

| Genre Feature | Persian Dahnamas (Awhadi, Ibn Nasuh, Barsah) | Turkic Dahnamas (Khujandi, Amiri, Sayyid Ahmad) |
|---|---|---|
| Structural composition | 10 letters + ghazals, fard, qit‘as, ruba‘is and na‘t | 10 letters + ghazals, fard, saqinama and tuyughs |
| Principal metre | Mathnawi form in hazaj or ramal metres | Hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzuf |
| Object of dedication | Sultans and viziers (Khoja Ziyauddin, Pir Ahmad) | Begs, princes and Sufi masters |
| Poetic devices | Tajnis, repeated rhyme, tansiq al-sifat | Tajnis, irsal-i masal, tajnis in tuyughs |

This comparative analysis demonstrates that the “Dahnama” genre was one of the most vivid products of the bilingual (zullisonayn) literary environment of the East and became a supreme example of poetic thought and the amatory epistolary genre.

A comprehensive study of the tazkira texts and the works of “Dahnama” authors leads to the following scholarly conclusions:

Medieval classical tazkiras constitute rare sources that have preserved the literary environment of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, its representatives, and lost or scarcely surviving poetic works in the “Dahnama” genre.

The “Dahnama” was not merely a collection of love letters; it was a universal poetic form that incorporated hamd, na‘t, mystical gnosis, philosophical reflection, social criticism, and ethical-political counsel dedicated to viziers and sultans.

Texts concerning Ruknuddin Sayin, Toghay Temur Khan and the Sarbadar movement serve as first-rate documentary sources not only for literary studies but also for historiography.

The complex devices of tajnis, repeated rhyme and aruz metre in the works of Katibi, Yahya Sibak and Khoja Mahmud Bursawi reflect a high stage in the development of Eastern poetics.

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