Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond

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In the Mood of Love: Love Romances in Medieval Persian Poetry and their Sources

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Introduction

Love romances present a substantial output in the medieval Persian literary tradition. They flourished mostly in the courtly milieu, the earliest extant texts coming from the eastern parts of the Iranian world and dating from the reign of Maḥmūd of Ghazna (r. 998–1030) whose capital became a significant centre of the dialogue among various intellectual traditions.[1] The rise of the romance brought about the gradual decline of the heroic epic, which reflected a "growing disaffection with the social values embodied in epic",[2] as well as changes in literary taste.[3] Formally the versified romances are written in the *mathnavī* form[4] and encompass a variety of poetic metres. In most cases their immediate sources are elusive.

In what follows I offer a chronological survey of available texts confining myself to the textual production of the 11th–13th centuries. At the end I present a synthesis of possible sources and influences on the medieval Persian love romances discussed in the survey.

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1   See Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 79–80.

2   Ibid., pp. 80–81.

3   In addition to courtly love romance, another strand which replaced the heroic epic was a kind of chivalric geste, i.e., tales of heroes whose exploits bore a legendary and fantastic character entwined with romantic adventures. Post-Firdausian epics belong to this category. See Molé, "Épopée"; de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/2, pp. 562–67, 568–76, and most recently and exhaustively, Van Zutphen, *Farāmarz*, pp. 62–138.

4   *Mathnavī*, meaning "doubled", is a Perso-Arabic term for a long poem in which every distich (*bayt*) has an internal rhyme that changes with each following line.

The Survey

a)   Romantic Poems by ʿUnṣurī. *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*

Abū al-Qāsim Ḥasan b. Aḥmad ʿUnṣurī (d. 1039/40) was a prominent poet at the court of Maḥmūd of Ghazna.[5] Bearing the venerable title *malik al-shuʿarāʾ* ("the poet laureate"), ʿUnṣurī exerted substantial influence among his fellow court poets and was considered primarily as a masterful panegyrist. Besides panegyric odes (*qaṣīda*s) devoted chiefly to his patrons, Sultan Maḥmūd, the latter's brothers and minister, ʿUnṣurī is credited with composing three poems *Khing but-u Surkh but* ("White Idol and Red Idol"), *Shād-bahr-u ʿAyn al-Ḥayāt* ("Happy of Fate and Spring of Life"), and *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā* ("The Ardent Lover and the Virgin"), all three titled according to the names of their male and female protagonists.[6]

ʿUnṣurī's poems have survived only partially: poetic treatises and lexicological works preserved a handful of verses from the *Khing but-u Surkh but* and about sixty isolated verses from the *Shād-bahr-u ʿAyn al-Ḥayāt*.[7] As for the *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*, more than 500 couplets were recovered altogether, which enables reconstruction of the subject-matter and source of the poem. The poem seems to have started fading into obscurity in the 13th century,[8] or even earlier, to which the discovery of a manuscript fragment used to stiffen the binding of an Arabic theological manuscript dated 1132 bears eloquent

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5   Information on his life is scarce; for summary, see EIr, "ʿOnṣori".

6   A certain connection exists between ʿUnṣurī's three poems and the prose works – no longer extant – of his contemporary Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī (d. after 1050). Bīrūnī mentions that he translated three stories "out of folly and ridicule" (*min al-hazl wa al-sakhf*). One may only speculate about Bīrūnī's source; it seems most likely that the three books were a translation of ʿUnṣurī's poems from Persian verse into Arabic prose. In that case Bīrūnī turns out to be the first known reader (and critic) of these poems. *Apud* Shafiʿ, *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*, pp. 4–5; cf. de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, pp. 232–33. See Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, p. 19, referring to Strohmaier, "Al-Bîrûnî".

7   Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*; EIr, "ʿOnṣori". For the verses supposedly belonging to *Shād-bahr-u ʿAyn al-Ḥayāt*, see ʿUnṣurī, *Dīvān*, ed. M. Dabīr-siyāqī, Tehran 1984, pp. 363–70. Some clues as to the nature of the two extinct poems can be gathered from a folk prose romance (*dāstān*), the anonymous *Iskandar-nāma* ("The Book of Alexander"; see *Iskandar-nāma*, ed. Afshār, pp. 288–89; 430–31). On the compilation and redaction of this text, see in detail Rubanovich, "Reconstruction of a Storytelling Event"; eadem, "Tracking the *Shahnama* Tradition", pp. 23–24, as well as the chapter on the Persian Alexander tradition in this volume p. 224 and n. 27 there. For a full translation of the relevant passages, see Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, pp. 197–99.

8   See Shafiʿ, *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*, pp. 7–10. One of the possible explanations for this is a conspicuously pagan character of the poem which made it unpalatable to the later Muslim audience; see ibid., p. 9.

testimony. Its plot, however, has been quite successfully reconstructed on the basis of 372 verses retained in the manuscript fragment just mentioned, some 150 distichs culled from old lexical works and a rather lengthy prose passage from yet another *dāstān*, the *Dārāb-nāma* ("The Book of Darius"), where the heroine ʿAdhrā herself tells her story.[9]

The narrative begins with the marriage of Fuluqrāṭ, king of the island of Shāmis/Shāmus, to a daughter of prosperous King *Aqrāṣus, from which union ʿAdhrā is born. The girl turns out to be remarkable, growing and developing extraordinary quickly, so that by the age of two she starts to learn and by seven becomes an astronomer and dexterous scribe. She excels in the martial arts as well, her father designating her commander-in-chief of his army. On another island a youth Vāmiq suffers the intrigues of his vicious stepmother – a motif the poem has in common with the well known *Book of Sindbād*;[10] he decides to flee with his friend Ṭūfān and sails off to Shāmis/Shāmus. There Vāmiq and ʿAdhrā first meet while visiting a temple and instantly fall in love with each other. Vāmiq is brought to Fuluqrāṭ's palace and given his protection. Although admiring Vāmiq for his intellect and eloquence, ʿAdhrā's father opposes their bond and the youth is made to swear he will not pursue his love. A war with some enemy breaks out, during which Fuluqrāṭ is executed, while Vāmiq and ʿAdhrā are taken captive. She is then sold into slavery, spending four years apart from Vāmiq. Falling into the hands of a kind and pious merchant, ʿAdhrā is set free and probably returns to her homeland. Whether she reunites with her soul-mate Vāmiq remains a matter for speculation.[11]

The connection of the poem with Hellenistic novels has long been recognised on the basis of apparently Greek names (Fuluqrāṭ = Polykrates; island of Shāmis/Shāmus = island of Samos; *Aqrāṣus = Kroisos)[12] and common Greek motifs. Its source was ultimately identified as the Greek historical novel of

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9   The manuscript fragment was first edited by Shafiʿ who had discovered it in the 1950s (see Shafiʿ, *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*, edition, pp. 1–41); this edition was later amended, commented upon and translated into English by Hägg and Utas (see Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, pp. 80–143). For the passage in the *Dārāb-nāma*, see Abū Ṭāhir-i Ṭarsūsī, *Dārāb-nāma*, ed. Dh. Ṣafā, vol. 1, Tehran 1965, pp. 209–10; English translation is in Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, pp. 147–48. On the *Dārāb-nāma*, see the chapter on Persian Alexander tradition in this volume, pp. 216–18, 227–29. I am examining the *Dārāb-nāma* which demonstrates strong affinity to the Greek novel tradition, in my forthcoming book *Alexander the Great in Medieval Persian Folk Tradition* (Brill). In the plot summary of *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā* below I rely on the reconstruction in Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, pp. 213–50. The asterisk denotes the editors' emendation.

10   See on this the chapter by B. Krönung in the present volume.

11   On possible endings, see Utas, "ʿAdhrā", pp. 437–39.

12   See Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, pp. 134–43, 153–83 and a conspectus on pp. 184–87.

Metiochos and Parthenope, which too survived only in fragments.[13] The stages and ways of transmission between the Hellenistic novel and its Persian off-shoot are impossible to determine with any certainty. Judging by the transformations of Greek names, the closest chain to ʿUnṣurī's work seems to be a written Arabic intermediary.[14]

Stylistically, *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā* is still conterminous with heroic epic rather than later romantic poems. Besides retaining the *mutaqārib* metre typical of epic, the narrative develops through action at the expense of depicting characters' inner states. The external orientation of the narration can be seen in the manner in which characters and motivation are subordinated to action and in the negligible role that dialogue and monologue play in the narrative.[15]

As for further ramifications of *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*, numerous and diverse versions appeared in Persian, Turkish, Kashmiri and Pashto, the two earliest (and extinct) ones dating to the second half of the 11th century (by Faṣīḥī-yi Jurjānī) and the 13th century (by Amīr Farkhārī). Most of the versions bear only slight resemblance to ʿUnṣurī's poem, their authors probably never having had a direct access to the original. The 16th-century Ottoman Turkish version by Lāmiʿī (d. 1531) serves as a good illustration: although referring to ʿUnṣurī as his predecessor, Lāmiʿī presents a significantly different story, where Vāmiq takes the place of ʿAdhrā as the main hero, at the same time preserving some parallels with ʿUnṣurī's tale.[16] All in all, more than twenty versions bearing the title *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*, at least two of which are in prose, are known.[17]

b)   *Varqa va Gulshāh* by ʿAyyūqī

The poem, titled according to its eponymous heroes, counts some 2,200 verses and is undated.[18] Lingua-stylistic evidence places its composition in the early

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13   For the survey of the question, see Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, pp. 10–22.

14   Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, p. 201; for discussion of other, less plausible alternatives, see ibid., pp. 193–203.

15   For discussion, see Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 82–85.

16   See Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, pp. 204–7.

17   For the content summary of principal versions, see Shafīʿ, *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*, pp. 35–126; see also Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, pp. 203–12; Utas, "ʿAdhrā", p. 438.

18   The poem has survived in a unique illuminated manuscript, dated not later than the 13th century, which comprises seventy-one miniatures in colour. For an edition, see ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, ed. Ṣafā. For French and German translations, see respectively Melikian-Chirvani, "Roman", 99–214; *Warqa und Gulschah. Liebesepos von Ayyuqi*, trans. A. Lavizzari, Zürich 1992. For an analysis of the miniatures, see Melikian-Chirvani, "Roman", pp. 51–98 (reproductions on pp. 215–46).

11th century.[19] The poet ʿAyyūqī, otherwise obscure and known only from self-references in the body of the poem,[20] probably dedicated his work to Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna, although other possible patrons can not be excluded.[21]

The poem narrates the story of two cousins Varqa and Gulshāh of the Shayba tribe who, growing up together, fall in love already during their school-time. During the betrothal ceremony, Gulshāh is abducted by the chief of a neighbouring tribe, but is brought back by Varqa after a series of merciless battles, in which Varqa's father is killed and Varqa's riches are ransacked. His impoverishment causes him to postpone the wedding and ask for help from his uncle Mundhir, the ruler of Yaman (roughly identifiable with Yemen). Concluding a pact with Gulshāh's father that he keeps his daughter for Varqa till his return, the youth heads for far-off Yaman. After numerous obstacles, Varqa acquires the riches and returns to his tribe, only to learn that Gulshāh's father has broken the pact and given his daughter in marriage to the King of Shām (roughly identifiable as Syria). Inconsolable Varqa follows her to the kingdom of Shām, where Gulshāh's husband, the King of Shām, allows the lovers to meet and converse. Touched by their pure and sorrowful love, he proposes divorcing Gulshāh; Varqa, however, humbled by the King's kindness, refuses and leaves Gulshāh with her husband. On his way back home he dies of grief and is soon followed by Gulshāh, who breathes her last breath on her beloved's grave. They become paragons of chastity and fidelity in the eyes of the world, their grave turning into a place of pilgrimage for both Muslims and Jews. When the Prophet Muḥammad becomes aware of the wondrous story, he offers to resurrect the two lovers, provided the Jews convert to Islam; the latter agree, and Varqa and Gulshāh are restored to life and finally united.

ʿAyyūqī explicitly mentions that he read this "heart-pleasing story" in the tales and books of the Arabs,[22] boasting that he was the first to render it "in this particular metre and manner", i.e. in Persian.[23] The story is indeed of Arabic provenance and is based on the pre-Islamic love tale in prose of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām al-ʿUdhrī, an Arab poet (d. around 650 or later), and his cousin ʿAfrāʾ.[24]

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19   See recently, Ṣādiqī, "Dar-bāra-yi *Varqa va Gulshāh*", pp. 198–202.

20   Two verses unrelated to the poem are attributed to ʿAyyūqī in one of the manuscripts of Asadī-yi Ṭūsī's lexicological dictionary *Lughat-i Furs* (11th century); however, whether this is the same poet remains uncertain; see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, p. 77.

21   On this, see ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, ed. Ṣafā, introduction, pp. 4–5; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "'Ayyūqī", p. 167; de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, pp. 77–78 and n. 1.

22   ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, ed. Ṣafā, pp. 5, 122.

23   Ibid., p. 4.

24   For a thorough thematic comparison of the Arabic and Persian stories, see Ghulām-Ḥusaynzāda et al., "Barrasī"; also Melikian-Chirvani, "Roman", pp. 22–25.

The story of ʿUrwa and ʿAfrāʾ was well known already during the early Umayyad period (second half of the 7th century) and existed in various versions.[25] It reflects the literary theme of ʿUdhrī love (*al-ḥubb al-ʿudhrī*) in classical Arabic poetry and prose, which emerged from an elegiac amatory genre among the poets of the Arabian ʿUdhra tribe in the Umayyad period.[26] Traces of elegiac poetry can be discerned in ten lyric pieces inserted in the narrative of the *Varqa va Gulshāh* which are mostly put in the mouths of the beloved couple and devoted to the pain of separation and vicissitudes of fate.[27] In stylistic terms, the lyric passages deviate from the action-oriented narration by conveying an array of emotions, thus to some extent removing the poem from the strict conventions of the heroic epic.[28]

Notwithstanding a discernible common pattern in the stories about ʿUdhrī poets and their beloved in the *Varqa va Gulshāh* and the inserted lyric pieces,[29] the romance departs from this genre not only in its happy, missionary-like ending, but also in its pronounced epic characteristics. The narrative is laden with lengthy epic scenes possessing manifest epic motifs, such as an unforeseen night-time attack (*shabīkhūn*), one-to-one combat, a change of weapons during the fight, boasting, name requesting, and perhaps most significantly, Gulshāh being a woman-warrior.[30] The emphasis on the epic constituent seems to reflect the mixed nature of love romances as a genre in 10th–11th-centuries Persian literature.

It is worth mentioning the legacy of *Varqa va Gulshāh*: in the 19th and early 20th centuries, its versions were widely lithographed in Iran and India for

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25   For content summaries and their Arabic sources, see Bauer, "ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām".

26   On ʿUdhrī poetry, see Jacobi, "ʿUdhrī"; Bürgel, "Love", pp. 91–96. See also below, the discussion on Laylī and Majnūn in Niẓāmī's work, who were another famous pair of ʿUdhrī lovers.

27   See ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, ed. Ṣafā, pp. 13, 15, 17, 20, 27, 75, 81, 108, 110, 112. Although composed in the same metre as the rest of the poem, these pieces are cast in monorhyme, following a pattern that is later customary for the *ghazal* genre.

28   For a brief discussion, see Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 83–85.

29   On the common pattern, see Jacobi, "ʿUdhrī", p. 830.

30   See, e.g., ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, ed. Ṣafā, pp. 10, 19–20, 20–27, 28, 29–32, 32–43, 47–48, 59–65. Melikian-Chirvani is especially keen to show the resemblance of *Varqa va Gulshāh* to 10th- and 11th-century Persian poems at the expense of Arab(ic) tradition; see Melikian-Chirvani, "Roman", pp. 28–50. The figure of the woman warrior is known to Byzantine epic as well; see the chapter on Digenis Akritis by C. Jouanno in the present volume.

popular distribution.[31] In addition, it gained popularity in the Turkic milieu, represented there by four recensions at least, the oldest dating to 1371.[32]

c)   *Vīs-u Rāmīn* by Gurgānī

Fakhr al-Dīn Asʿad Gurgānī, native of Gurgān to the east of the Caspian, flourished around the middle of the 11th century and is celebrated for his romantic poem *Vīs-u Rāmīn* ("Vīs and Rāmīn").[33] He wrote the poem between 1050 and 1055 while staying in Isfahan and dedicated it to the Saljūq governor of the city ʿAmīd Abū al-Fatḥ Muẓaffar, who commissioned the composition.[34]

The story tells of the vicissitudes of the lovers Vīs and Rāmīn. Powerful King Mubad of Marv proposes to Shahrū, Queen of Māhābād, who is married and mother to several sons, the eldest, Vīrū, being the most successful of them all. Shahrū refuses but promises that if she bears a daughter, Mubad can claim her for a bride. After many years she gives birth to the beautiful Vīs, who is brought up by a wet-nurse together with prince Rāmīn, Mubad's younger brother. By the time Vīs is mature enough to get married, Shahrū in forgetfulness breaks her pact with Mubad, wedding her instead to Vīrū, his son and Vīs's brother. The marriage is not consummated, owing to the fact that Vīs is menstruating at the time. Learning of the marriage, Mubad wages a battle with Shahrū's principality, in which Mubad is defeated. Notwithstanding the defeat and Vīs's resistance, Shahrū, tempted by Mubad's exquisite presents and fearing God's punishment for breaking the pledge, relinquishes her daughter to the old king. On their way to Mubad's realm, Rāmīn who accompanies the royal entourage, catches a glance of Vīs's face and falls desperately in love with her.

In the meantime the devoted nurse of Vīs learns of her abduction and goes to Marv, where she advises Vīs to put up with her fate. The latter, loathing the union with Mubad, threatens to kill herself, and the nurse casts a spell on

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31   See Melikian-Chirvani, "Roman", p. 9.

32   See ibid., p. 10; de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, p. 80 and n. 1. A Kurdish version of the story exists as well (ibid.).

33   The poem survived in a small number of manuscripts – eight complete copies and some five extracts of different length (see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, pp. 164–65; Tūdūā/ Gvākhāriyā (eds.), Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs-u Rāmīn*, introduction, pp. 27–28). For editions, see Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs-u Rāmīn*, ed. Maḥjūb; Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs-u Rāmīn*, ed. Tūdūā/Gvākhāriyā. For translations, see Fakhr ud-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis and Ramin*, trans. Morrison (English; prose); Fakhraddin Gorgani, *Vis and Ramin*, trans. Davis (English; verse); Gorgâni, *Le roman de Wîs et Râmîn*, trans. H. Massé, Paris 1959 (French; prose); Fakhriddin Gurgani, *Vis i Ramin: poèma*, trans. S. Lipkin, Moscow 1963 (Russian; verse).

34   Our knowledge of Gurgānī and the circumstances of his work's composition derives from the poem itself. For summary, see Meisami, "Gorgāni".

Mubad that renders him impotent with Vīs. The lovesick Rāmīn confides in the nurse, who after much persuasion and trickery brings him and Vīs together. From now on the lovers seek every opportunity to spend time together and constantly struggle with the obstacles set on the path of their illicit love by Mubad who discovers their secret. Fatigued by incessant suffering and Mubad's hostility, Rāmīn departs from Marv, goes to Gūrāb where he meets moon-like Gul and marries her. Vīs writes a long letter to Rāmīn describing her feelings during their separation. By the time he receives it, Rāmīn has grown weary of Gul and returns to Vīs. The two conspire with the nurse and plan a revolt against Mubad, after which they flee to Daylam with the king's treasury. Mubad follows them but is killed by a wild boar. The lovers return to Marv where they get married and Rāmīn is crowned king. He rules eighty-three years; after Vīs dies, he passes his throne to their elder son and lives until his death as a recluse at Vīs's tomb.[35]

As far as the romance's sources are concerned, Gurgānī offers a somewhat convoluted explanation in one of the initial sections of his poem. While describing his conversation with his patron, the Isfahani governor ʿAmīd Abū al-Fatḥ Muẓaffar, who asks his opinion about the story of Vīs and Rāmīn "which is well liked in this country", Gurgānī concedes to the loveliness of the story. He mentions that it was put together by six wise men in the Pahlavi (Middle Persian) language which was not accessible to everybody at that time. During previous times the story was used for the study of Pahlavi. Moreover, in the past "there were no professional poets", and only now poets know how to impose metre and rhyme on speech. After presenting the advantages of versified discourse over prose, Gurgānī refers, somewhat ironically, to the ancient experts who rendered the story into Persian, but introduced strange words and failed to embellish it with conceits and proverbs. At the request of the governor, he takes it upon himself to adorn the story and "wash" it of meaningless and obsolete words.[36] Gurgānī thus evokes both Middle Persian (Pahlavi) and New Persian sources and implies that the poem is at once a translation of a work in Middle Persian, and a reworking of a translation from Middle Persian to New Persian.[37] Although there is some vagueness as to the immediate source Gurgānī worked from, most scholars agree that it was probably in some-

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35   For a more detailed summary, see Minorsky, "Vīs u Rāmīn", 11/4, pp. 745–53; Bürgel, "Liebesvorstellungen", pp. 67–77.

36   Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs-u Rāmīn*, ed. Tūdūā/Gvākhāriyā, pp. 28–29. Full translation in Minorsky, "Vīs u Rāmīn", 11/4, pp. 742–43.

37   Davis, "Vis o Rāmin".

what antiquated New Persian;[38] whether it was in verse or in prose remains unclear.[39]

The background of *Vīs-u Rāmīn* as specifically Parthian was well established by Vladimir Minorsky, who discusses the internal evidence of the romance, including the names of its characters, geographical background and political organisation reflected in it, thus demonstrating its probable origins in the Arsacid period (247/38 BC – 224 AD).[40]

The *Vīs-u Rāmīn* is saturated with Zoroastrian motifs and practices, among which the brother-sister marriage (between Vīs and Vīrū) which was considered desirable in pre-Islamic Zoroastrian Iran and the mention of which is generally eschewed in Islamic texts of pre-Islamic origin by Muslim authors; a particular attitude to menstruation and to woman's impurity during this period; the significant role of sacred fires; the motif of trial by fire; Vīs's burial on a *dakhma*, the Tower of Silence, and more.

From the point of view of the development of the love romance, *Vīs-u Rāmīn* represents a milestone in the medieval Persian tradition, greatly surpassing the works of ʿUnṣurī and ʿAyyūqī discussed above: Gurgānī introduces psychological depth by expressing the characters' innermost feelings and thoughts and by conveying the moral complexities of human experience.[41] This is achieved by presenting shifting or contrasting points of view through various rhetorical means, among them interior monologue and dialogue of the characters, interpolated lyric passages of songs sung by the accomplished minstrel Rāmīn, letters, narratorial interjections serving as commentary on the action, and descriptions built on rich imagery.[42] In addition, Gurgānī's *Vīs-u Rāmīn* introduces a discourse on the ideal of kingship, specifically on the relation between violence and injustice as they are embodied first and foremost in the character of Mubad, but also in Rāmīn's infidelity to Vīs,[43] – the themes which would become pivotal in Niẓāmī's love romances.

The diffusion of *Vīs-u Rāmīn* seems to be rather limited. It was popular in the medieval Caucasus, to which its prose translation in the 12th century into Georgian as *Visramiani* bears testimony. The translation is attributed to Sargis

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38   Ibid.; Minorsky, "Vīs u Rāmīn", 11/4, p. 744; 25/2, p. 275; Tūdūā/Gvākhāriyā (eds.), Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs-u Rāmīn*, introduction, pp. 22–23. For a different view, see e.g., de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, p. 163.

39   On this, see e.g., de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, p. 162.

40   Minorsky, "Vīs u Rāmīn", 11/4; 12/1; 25/2.

41   See Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 137–45. For an examination of the representation of the characters and their relationship, see also Bürgel, "Liebesvorstellungen", pp. 77–90.

42   For an incisive discussion of all mentioned aspects, see Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 90–111.

43   See ibid., pp. 182–92.

T'mogveli and closely follows Gurgānī's poem.[44] The Ottoman poet Lāmiʿī, mentioned above in connection with his rendering of ʿUnṣurī's *Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā* into Ottoman Turkish, compiled a version of *Vīs-u Rāmīn* as well, which although preserving the original metre of Gurgānī's poem and showing a direct dependence on it, considerably reworks it.[45] *Vīs-u Rāmīn*'s impact is most palpable in Niẓāmī's romantic poems, first and foremost in his *Khusrau va Shīrīn* (see below).

Attempts have been made to demonstrate the influence of *Vīs-u Rāmīn* on the Celtic legend of Tristan and Iseult.[46] However, in the absence of a plausible explanation as to how this story could have migrated from medieval Khurāsān to medieval Europe, any comparisons are bound to remain inconclusive.

d)   Romantic Poems by Niẓāmī

Ilyās b. Yusūf Niẓāmī-yi Ganjavī (d. not later than 1209/10) was a native of Ganja, the capital of Arrān in Transcaucasian Azerbaijan, where he spent the whole of his life.[47] Born to a Kurdish mother, he had a son Muḥammad from his first wife of Qipchaq slave origin. Although no information on his education is available, his works testify to his mastery of the Persian and Arabic language and literature, Islamic theology and jurisprudence, philosophy, ethics, music, astronomy and astrology; he was well acquainted with geographical and cosmographical literature of his time and possessed some knowledge of mathematics, medicine, and botany. Niẓāmī probably started his career as a court poet, but then renounced it, possibly on account of the envy of other court poets.[48] Nevertheless, all his works were commissioned by, or devoted to, certain patrons.

Niẓāmī's poetic output comprises five narrative poems, unified after his death under the title *Khamsa* ("Quintet") or *Panj ganj* ("Five Treasures"): *Makhzan al-asrār* ("The Treasury of Secrets), *Khusrau va Shīrīn* ("Khusrau and

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44   For bibliographical references to editions and translations of the Georgian version, see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, p. 165.

45   See Minorsky, "Vīs u Rāmīn", 12/1, pp. 31–32.

46   For a bibliography on the supposed connections, see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/1, p. 167; also Fakhraddin Gorgani, *Vis and Ramin*, trans. Davis, pp. xxxiii–xlii. For enumeration of common motifs and similarities, see Davis, "Vis o Rāmīn"; Fakhr ud-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis and Ramin*, trans. Morrison, *passim*. For a rebuttal of the connection, see, e.g., Bürgel, "Liebesvorstellungen", pp. 96–98.

47   Biographical data on the poet varies considerably. I follow Bertel's's reconstruction based mostly on internal evidence extracted from the poet's works. See Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 91–123; also Chelkowski, "Niẓāmī Gandjawī", p. 76.

48   Discussion in Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 114–17.

Shīrīn); *Laylī va Majnūn* ("Laylī and Majnūn"); *Haft paykar* ("The Seven Beauties" or "The Seven Portraits"); *Iskandar-nāma* ("The Book of Alexander").[49] Apart from the narrative poems, Niẓāmī also composed *ghazal*s (lyric pieces), and to a lesser extent, *qaṣīda*s (panegyric odes) and *rubāʿī*s (quatrains); at least one collection (*dīvān*) of his shorter poems was in circulation by 1188.[50] Manuscripts of his lyric collection, rare in themselves, usually comprise around two thousand distichs.[51]

1)   *Khusrau va Shīrīn*

The story of the second poem of the *Khamsa*, *Khusrau va Shīrīn* (completed between 1176 and 1186),[52] takes place in a historical setting, to which I refer – where relevant – in a summary of the poem's plot.

Prince Khusrau (the Sasanian Khusrau II Parvīz; r. 590–628), son of Shāh Hurmuz (the Sasanian Hurmizd IV; r. 579–590), hears from the painter Shāpūr about Shīrīn,[53] the beautiful niece of the Queen of Arrān known as Mihīn-Bānū.[54] He falls in love with her. To gain Shīrīn's heart for Khusrau, Shāpūr goes to Armenia where Shīrīn entertains herself during spring-time. Having seen Shāpūr's portraits of Khusrau, Shīrīn becomes so enamoured that she immediately sets off for Madāyin, Khusrau's capital. In the meantime, however,

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49   For the complex chronology of Niẓāmī's poems, see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/2, pp. 439–46.

50   See ibid., p. 447.

51   On Niẓāmī's lyric poetry, see Bertel's, "Lirika Nizami".

52   See Niẓāmī, *Khusrau va Shīrīn*, ed. Tharvatiyān. For other editions, see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/2, pp. 483–84. For translations, see Nizâmi, *Le Roman de Chosroès et Chîrîn*, trans. H. Massé, Paris 1970 (French; prose); Nizami, *Chosrou und Schirin*, trans. J.Ch. Bürgel (Manesse Bibliothek der Weltliteratur), Zürich 2009 (German; prose interspersed with verse); Nizami, *Sobranie sochineniy v pyati tomakh*, vol 2: *Khosrov i Shirin*, trans. K. Lipskerov, Moscow 1985 (Russian; verse).

53   Shīrīn is a historical figure mentioned in early Christian sources, Syriac, Byzantine, and Armenian, as well as in early Arabic historiographical works. On the basis of the sources, one may conclude that Shīrīn was a Christian and Khusrau's concubine; it was only after some time that she and Khusrau married (probably in 592), Shīrīn becoming one of his most influential wives. Her ethnic origin is variously given as Greek (Byzantine), Persian, or Armenian. See Aliyev, "Rannie istochniki"; idem, "Legenda"; Orsatti, "Kosrow o Širin".

54   Mihīn-Bānū, whose personal name is Shamīrā (or: Shumayrā), does not appear in earlier versions of *Khusrau va Shīrīn* and is introduced into the story by Niẓāmī (see also below). On the basis of the etymology of Shamīrā's name and the data of early medieval Armenian sources, the suggestion was made that the character retains traces of the legendary narrative about Semiramis, as preserved in Armenian tradition. See Aliyev, "Obraz Mehin-Banu".

Khusrau is slandered before his father, leaves the court and departs for Armenia to find Shīrīn. They chance upon each other on the road but remain unaware of one another's identity. Shīrīn stays in Madāyin under the guise of Khusrau's new concubine, while he spends time in Bardaʿa, Mihīn-Bānū's capital. The lovers' paths finally cross when Khusrau seeks refuge in Bardaʿa from Bahrām Chūbīn who usurped the throne after Hurmuz's death.[55] Notwithstanding the unrest in his kingdom, Khusrau passes his time in light-hearted pleasures with Shīrīn; however, while entreating her to consummate their love, he receives a firm rejection: Shīrīn is ready to become Khusrau's wife only after he has suppressed the uprising and restored to himself his father's throne. Khusrau's wounded pride induces him to take steps: he seeks the help of Qayṣar of Rūm (the Byzantine Emperor Maurice; r. 586–602) who willingly aids him, strengthening their pact by wedding him to his daughter Maryam.[56] Khusrau restores his sway over Iran.

Meanwhile Mihīn-Bānū dies and Shīrīn inherits her throne, but moved by her love for Khusrau, she arrives in Iran, where she lives in seclusion in a mountain castle. This is where the story of Farhād's tragic love for Shīrīn starts, ending in his suicide as a result of the ruse played on him by the jealous Khusrau.[57] Maryam dies but this does not remove the obstacles between the lovers. The complexity of their relationship is masterfully articulated in the long scene of their conversing on the snowy evening, Shīrīn standing on the wall of her castle, while the freezing Khusrau pleads with her to let him in – but to no avail. When at long last they finally marry, Khusrau falls victim to the conspiracy of his son Shīrūya who covets both his father's throne and his stepmother. Khusrau is imprisoned and Shīrīn stays with him in the dungeon, where he is stabbed to death while she is asleep near him. She shuns her stepson's importunity and kills herself on Khusrau's tomb.

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55   The Sasanian general Bahrām Chūbīn contested Khusrau II Parvīz's right to the throne and a state of war ensued between the two. Khusrau was forced to seek Byzantine support and in the meantime Bahrām Chūbīn crowned himself king (r. 590–91).

56   No ancient sources mention a daughter of Maurice married to Khusrau, and the figure of Maryam is usually considered as a duplication of Shīrīn lacking historical basis. However, recent research shows that this character might be identified as the Persian Christian martyr Saint Golinduch (d. 591), baptised with the name Maria. She met Khusrau II at Hierapolis, in the company of the Emperor Maurice's emissary, Domitian, bishop of Melitene. A version of her *Life* was translated into Georgian and was probably known in the Caucasus region in the early medieval period. See Brock, "Golinduch"; Orsatti, "Kosrow o Širin".

57   For the Farhād – Shīrīn story and its evolution from the time of Niẓāmī to the 20th century both in Perisan and Turkish, see Duda, *Ferhād und Shīrīn*.

In a section explicating the reasons for his composing the poem, Niẓāmī describes the story of Khusrau and Shīrīn as well known and most pleasing, at the same time remarking on the inadequate treatment of its theme.[58] He admits acquaintance with Firdausī's rendering of the story, mentioning that *ḥakīm* (i.e. Firdausī) disposed of the love topic because of his old age. Niẓāmī does not intend to emulate his predecessor, but to focus on the "game of love".[59] Indeed, Niẓāmī's version differs considerably from that of Firdausī in its scope, plot development and character treatment. Unlike Firdausī, Niẓāmī devotes minimal attention to the historical-political background of the story and represents the character of Shīrīn in a different light (see below).

Another source mentioned by Niẓāmī is a manuscript draft kept in Bardaʿa, whose "clean copies are well disseminated".[60] This might point to the local nature of materials used by Niẓāmī which circulated in medieval Azerbaijan where he lived. Indeed, the story of Farhād and the figure of Mihīn-Bānū with the localisation of her realm in the historical Bardaʿa first appear in Niẓāmī's poem and might originate in local traditions, whether written or oral.[61]

Besides Firdausī, *Khusrau va Shīrīn* was formed in dialogue with yet another literary work, Gurgānī's *Vīs-u Rāmīn*, the account of which was given above. In addition to the structural affinity to Gurgānī's poem which finds expression in Niẓāmī's use of the same metre, Niẓāmī introduces direct references to the characters,[62] models scenes on this earlier work and echoes – both explicitly and implicitly – Gurgānī's work on the levels of poetic device, language and imagery.[63] Moreover, while Niẓāmī's attitude towards the story of Khusrau and Shīrīn by Firdausī is somewhat dismissive, his relation to *Vīs-u Rāmīn* is that of intertextuality that "at once increases the complexity of Niẓāmī's romance and

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58   Niẓāmī, *Khusrau va Shīrīn*, ed. Tharvatiyān, p. 137, lines 37–38.

59   Ibid., p. 137, lines 46–50. For Firdausī's version of the story, see Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, ed. Khāliqī-Muṭlaq, vol. 8, pp. 259–319, lines 3387–4107; pp. 364–73, lines 494–615.

60   See Niẓāmī, *Khusrau va Shīrīn*, ed. Tharvatiyān, p. 137, line 39. Vaḥīd Dastgirdī gives a different reading – "whose clean copies are *not known* (*nīst maʿrūf*) in dissemination" (*Khusrau va Shīrīn*, ed. Dastgirdī, p. 32, line 10), – which supports the local origins of at least some parts of Niẓāmī's story.

61   See also notes 54, 56 and 60 above.

62   See, for example, the references to Vīs (in the form of Vīsa) in Niẓāmī, *Khusrau va Shīrīn*, ed. Tharvatiyān, p. 350, line 46; p. 368, line 74.

63   The affinity of Niẓāmī's *Khusrau va Shīrīn* with *Vīs-u Rāmīn* has been long noted and studied, mostly along the lines of influence, borrowing and imitation; see, e.g., Maḥjūb (ed.), Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs-u Rāmīn*, introduction, pp. 91–95. See, however, the next note.

suggests that he views his poem as a commentary on (or, properly, interpretation of) that of his predecessor".[64]

Comparing Firdausī's treatment of the Khusrau and Shīrīn narrative with that of Niẓāmī's brings to the fore distinctive differences in two domains: (a) between two contrasting traditions – one critical of Shīrīn, with its roots in the Sasanian dynastic chronicles, the other in her favour, with its roots in Armenia and the Christian regions of the Caucasus; (b) between the genres of heroic epic and love romance. Whereas Firdausī touches upon the tale of Khusrau's and Shīrīn's love only cursorily, framing it within the detailed historical narrative of Khusrau's rule and focusing on battles and political issues, Niẓāmī organises his work around their love and its repercussions. *Khusrau va Shīrīn* contains one battle only, that against Bahrām Chūbīn, which is in fact caused by Shīrīn's reminding Khusrau to fulfill his duty to wrest his kingdom from the usurper.[65] By contrast to Firdausī's Shīrīn, who is of humble origin and vindictive in nature and whose jealousy leads her to poison Maryam,[66] Niẓāmī portrays a noble, chaste, albeit passionate, woman who defies Khusrau's initial view of her as an object to be possessed and rejects his divided loyalties in love as in kingship. With Shīrīn's help and as a consequence of his love quest, Khusrau overcomes his willfulness, even if belatedly. For Niẓāmī, as for Gurgānī before him, marriage is the only true union and the ultimate symbol of the success or failure of the lovers' pursuit, whereas a courtly attitude towards love is perceived as incapable of leading to true wisdom.[67]

2)   *Laylī va Majnūn*

The poem comprises over 4,000 distichs.[68] It was written in 1188 at the request of the ruler of Shirvān Jalāl al-Daula va al-Dīn Abū al-Muẓaffar Akhsatān

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64   Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 111–12. See also Gvakhariya, "Vis o Ramin". For a comparison of the episodes which Niẓāmī adapted or modelled on *Vīs-u Rāmīn*, see Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 113–22, 152–55.

65   For a description of the battle, see Niẓāmī, *Khusrau va Shīrīn*, ed. Tharvatiyān, pp. 255–58.

66   Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, ed. Khāliqī-Muṭlaq, vol. 8, pp. 269–70, lines 3511–15. Firdausī's censorious treatment of Shīrīn in comparison with other female figures who surround Khusrau is dealt with in van Ruymbeke, "Firdausi"; however, see also Davis, "Aesthetics", pp. 118–20, 122. The differences in the representation of Maryam and Shīrīn by Firdausī and Niẓāmī are discussed by Mu'ayyad, "Maryam va Shīrīn".

67   For analysis, see Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 145–58, 192–98.

68   Of all Niẓāmī's poems, *Laylī va Majnūn* raises the most questions as to its textual history; whole chapters have been purged as later interpolations. In various editions the number of chapters and distichs may vary significantly. On the controversy, see Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 270–73; Chelkowski, "Niẓāmī Gandjawī", p. 78. The most recent edition is Niẓāmī-yi

(r. 1187–1196), who himself selected the subject: the story memorialising Majnūn and Laylī.[69] At first, Niẓāmī is reluctant, for although well known, the legend is difficult to poeticise: devoid of any joie de vivre, it is set in barren rocky mountain terrain, and resolutely refuses to introduce pleasing poetic elements, such as descriptions of gardens and royal feasts. However, persuaded by his son Muḥammad,[70] Niẓāmī embarks on the task and completes it in an extremely short period of time, less than four months, according to his own statement.[71]

In the country of the Arabs there lived a chieftain of the tribe of ʿĀmir, who prayed for a son. His prayers were answered and a son, named Qays, was born. By the time he is ten, his beauty is proverbial.[72] Sent to school, Qays falls in love with his classmate Laylī (compare the same motif in ʿAyyūqī's *Varqa va Gulshāh*). The intensity of his love is so great that he is termed "possessed by a *jinn*" (Majnūn). The two are separated for propriety's sake. Majnūn wanders around in frenzy singing love songs and alienating himself from society. The attempt of Majnūn's father to propose his son to Laylī is met with rejection. In order to restore Qays to reason, his father takes him to Kaʿba, but instead of curing his love, the pilgrimage kindles it further. For her part, Laylī pines no less, her anguish intensified by occasionally listening to *ghazal*s composed and sung by Majnūn. In the meantime, noble Naufal tries to help Majnūn win his beloved by waging battle against Laylī's tribe, but without success. Majnūn's estrangement from human kind grows; the only consolation left to him is his friendship with wild animals. In the meantime, weary of Majnūn's eccentricity Laylī's family marries her to Ibn Salām, but the marriage is never consummated

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Ganjavī, *Laylī va Majnūn*, ed. B. Zanjānī, Tehran 1990, which is divided into 67 chapters and comprises 4,538 distichs. I use throughout Niẓāmī, *Laylī va Majnūn*, ed. Tharvatiyān; for other editions, see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/2, p. 485. For principal translations, see *Layla and Majnun by Nizami*, trans. C. Turner, London 1997 (English; prose adaptation); Nizami Ganjavi, *Leila und Madschnun*: *der berühmteste Liebesroman des Morgenlandes*, trans. R. Gelpke, Zürich 1983 (German; prose, abridged); Nizami, *The Story*, trans. Gelpke (English version of German; prose); Nizami, *Leyli i Medzhnun*, trans. R. Aliyev, Baku 1981 (Russian; prose); Nizami Gyanjevi, *Sobranie sochineniy v pyati tomakh*, vol. 3: *Leyli i Medzhnun*, trans. T. Streshneva, Moscow 1985 (Russian; verse); Nizami, *Layli i Madzhnun*, trans. Chalisova/Rusanov (Russian; literal verse by verse translation, with extensive scholarly commentary); Neẓāmī, *Leylā e Majnūn*, trans. G. Calasso, Milan 1985 (Italian; prose).

69   See Niẓāmī, *Laylī va Majnūn*, ed. Tharvatiyān, p. 44, lines 25–26.

70   Ibid., pp. 45–47, lines 35–81.

71   Ibid., p. 47, line 91. On the circumstances of the poem's composition, see Nizami, *Layli i Madzhnun*, trans. Chalisova/Rusanov, pp. 15–18. See also, Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 232–42.

72   Niẓāmī, *Laylī va Majnūn*, ed. Tharvatiyān, p. 77, line 46.

because of Laylī's fidelity to her beloved. After Laylī's marriage and his father's death Majnūn's insanity reaches its pinnacle, assuaged from time to time by an exchange of letters between the lovers and by their secret chaste encounters, during which Majnūn sings his *ghazal*s brimming with dolefulness and sorrow. Affected by Laylī's suffering her husband Ibn Salām gets ill and dies.[73] With the approach of autumn Laylī withers away. Majnūn bemoans her death, sometimes prostrating himself on her grave, sometimes roaming the mountains. He eventually breathes his last breath, while embracing Laylī's grave. His dead body remains there for a month, or according to another version, for a year, guarded by wild beasts. He is finally buried near his beloved's grave, and the two graves turn into a place of pilgrimage for suffering lovers whose pain is cured there (again, compare a similar motif in 'Ayyūqī's *Varqa va Gulshāh*).

Unlike in his other poems, Niẓāmī does not elaborate on the sources of *Laylī va Majnūn*, implying only that he is reworking a celebrated Arabian tale. The roots and development of the Majnūn narrative in the Arabic milieu are fairly well established. Krachkovsiy's study of the sources affirms the historicity of several personages in the narrative.[74] Majnūn is traditionally identified with poet Qays b. al-Mulawwaḥ who died around 700 and is credited with poems on platonic love featuring 'Udhrī motifs, either of his authorship or attributed to him.[75] These poems, as well as commentaries on them, initially gave rise to fragmentary motifs connected to Majnūn and Laylī (in early 9th century), and later to more or less orderly written anecdotes (during the 10th century), which, however, never developed into a unified whole.[76] As for Persian literature, despite a score of allusions to the two lovers in poetry and prose before Niẓāmī,[77] he appears to be the first author to grant the tale coherent treatment, urbanising the Bedouin legend and investing the female character with a more

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[73]   A chapter on the lovers' union follows (Niẓāmī, *Laylī va Majnūn*, ed. Tharvatiyān, pp. 262–72), which, on account of its incongruity with the spirit of the narrative and later episodes, is deemed a later interpolation (see Bertel's, "Nizami", p. 265, n. 110).

[74]   Krachkovskiy, "Rannyaya istoriya", pp. 602–03. Also Miquel and Kempf, *Majnūn et Laylâ*. For an opinion in favour of Majnūn as an imaginary character, see Pellat, "Maḏjnūn Laylā. i. In Arabic literature", p. 1102.

[75]   Krachkovskiy, p. 603; also Chelkowski, "Niẓāmī Gandjawī", p. 78. On 'Udhrī poetry, see p. 72 above.

[76]   Krachkovskiy, "Rannyaya istoriya", pp. 622–24, 631. See also Pellat, "Maḏjnūn Laylā. i. In Arabic literature", p. 1103; Seyed-Gohrab, "Leyli o Majnun". The contents of three early Arabic versions are given by Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 242–49.

[77]   For examples, see Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, pp. 69–72; de Bruijn, "Maḏjnūn Laylā. ii. In Persian, Kurdish and Pashto literature", p. 1104.

active role.[78] As mentioned above, some common motifs with 'Ayyūqī's *Varqa va Gulshāh* can be discerned in Niẓāmī's poem; however, it is unclear whether Niẓāmī had a direct acquaintance with 'Ayyūqī's work or borrowed the motifs from the common lore.

Since the problem of interpolations remains unresolved,[79] interpretation of the poem's meanings is necessarily conjectural. Notwithstanding that, different interpretations have been suggested. According to one, Majnūn's passion and self-alienation from society cause him to lose sight of his own self, turning him into a shell that harbours the image of the ideal Laylī which ousts her earthly prototype. Only when freed from the mundane does he metamorphose into a pure and sublime Poet, his delirious passion adding further stimulus to his poetic genius.[80] According to another, opposing interpretation, the story reveals the destructive aspects of love which, once it becomes an obsession, results in division rather than in union. The ultimate object of Majnūn's adoration is not Laylī, but his own self-image as a lover. His self-indulgence and deliberate self-estrangement rooted, among other things, in his moral passivity, destroy his family, both of his parents dying from the grief of separation, compromises the honour of the noble Naufal, who offered him his aid, and ultimately ruins the faithful Laylī.[81] As for Majnūn's poetry, inspired by his abortive passion, it is limited to self-expression and provides "not guidance toward right conduct (the proper function of poetry), but misguidance – it is, in short, a negative exemplum".[82] Yet another strand of interpretation offers a mystical reading of the poem. Manifestations of Majnūn's seemingly ascetic and abstinent way of life (emaciation, vegetarianism, reluctance to speak, rejection of clothing) are considered to reflect the practices of mystics; his death is couched in mystical terms as "death from the hands of the Beloved", while his actions and behaviour are seen as meaningful to his desire to release himself from worldly bonds in a mystical quest for unity with the Beloved, impersonated by Laylī.[83] Although mystical poets did refer to Majnūn and Laylī in a mystical context prior to Niẓāmī's time, in view of the poet's lack of historical connection with Sufi circles and incongruities in the representation

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78   For changes in Arabic material and innovations which seem to be introduced by Niẓāmī, see Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 267–69; Seyed-Gohrab, "Leyli o Majnun".

79   See above, notes 68 and 73.

80   Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 269, 273.

81   Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 158–63. On passivity as Majnūn's main characteristic, see also Anvar, "Pearls", pp. 56–57.

82   Meisami, *Poetry*, p. 165; see also ibid., pp. 166–71.

83   See, e.g., Nizami, *Story*, trans. Gelpke, pp. 219–20; Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, pp. 89–159, 213–69; Anvar, "Pearls".

of the pair's relationship with the Sufi ideal of self-annihilation in the Beloved, a Sufi interpretation of the poem should be treated with caution.[84]

3)   *Haft paykar*

Haft paykar is the last of Niẓāmī's romantic poems and probably the most accomplished from the viewpoint of its contents, structure and style. Compiled in 1197 and dedicated to the ruler of Marāgha ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. Āq-Sunqur (d. 1208),[85] the poem amounts to slightly more than 4,500 distichs.[86] Similarly to *Khusrau va Shīrīn, Haft paykar* revolves around the historical figure of a Sasanian king, Bahrām V Gūr (r. 421–39; his sobriquet Gūr meaning "onager" which was his favourite prey), although the historical context is much less significant.[87] Structurally, the poem is organised into two distinct but interrelated parts: a frame-story that comprises the narrative account of Bahrām's life, and seven long tales which are woven into it and comprise the bulk of the poem.[88]

On account of the unrest in Iran, the heir-apparent Bahrām is brought up at the court of the Arab king Nuʿmān whose realm is placed in Yemen. Bahrām obtains a superb education: he masters three languages – Arabic, Persian and Greek, – learns sciences, including astrology and astronomy, and becomes an unsurpassed hunter. After his father's death, Bahrām ascends the throne after having overcome the enmity of the Iranian nobility. He proves himself a wise and just ruler, rescuing his people from famine. Next comes the famous episode of Bahrām's conflict with his favourite slave-girl Fitna, which is ultimately peacefully resolved (see below, p. 85). The king sets out in search of the Princesses of the Seven Climes whose portraits he saw in a mysterious room in

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84   See Bertelʾs, "Nizami", pp. 110–11, 270; Meisami, *Poetry*, p. 172.

85   See discussion in de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/2, p. 441 and n. 2 there.

86   For editions and their evaluation, see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/2, p. 486; ibid., "Haft Paykar", p. 523; his list should be completed by Niẓāmī, *Haft paykar*, ed. Tharvatiyān, which I use here. The principal complete translations include Niẓāmī, *The Haft Paikar*, trans. C.E. Wilson; reprint of 1924 ed. in one volume (English, erotic passages are translated in Latin; blank verse; with useful commentary); Nizami, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, trans. J.S. Meisami, Oxford 1995 (English; verse); Nizami, *Sobranie sochineniy v pyati tomakh*, vol. 4: *Semʾ krasavits*, trans. V. Derzhavin, Moscow 1985 (Russian; verse); Nezāmī di Ganjè, *Le sette principesse*, trans. with introduction A. Bausani, notes by A. Bausani/G. Calasso, Milan 2002 [Or. publ. Bari 1967]. For a list of partial translations, see de Blois, *Persian Literature*, 5/2, p. 487.

87   For a comparison of the Bahrām Gūr story in Arabic and Persian historical, literary and popular sources, including *Haft paykar*, see Pantke, *Arabische Bahrām-Roman*.

88   The complex structure of the narrative, including the spacial and time patterns as a key to the poem's meaning is minutely dealt with in Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 203–36.

his castle when he was a youth in Yemen. Each princess comes from a different part of the world (i.e., clime) – India, Turkistān, Khvārizm (= Chorezm), Saqlāb (identifiable with medieval Russia), Maghrib, Rūm (Byzantium), and Persia. An architect erects seven domed pavilions, one for each of the princesses, every pavilion painted in a colour associated with the clime and planet of its occupant.[89] Bahrām visits one princess each day, feasts and listens to a tale she relates. The tales are elaborate and of sensual nature, comprising fantastic or riddle-like elements.[90] While Bahrām is thus engaged with the princesses, his vizier seizes power and the kingdom falls into disarray. Once Bahrām becomes aware of the injustices inflicted on the people of his kingdom, he executes the vizier, restores justice and orders the seven pleasure-domes to be converted into fire-temples for the worship of God. During his last hunt, Bahrām mysteriously disappears in a cave while hunting an onager – *gūr*. His body is never recovered.

As with *Khusrau va Shīrīn*, Niẓāmī selected the story which had earlier been dealt with by Firdausī, rewriting it, adding new material and changing emphases.[91] One of the most conspicuous examples of his creative rewriting concerns the episode of the conflict between the king and his harp-girl Fitna (Firdausī's Āzāda).[92] Whereas in Firdausī's condensed version Bahrām appears as a willful and tyrannical ruler whose camel tramples Āzāda underfoot for her unfortunate remark which seemingly hurt his pride, Niẓāmī offers an elaborate story which pre-empts Fitna's role in Bahrām's spiritual guidance and ends with their marriage. Aside from Firdausī, Niẓāmī must have used the Mirrors for Princes as a source, including the *Siyāsat-nāma* ("Book of Governance") of the

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89   For a discussion of colour and number symbolism, see Krotkoff, "Colour"; for examining the role of astrology, see Vesel, "Réminiscences"; Ritter, *Bildersprache*, pp. 27, 50.

90   The imagery, symbolism and purport of the tales in terms of Bahrām's spiritual progress from the darkness of moral ignorance (symbolised by the black of the first dome) to the light of illumination (symbolised by the white of the last, seventh dome) are examined in Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 225–32.

91   For the story of Bahrām Gūr in the *Shāh-nāma*, see Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, ed. Khāliqī-Muṭlaq, vol. 6, pp. 363–615; content summary in Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 315–19. Regarding his treatment of the version of his predecessor, Niẓāmī declares, "that which was left by him half-said I say; the half-pierced pearl I thread; While that which I found right and true just as before I've left to view"; see Niẓāmī, *Haft paykar*, ed. Tharvatiyān, p. 90, lines 24–25; translation and analysis in Meisami, *Poetry*, pp. 201–02.

92   See respectively, Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, ed. Khāliqī-Muṭlaq and Umīdsālār, vol. 6, pp. 373–76, lines 166–98; Niẓāmī, *Haft Paykar*, ed. Tharvatiyān, pp. 167–78.

Saljūq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092). Other sources, notably those of the inserted tales, have yet to be studied.[93]

4)   Reception of Niẓāmī's Romantic Poems

Niẓāmī's oeuvre had a considerable impact on the development of different linguistic and ethnic literary traditions. "Niẓāmī's poetic school" comprises hundreds of compositions in a variety of languages, from Persian, Arabic and a range of Turkic languages to Urdu, Kurdish, Punjabi, Pashto and others; a substantial part of the compositions remains unedited and unstudied, some works known only by title.[94] Whereas modern European scholarship employs the term "imitation" or "creative imitation" to describe Niẓāmī-inspired poems, the Persian normative tradition offers a subtler view of the relationship between the source and its progeny. The most common pattern of the relationship is defined as *naẓīra* ("similar, parallel"), when both formal (e.g., metre), compositional and some thematic features of the model are retained, but at the same time new material is introduced and the topic and characters are treated in an original fashion, providing different responses to themes and reflections addressed in Niẓāmī's poetry. Such are, for example, *Shīrīn-u Khusrau*, *Majnūn-u Laylī* and *Hasht bihisht* ("Eight Gardens of Paradise"; note the changes in the titles of all three poems) by the Indian poet Amīr Khusrau Dihlavī (d. 1325), who was the first to emulate Niẓāmī's *Khamsa*; and the works *Laylī va Majnūn*, *Farhād-u Shīrīn* and *Sabʿa-yi sayyāra* ("Seven Planets") by ʿAlī Shīr Navāʾī (d. 1501), who wrote in the Chaghatay (Eastern Turkic) language.[95] Another type of relationship, *tatabbuʿ* ("following behind, succeeding"), involves the keeping of formal elements (e.g., metre, number of chapters), but altering the thematic nature of the work. As an example, one can mention the *Haft akhtar* ("Seven Stars") of Fānī-yi Kashmīrī (d. 1670–71), written as a *tatabbuʿ* of *Haft paykar*, that substitutes Bahrām Gūr with a trickster Hilāl and relates seven independent stories that take place during his travels.[96] Finally, the *javāb*

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93   An attempt was made to trace certain motifs to the Jewish *Book of Esther* and to the Greek *Liber Syntipae*; see Piemontese, "Turandot". Besides written sources, it is highly plausible that Niẓāmī utilised motifs and tales current in oral tradition; see, e.g., Umīdsālār, "Haft paykar-i Niẓāmī".

94   For an annotated listing, see Aliyev, *Temy;* Rādfar, *Kitābshināsī*, pp. 216–34. Quantitatively, the most frequently emulated of Niẓāmī's poems is *Laylī va Majnūn*, followed by *Khusrau va Shīrīn*, *Haft paykar* being the least; see Aliyev, *Temy*, p. 20.

95   For a discussion of the contents of the poems and their relation to Niẓāmī's work, see Aliyev, *Temy*, pp. 45–58; Bertel's, "Nizami", pp. 275–81; Orsatti, "Kosrow o Širin", and Aliyev, *Temy*, pp. 156–61; Bertel's, "Navoyi", pp. 139–65 respectively.

96   See Aliyev, *Temy*, pp. 219–22.

("reply") type of relationship suggests the treatment of an entirely different subject along the lines determined by the model (mostly, the same metre) and implies debate across time with the model. Such is *Nal-u Daman* of Fayḍī (d. 1595) which, written as a reply to Niẓāmī's *Laylī va Majnūn*, reworks one of the episodes of the *Mahabharata*.[97] Thus, as a result of the poetic writing inspired by Niẓāmī's romantic poems, we witness over the centuries a process of accumulation, whereby texts and their authors are involved in a complex intertextual relationship not only with their ultimate model, but also with their more immediate predecessors.

Starting from the 14th century onwards two significant, albeit opposing, tendencies in the reception of Niẓāmī's romantic poems can be traced. One concerns the interpretation of his poems, particularly *Laylī va Majnūn* and *Haft paykar*, in a mystical Sufi vein, which spawned a host of compositions illustrating various mystical concepts, among them, for example, works by Jāmī (d. 1492) and Vaḥshī-yi Bāfqī (d. 1583). The other tendency involves a shift towards the fabulous and the adventurous, borrowing from folklore and thus bordering on popular literature.[98]

Niẓāmī's romantic poems inspired original reworkings in Georgian by King Teymuraz I (d. 1663) who composed *Layl-Mejnuniani*, and by Nodar Tsitsishvili (d. *ca.* 1658) who wrote *Baram-Guriani* (= the story of Bahrām Gūr), adopting themes and motifs from *Haft paykar*.[99] Although less popular than Niẓāmī's other poems from the viewpoint of emulation in the Perso-Turkish milieu, the themes and motifs of *Haft paykar* resurface in rather unexpected cultural environments. Thus, the Red Dome novella, which is told to Bahrām by the Russian princess re-emerges after many transformations as the story of Turandot, a tragi-comedy versified by Carlo Gozzi.[100] In addition, some of the poem's most

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97   See ibid., pp. 216–17.

98   The latter tendency manifests itself mostly after the 16th century and typically relates to poets writing in India (see, e.g., *Haft jauhar* of Abjadī, in Persian; Aliyev, *Temy*, pp. 29–31; *Bahrām-u Bānū Ḥusn* by Amīn, in Urdu; ibid., p. 44; *Bahram and Gulandam* by Tab'ī, in Dakhni; ibid., p. 204).

99   See respectively, Aliyev, *Temy*, pp. 206–07 and 262–64.

100   The connection with Niẓāmī's *Haft paykar* was noted long ago; see, e.g., Meier, "Turandot in Persien", which refers to a number of parallel stories. The channels via which the tale infiltrated the European realm remain obscure; hypotheses include the Persian collection of tales, which was translated into French as *Les Mille et un Jour* by Pétis de la Croix (see ibid., p. 1; Piemontese, "Turandot", pp. 133–34), and the Italian story-collection *Peregrinaggio di tre giovani figliuoli del re di Serendippo* (published in Venice in 1557) by a certain Christoforo Armeno (i.e. the Armenian) who translated the tales from Persian to Italian (see Chilkūfskī, "Upirā-yi Tūrāndūt"), pp. 719–21. A probable offshoot of Niẓāmī's tale is a

conspicuous motifs can be discerned in the Byzantine romance *Velthandros and Chrysantza* (*ca.* 13th century),[101] which fact calls for a closer investigation of a possible cultural impact of 11th–13th-centuries Persian literature on Byzantine and Early Modern Greek romances.

Conclusion

In the course of the three hundred years covered by the present survey, the genre of Persian love romances underwent a significant evolution, maturing by the late 13th century into a fully-fledged tradition, with its own structural, thematic and ideological dimensions. Departing from the conventions of the heroic epic, it adopted a variety of poetic metres, versatile enough to express romantic topics; the emphasis shifted from action to a depiction of the protagonists' interior world through elaborate imagery and character delineation. In addition, love romances demonstrate diversity in the types of love they portray, from the chaste and pure to the illicit to the matrimonial relationship. Yet, the common denominator in most of the Persian love romances discussed above is their tragic ambiance, on the one hand, and their didactic purport, on the other hand, which both set them apart from their Ancient Greek and Byzantine peers. With Gurgānī and even more so with Niẓāmī, the love romance becomes tightly linked with concepts of justice and kingship, the lovers' relationship emblematic of just or tyrannic rule and reflecting the transformation of the male protagonist – usually a king – as he proceeds along the path to self-knowledge.

From the viewpoint of their sources, medieval Persian love romances draw on three major cultural traditions: pre-Islamic Iranian, formed both under the Parthians (*Vīs-u Rāmīn*) and the Sasanians (*Khusrau va Shīrīn*, *Haft paykar*), Arabic (*Varqa va Gulshāh*, *Laylī va Majnūn*), and Greek (*Vāmiq-u ʿAdhrā*). Although written sources can be postulated for most of the texts considered above, the influence of the oral tradition must have been significant and might account for the local lore encountered, for instance, in Niẓāmī's *Khusrau va Shīrīn* and *Haft paykar*.

At the same time, the above categorisation of the cultural traditions and sources undermines the complexity of cultural exchange at work in the Iranian

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vernacular Greek rewriting of the early 15th-century *Alexander and Semiramis* based on an Ottoman *Vorlage*; see Moennig, *Erzählung*, esp. pp. 19–36.

101   For a comparative analysis, see Yiavis, "Persian Chronicles", esp. pp. 34–38; on Velthandros, see the chapter on Original romances by C. Cupane in this volume pp. 110–14.

domain during the pre-Islamic and early medieval periods. A good illustration of such complexity is offered by the relationships between Greek and Persian materials as reflected in Greek Hellenistic novels and Persian love romances: this relationship is better described as of mutual reciprocity than direct influence. Notwithstanding the origins of *Vīs-u Rāmīn* and *Varqa va Gulshāh* in Parthian and Arabic sources respectively, these two romances demonstrate significant motif correspondences with Greek novels written between ca. 100 BCE and ca. 300 CE, i.e., during the domination of the Parthian Empire (247/38 BCE – 224 CE) where the Greek element for a long time formed an important part of the Parthian culture.[102] Common motifs and narrative techniques comprise, among others, the abduction of a bride around the time of her wedding ceremony; the forced separation of lovers during which the heroine protects her chastity by every means possible; the importance of chance in the development of plot; the chronotope of "adventure-time", etc.[103] These similarities by no means imply lost Greek prototypes either for *Vīs-u Rāmīn* or *Varqa va Gulshāh*, but rather suggest that "their basic motivic building blocks were originally elaborated within the same hybrid milieu that gave rise to the Greek novels, and that the sharing of motifs and narrative technique by the two sets of tales is in all probability a result of their having sprung initially from this common, culturally highly mixed, soil".[104] The same may prove true with respect to the impact of the Persian love romances, notably those of Niẓāmī, on the neighbouring non-Persianate cultures, such as the Byzantine literary tradition, for example. Any inquiry into cultural contacts should take into account possible channels of transmission and patterns of diffusion and reception of the literary material, be it on the level of motif, theme or a text in its entirety. The main prerequisite for such an inquiry remains, as always, an old-school philological-historical scrutiny predicated on a close comparative reading of the original texts.

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102   On Greek influence during the Parthian period, see Martinez-Sève, "Hellenism", p. 161.

103   For a comparison of these and other common motifs in the Persian romance and Greek love novel, see Davis, *Panthea's Children*, pp. 44–57, 61–75; ibid., "Greek and Persian Romances", pp. 339–40.

104   Davis, *Panthea's Children*, pp. 43–44.

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