

# ASIATIC PAPERS

## PART II

PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
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ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

BY

JIVANJI JAMSHEDJI MODI, B.A., Ph.D., C.I.E.,

Fellow of the University of Bombay (1887), Dipl. Litteris et Artibus  
(Sweden, 1889), Shams-ul-Ulma (Government of India,  
1893), Officier de l'Instruction Publique  
(France, 1902), Ph. D. (Honoris  
Causa, Heidelberg, 1912).

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## *The Date of the Death of Nizami.*

(Read 26th April 1906.)

According to M. Mohl, Nizami was the first of the Persian poets, who after the decadence of the Epic literature, inaugurated by Firdousi, (A.D. 941-1020) brought the historical romance into fashion. <sup>1</sup> One of his Persian biographers, Doulat Shah, as pointed out by Ousley, says of him, in his "Memoirs of the Poets," that "it is impossible for either tongue or pen to describe his sanctity, his excellence, or his science." <sup>2</sup>

Nizami is best known for his "Five Poems" known as the Khamseh (خمسه), *i.e.*, 'the five' and also as the Panj Ganj, *i.e.*, 'the five treasuries.' These five poems are—

1. Makhzan-u'l-Asrar (مخزن ال اسرار), *i.e.*, the Treasury of Secrets.
2. Khusru and Shirin.
3. Laili and Majnun.
4. Haft Paikar (هفت پیکر), *i.e.*, the Seven Portraits.
5. The Sikandar-Nameh, *i.e.*, the Book of Alexander.

Of these five, three,—the second, fourth and fifth poems,—treat of historical romances, in which kings Khusru (Chosroes II) and Behram Gour (Behram V) of the Sassanian dynasty and Sikandar (Alexander the Great) who overthrew the Achemenian dynasty are the principal heroes.

Just as Firdousi had a host of imitators, who tried to imitate his Shâhnâmeh and wrote poems like Burzo-nâmeh, Frâmroz-nâmeh, Kersâsp-nâmeh, Bânu-Goshasp-nâmeh, Sârnâmeh, Jehângier-nâmeh, and Bahman-nâmeh, so, Nizami had several imitators of his Khamseh. The most well-known of these imitators was Amir Khusro.

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<sup>1</sup> "Le premier qui mit à la mode le roman historique fut Nizami (né l'an 513 et mort l'an 576 de l'hégire)." Le Livre des Rois, small edition, Preface, p. LXXXII.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical Notices of Persian poets by Sir Gore Ousley (1846), p. 43.

Nizami is known to have been a poet who sought retirement and a solitary life in the latter part of his life. Dault Nizami's muscle. Shah describes the following story of his miraculous powers in his retirement :—

اتابک قزل ارسلان را آرزوی محبت شیخ بودی و  
 بطلب شیخ کس فرستاد نمودند که شیخ منزویست و  
 بسلاطین و حکام محبت نمیدارد اتابک آرزوی امتحان  
 بدیدن شیخ رفت شیخ از روی کرامت دانست که  
 آرزوی امتحان میاید و بچشم حقارت بشیخ مینگرد  
 شیخ از عالم غیب شمه بچشم اتابک نمود اتابک دید  
 (1)

تخت بادشاهانه نهاده اند از جواهر و کبریا سی دید که صد هزار  
 چاکر و سپاهی و تجل پادشاهانه و غلامان با کمر مرصع و حاجبان  
 و ند معان برپای ایستاده و شیخ پادشاهانه بر تخت نشسته  
 چو چشم اتابک بر آن عظمت و شوکت افتاد مبهوت شد  
 و از روی تواضع میخواست که قدم شیخ را بوسه دهد 2

TRANSLATION.—Atâbak Kazal Arslân desired to see the Shaikh (Nizami). He sent somebody to call the Shaikh. They made him understand that the Shaikh is one who seeks solitude and does not keep the company of Sultans and rulers. Then Atâbak went to see the Shaikh with a view to examine (whether his retirement was real or only feigned). The Shaikh by virtue of his miraculous powers came to know that he (the king) came with a view to examine him (and not with the real desire of seeing him) and that he looked towards him with an eye of contempt. The Shaikh shewed to Atâbak a portrait (of his miraculous power) of the unseen world. Atâbak saw that a royal throne was placed there adorned with jewels and royal splendour. He (further) saw that 100,000 servants and soldiers and royal splendour and slaves decked with jewelled belts and chamberlains and attendants all were waiting upon him and the Shaikh was sitting in a royal fashion upon the throne. When the eyes of Atâbak fell upon such a splendour and pomp he was astonished and wished to kiss the feet of the Shaikh by way of respect.

<sup>1</sup> یاسا a royal mandate.

<sup>2</sup> Khan Saheb Mirza Mohammed Shirazi's Bombay edition of Tazkarat-al Shu'ara (i.e., Memoirs of Poets) by Doulat Shah, p. 60, l. 3.

It is no wonder, that the date of the death of such a person, who had ended his life in retirement, and around whose old age a halo of a miraculous sanctity had spread, has not been certain and is variously stated. Many known authors differ on this point. The object of this short paper is to determine the date of his death on the authority of an old manuscript of the poet's *Sikandar-nâme*h or the book of the life of Alexander. This manuscript was one of the old manuscripts that I exhibited at the Exhibition held in our City in December 1904 in connection with the Indian National Congress.

Dr. Wilhelm Bacher, in his history of Persian literature, published in 1871, says: "The statements which are contained in Oriental sources as to the year of Nizami's death diverge, in their extreme limits, more than twenty years, and unhappily European authors have inclined to that side which, according to what follows, is submitted as the incorrect account. Daulat Shah, in his biography, which gives only very scanty and quite insufficient notices with regard to our poet, says, that Nizami died in some month of the year 576 of the Hejra. This date has been adopted by Haji Khalifa also, in one place; whilst in other places of his Dictionary he has named quite different dates, *viz.*, twice A. H. 596, once 597, and finally 599. Now the first-named date, A. H. 576, is the one which has been adopted by the most eminent writers. So Von Hammer, in his history of Persian polite literature, and Von Erdman, who yet expressly adds, that Haji Khalifa incorrectly says that Nizami died A. H. 597. Flügel, in his account of Persian literature, names likewise the year 576.<sup>1</sup>"

M. Mohl. also, as quoted above, gives 576, as the date of Nizami's death.

Dr. Bacher himself gives the date as 599 Hijri.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Hermann Ethé<sup>3</sup> also gives the date as 599 Hijri (1203 A. D.). Ousley<sup>4</sup> gives the year as 597 Hijri (1200 A. D.).

Dr. Charles Rieu, in his Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum, (1881, Vol II., p. 564*b*) says: "Most conflicting statements have been made regarding the date of Nizami's death. Daulat Shah gives A. H. 576, the Atashkadah A.H. 586, the *Jahânârâ* A.H. 597, Haji. Khal A.H. 596, the Subh-i-Sâdik A.H. 602, and *Tâkî Kâshî* A.H. 606." Dr. Rieu himself determines the date to be A.H. 598 or 599 (*Ibid.* p. 565*a*.).

<sup>1</sup> "Persian Poetry for English Readers" by Robinson (1883), pp. 109-110.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> Article on Nizami in the Encyclopædia Britannica, 9th edition, Vol. 17, p. 522, col. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Biographical Notices of Persian Poets (1846), p. 48.

Dr. Bacher arrives at the date of Nizami's death in the following way:—

In his *Laila and Majnun*, Nizami says :

بر جلوۀ این عروس آزاد — آباد تر آنکه گوید آباد  
کاراسته شد به بهترین حال — در سلخ رجب ثی و فی دال  
تاریخ عیان که داشت با خود — هشتاد و چهار بعد پانصد <sup>1</sup>

Robinson <sup>2</sup> thus renders these verses on the authority of Bacher's German translation :—

“ Bravo ! on the unveiling of this lovely bride !

Bravo ! for him that exclaims ‘ Well done ! ’

It was brought to completion under the happiest auspices,  
In the month of Rajab, and the letters *Thee* and *Fee* and  
*Dal*.

The precise date which it brought with it was eighty and  
four and five <sup>3</sup> hundred.”

This gives 584 Hijri as the date of the completion of *Laila and Majnun*.

Now Nizami was 49 years of age at this time. This appears from the following couplet in the Introduction of the *Laila and Majnun* :—

زان سحر سحر گهی کرانم  
مجموعه هفت سبع خوانم <sup>4</sup>

*i.e.*, “ From this morning enchantment in which I live, (*i.e.*, my life), I have already read off the sum of seven sevens.” <sup>5</sup>

Another similar couplet in the Introduction of the *Laila and Majnun* says the same thing. It says :

“ Whether thou hast read off only seven sevens.

“ Or whether thou hast existed for seven thousand.” <sup>6</sup>

These couplets then show, that when Nizami wrote, in 584 Hijri, his *Laili and Majnun*, he was 49 years of age. Thus he was born in 535 Hijri.

Now a glossarist or a commentator who seems to have latterly collected the Quintuple or Five-books, <sup>7</sup> has given the following verses,

<sup>1</sup> Bombay edition of 1265 Hijri of Nizami's *Khamseh*, 3rd Jald, p. 9, couplets 35-37 end of the Chapter on *سبب نظم کتاب*

<sup>2</sup> *Persian Poetry for English Readers* (1883, p. 111).

<sup>3</sup> Robinson gives by mistake 400. This is evidently a mistake, because the numerical value of *Thee* ث is 500. So ث and ف and د give 500+80+4=584.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Dr. C. Rieu, *British Museum Catalogue*, p. 564B.

<sup>5</sup> Robinson's *Persian Poetry*, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The *Sikandar-nâmeh* is written in two parts, one of which is called *Sikandar-nâmeh-i Bahri*. So some include the two parts as two poems of the *Khamseh*, and keep out “ *Khusru and Shirin*.”

of his own composition, on the death of Nizami at the end of his Sikandar-nâmeḥ:—

نظامي چو اين داستان شد تمام — بعزم شدن نيز برداشت کام  
نه بس روزگاري براي بر گذشت — که تاريخ عمرش ورق در نوشت  
بد فزون بود شش مه ز شصت و سه سال — که بر عزم ره برد هل زد دوال<sup>1</sup>

(Quoted by Dr. C. Rieu in the British Museum Catalogue, p. 564B—565A.)

“When Nizami had completed this narrative,  
He lifted up his foot with the purpose of setting out on his  
journey ;  
Nor did much time pass after this  
Before the chronicle of his life was rolled up :  
Six months were added to sixty and three years,  
When he beat on the drum the signal of departure:”<sup>2</sup>

According to this glossarist, then, Nizami died shortly after the completion of his Sikandar-nâmeḥ referred to by him, and he was 64 years (63 years and 6 months) of age at that time. So, if, in 584 Hijri, he was 49 years of age, it follows that 15 years later, *i.e.*, at the age of 64, when he died, the Hijri year was  $(584 + 15) = 599$ .

Thus we have the following dates of the death of the poet, as given by different authors:—

Conflicting dates of his death.							Hijri.
Doulat Shah	...	...	...	...	...	...	576
Haji Khalifa	...	...	...	...	...	...	{ 576 596 597 599
Âtashkadah	...	...	...	...	...	...	586
Jahan Ârâ	...	...	...	...	...	...	596
Subh-i-Sâdik	...	...	...	...	...	...	602
Tâkt-i-kashi	...	...	...	...	...	...	606
Von Hammer	...	...	...	...	...	...	576
Von Erdman	...	...	...	...	...	...	576
Flügel	...	...	...	...	...	...	576
M. Mohl.	...	...	...	...	...	...	576
Dr. Bacher	...	...	...	...	...	...	599
Dr. H. Ethé	...	...	...	...	...	...	599
Sir G. Ousley	...	...	...	...	...	...	597
Dr. Charles Rieu	...	...	...	...	...	...	598 or 599

<sup>1</sup> The Khamsah is also called پنج گنج (Panj ganj), *i.e.*, the five treasures. Of the two parts of the Sikandar-nâmeḥ, above referred to, the first is sometimes called “Sherf-nâmeḥ Iskandari” (*i.e.*, the book describing the glory of Alexander). It is also called Sikandar-nâmeḥ Beri (بری) *i.e.*, of the continent. The second part is called Skindar-nâmeḥ Beheri (*i.e.*, of the sea) and also Akbâl-nâmeḥ Sikandari.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson's Persian Poetry, p. 113.

Now Bacher, whom we have followed in the words of his translator Robinson, has, as shown above, determined the date of the death of Nizami, not on the authority of the author himself, but on the authority of a later glossarist, who gives the age of the author when he completed the Sikander-nâme. Bacher seems to believe that the author himself has not given the date of the composition of the Sikandar-nâme. He says, "It remains still to settle with regard to the Alexander-Book (Sikandar-nâme), the time of its composition, which Nizami does not directly give."<sup>1</sup>

I now produce, for the inspection of members, an old manuscript,<sup>2</sup> about 300 years old, of a poem of Nizami known as the Sikander-nâme or the book of Alexander. At the end (last page) of this Sikander-nâme, as given in this old manuscript, Nizami himself gives the date of the composition of this poem. As far as I know, no author who has treated the subject of the date of Nizami's death has referred to these lines. Nizami says:

خجسته همیشه چو سرو جوان — بماناد در بزم شاه جهان  
بتاریخ پانصد نود هفت سال — که خوانند روز نگیرد ملال<sup>3</sup>  
سر سال چهارم محرم بدست — ز ساعت گذشته چهارم بدست

Translation—May the king of the world be always blessed in his assembly like a young cypress. In order that the reader may not be tired, on the date of the year 597, in the beginning of the year, on the 4th (day) of (the month of) Moharam<sup>5</sup> when the 4th hour had passed.

These couplets then clearly point out that Nizami was alive in the year 597 Hijri, and so, all the dates previous to this, generally given as the date of his death, cannot be correct. Then, as Nizami, according to the above glossarist, died shortly after finishing his Sikander-nâme, the date of his death comes to about 597 Hijri.

Now, when we speak of Nizami, as finishing his Sikander-nâme in 597, we must understand by that, the completion of the second

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> The manuscript belongs to Mr. Manockjee Rustomjee Unwalla of Bombay, of whom I have often spoken in this room as a fortunate possessor of many old Oriental manuscripts. Comparing this old manuscript with a lithographed copy of Nizami's Khamsah, I find that about 300 couplets are lost in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> The first part of the 2nd couplet occurs in verses "quoted in the Haft-Asmân, but which the author thinks to be of doubtful authenticity." Dr. C. Rieu's catalogue of the Persian manuscripts in the British Museum, Vol. II, p. 568b.

<sup>4</sup> چهارم = چهارم

<sup>5</sup> Moharam is the 1st month of the year.

recension of that work. He had written the work long before. As pointed out by Bacher,<sup>1</sup> it was in 587 that he had written it.

Dr. Ethe says on this subject: "As for the date of composition, it is evident, from the conflicting statements in the different manuscripts, that there must have been an earlier and a later recension, the former belonging to 587-589 and dedicated to the Prince of Mosul, Izz-uddin Masud, the latter made for the atâbeg Nusratuddin Abu Bakr of Tabriz, after 593 A.H., since we find in it a mention of Nizami's last romance Haft-païkar or 'The Seven Beauties,' which comprises the seven tales related by the seven favourite wives of the Sassânian king Bahrângur." (Encyclopædia Britannica, Vol. XVII, p. 522, Col. 2).

Now, our manuscript is the second recension, because we find Prince Nasruddin referred to therein. In the end,<sup>2</sup> we read:

ولایت ستان شاه گیتی پناه — فریدون کمر بلک خاقان کلاه  
ملک نصره الدین که از داد او — خورده هر کسی باده بریاد او

Translation—The saintly<sup>3</sup> king who protects the world, who has the belt (like that) of Feridun, nay more,<sup>4</sup> who is the owner of an imperial crown,<sup>5</sup> King Nasratuddin, to commemorate whose justice, everybody drinks wine in his honour.

Bacher also refers to a second reduction.<sup>6</sup>

When Nizami first began his Sikandar-nâmeh, he must have passed fifty years of age, because he says in the beginning:—

چو تاریخ پنجه در آمد بسال  
شتابنده را شد دگر گونه حال

*i.e.*, when fifty years of age came up, Time (lit. the hastener<sup>7</sup>) has quite a different kind of condition (for me).

<sup>1</sup> Robinson's Persian Poetry, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> P. 207, couplet 12.

<sup>3</sup> ولایت ستان the friend of God, saint, lit. one who takes the kingdom.

<sup>4</sup> بلک for بلکہ but.

<sup>5</sup> خاقان کلاه owner of an Imperial Crown.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson's Persian Poetry, p. 160.

<sup>7</sup> It may be ستاینده.



The date, 597 Hijri, arrived at by us, on the authority of an old manuscript, is, as pointed out by Dr. C. Rieu,<sup>1</sup> referred to in the following verses from the Sikandar-nāmeḥ quoted in the Haft-Asman:—

بگفتم من این نامه را دو جهان  
که تا دور آخر بود در جهان  
بتاریخ پانصد نود هفت سال  
چهارم محرم بوقت زوال

Translation—I recited this Nameh in the world, so that it may remain in the world till the end of time, in the year 597 on the 4th of Moharam and at the time of its end.

Now the author of the Haft-Asmān doubts, according to Dr. Rieu, the authenticity of these lines as those of Nizami used in his Sikandar-nāmeḥ.

The author has reasons to doubt the authenticity of all the lines, because, on comparing the lines given above from our old manuscript, we find that they differ a good deal, but the particular line which gives the date as 597 (بتاریخ پانصد نود هفت سال) is correct.

Dr. C. Rieu adds that the same date is given in some later copies. These facts then point to 597 Hijri as the date of Nizami's death.

The date of the manuscript which I produce to-day, is as given at the very end of the book, Hijri 1012 (A.D. 1603). The second figure, which is zero, is not distinctly visible, but with the aid of a magnifying glass we can see its slight mark. The old manuscript of the Sikandar-nāmeḥ which Ousley refers<sup>2</sup> to in his memoir of Nizami, is dated A.H. 1021 (A.D. 1612).

Nizami's book had many commentators. I produce here a commentary, which is written in 1110 Hijri (1698 A.D.).

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Catalogue, Vol. II, p. 568 b.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical Notices of Persian Poets (1840), p. 48.