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Early Persian Verse Romances in *Mutaqārib*: Form, Structure, Contents

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Abstract

This article discusses use of the meter *mutaqārib* in Persian *masnavī* (narrative) poetry as related to its content from a comparative perspective. One of the aims is to demonstrate the various connections between a set of narrative poems composed in *mutaqārib*. The article questions previous assumptions about the form and style of early Persian verse romances and contributes to further discussion of approaches to Persian narrative poetry.

Keywords: Firdawsī, Abuʾl-Qāsim; *mutaqārib*; Persian narrative poetry; verse romances

In Saʿdī Shīrāzī's *Būstān*, completed in 655/1257, we find the following two verses written as a *tazmīn*, or quotation, of Firdawsī.[1]

> *chi khvash guft firdawsī-yi pākzād*
> *ki rahmat bar ān turbat-i pāk bād*
> *mayāzār mūrī ki dāna kash-ast*
> *ki jān dārad-u jān-i shīrīn khvash ast*[2]
> How well the noble-born Firdawsī spoke
> May there be mercy on his pure grave
> Do not injure the ant that is carrying grain
> For he has a life and a sweet life is beautiful.[3]

These well-known verses appear in the second of the ten chapters of Saʿdī's *Būstān*, entitled *Dar Ihsān* (On doing good).[4] In the *Shāhnāma*, this is what Iraj says when Tūr is about to kill him, telling his brother not to abase himself by killing the weak.

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[1] Thiesen, *Manual*, 115.
[2] Saʿdī, *Būstān*, 87, vs. 1330–31.
[3] All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.
[4] In the edition of Khaleghi-Motlagh (*Shāhnāma*, I, 120, vs. 501), Firdawsī's verse differs slightly:

makush mūrakī-rā ki rūzī kash ast
ki ū nīz jān dārad-u jān khvash ast
Do not kill the little ant that is toiling for its daily food
For he too has a life and life is sweet

Saʿdī's verses appear in the story of the Sufi Shiblī (d. 945), who spots an ant in his grain storehouse.[5]

This quotation, just as the choice for the meter of the *Būstān*, may be understood as a *javāb*, an answer to a literary predecessor.[6] The meter in which the *Būstān* is composed is the *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*, the meter Firdawsī used for his *Shāhnāma* about two hundred and fifty years earlier. From that time forward, the *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf* was associated with the *Shāhnāma*. The *Būstān* even opens with verses almost identical to Firdawsī's own.

This article considers usage of the meter of the *Būstān* and the *Shāhnāma*, the *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*, "the eightfold apocopated *mutaqārib*," in early Persian poetry.[7] In addition, I will discuss some issues relevant to the relation between content and meter in Persian poetry, a topic that has received relatively little attention in studies on Persian literature.[8]

The Meter *Mutaqārib* and Other Narrative Meters

The basic form of the *mutaqārib* meter is the unit (*rukn*) *faʿūlun*, consisting of one short syllable followed by two long syllables. In the "sound" (*sālim*) form of the meter this unit is repeated four times per *misrāʿ* (hemistich), eight times per *bayt* (distich). In the most common form of this meter, the one under consideration here, the last unit of each *misrāʿ* is shortened by one syllable, rendering the fourth and the eighth unit *faʿal* instead of *faʿūlun* (thus: ∪ - - / ∪ - - / ∪ - - / ∪ -).

The *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf* is usually described as "the heroic meter," because the *Shāhnāma* is "a heroic epic."[9] Categorizations like this, although useful, do not do full justice to the nature of the *Shāhnāma* or to its meter. The fact that Saʿdī chose this meter for his *Būstān*, a work that may be called a didactic rather than a heroic epic, is indicative of this. The categorization of epics, or narrative poems, in literary histories as heroic, romantic, or didactic is questionable and perhaps should be reconsidered.[10] Labels may limit the reader to a normative way of looking at narrative poems.

In *The Persian Metres*, published in 1976, L. P. Elwell-Sutton presents the following concise classification of meters used in narrative poems:

> According to the prosodists, it is possible to tell the nature of the *maṣnawī* poem from the meter in which it is composed: meter 1.1.11 [*mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*] is used for *razm* (heroic epics) and *bazm* (festive poems), 2.1.11 [*hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzūf*, ∪ - - - / ∪ - - - / ∪ - -] and 5.1.10 [*hazaj-i musaddas-i akhrab-i maqbūz-i mahzūf*, - - ∪ / ∪ - ∪ - / ∪ - -] for *ʿešq* (love poems), 2.4.11 [*ramal-i musaddas-i mahzūf*, - ∪ - -/ - ∪ - -/ - ∪ - -], 3.1.11 [*ramal-i musaddas-i makhbūn-i mahzūf*, ∪ ∪ - - / ∪ ∪ - -/ ∪ ∪ -]

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[5] On this verse and its variants, see Khatibi, "Mayāzār mūrī yā makush mūrakī?"

[6] One reviewer of this article observed that textual connections between the *Shāhnāma* and the *Bustān* may belong to the reception history of Saʿdī's works, and may not necessarily reflect an intertextual connection intended by the poet Saʿdī himself. I am grateful for this insightful observation and hope to follow up on this in later research.

[7] Thiesen, *Manual*, 113.

[8] The volume *Arabic Prosody and Its Applications in Muslim Poetry*, edited by Lars Johanson and Bo Utas, is a notable exception and contains several contributions on Persian poetry.

[9] See for instance Meisami, *Court Poetry,* 82. But as already noted by Jan Rypka, the *mutaqārib* was "neither during the Ghaznavid period nor in earlier times confined to the heroic epic" (*History*, 175). Hägg and Utas describe the *mutaqārib* as a meter that later became specific to historical epics: "The meter *mutaqārib* later on became the specific meter for historical epics, but in the 11th century AD it also was still used occasionally for romantic poems, like *V&A* [*Vāmiq-u Azrā*] and the contemporary *Varqa and Golshāh* by a certain 'Ayyūqī." Hägg and Utas furthermore claim the following about the *mutaqārib*: "It is considered a rather simple, narrative meter that gives less room for rhetoric devices and stylistic refinement than the more complex meters that were generally used for romantic poems." They go on to qualify and nuance this statement further (*Virgin*, 79).

[10] But see Rypka, *History*, 251, referring to K. Chaykin, in a discussion of the *Būstān*. Rypka also references the poet Sharīf's *Pandnāma*, dating from the eleventh century, and Abū Shakūr's *Āfarīn-nāma*, dating from the tenth century. See also Rypka, *History*, 144.

and 3.4.11 [*sarīʿ-i musaddas-i matwī-yi maksūf,* - ◡ ◡ -/ - ◡ ◡ -/ - ◡ -] for *pand* (homilies) and *taṣavvof* (Sufism), and 4.5.11 [*khafīf-i musaddas-i makhbūn-i mahzūf,* - ◡ - -/ ◡ - ◡ -/ ◡ ◡ -) for *bazm.* Traditionally these were the only meters in which a *maṯnawī* might be composed, and a favourite ploy was to compose a set of seven poems (*sabʿa*) using each of them.[11]

Elwell-Sutton, however, immediately invalidates this classification in the remark that follows: "In fact the choice of neither meter nor subject was strictly observed, at any rate in early classical times."[12] His study indicates that some sort of categorization of meters may have taken place, at least at a certain moment in time: probably after the twelfth-century poet Nizāmī. What is clear from **Elwell-Sutton's** list is that there is a strong preference for eleven-syllable meters in *masnavī* poetry. He is not very clear about the books on prosody on which he based his conclusions regarding the use of meters. He mentions a few early treatises, and refers to "innumerable later works."[13] In the introduction to his own study he mentions the earliest books on prosody in Persian, the *Tarjumān al-Balāgha* by Rādūyānī (507/1113–14) and Rashīd al-Dīn Vatvāṭ's *Hadāʾiq al-sihr fī haqāʾiq al-shiʿr* (573/1177–78). Both works date from the twelfth century. However, as **Elwell-Sutton** also notes, these works do not deal with the study of meters (*ʿarūż*).

The thirteenth-century prosodist Shams-i Qays is one of the first to focus on meters in his *al-Muʿjam fī maʿāyir ashʿār al-ʿajam* (composed after 614/1217–18), alongside other formal aspects of poetry. Shams-i Qays and slightly later Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī in his *Miʿyār al-ashʿār* (649/1251) treat prosody by focusing on its technicalities, and hardly at all on its meter.[14] Shams-i Qays in his *al-Muʿjam* includes sometimes phrases, such as "this is the meter of Nizāmī's *Khusraw-u Shīrīn* and Fakhrī Gurgānī's *Vīs-u Rāmīn*," but he does not say why poets chose a certain meter.[15] Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī in the classification of the *mutaqārib* meter in his *Miʿyār al-ashʿār* notes that *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf* is the meter of the *Shāhnāma* and that speakers of Persian call this meter *rāh-i aʿshā* (the manner of al-Aʿshā) since this sixth- to seventh-century Arabian poet used it in his verses.[16]

Before discussing a group of early narrative poems in *mutaqārib* meter that were composed prior to Nizāmī, I would like to briefly discuss Nizāmī's considerable role in the propagation of the *mutaqārib* meter, as well as in establishing a belief that certain meters were associated with particular subjects. Both parts of Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma* (*Sharafnāma* and *Iqbālnāma*, completed in 590/1194) are composed in *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*. As Nizāmī's five narrative poems, or *Khamsa*, became a model for later poets, many narrative poems on Iskandar were composed in the same meter Nizāmī had chosen, the *mutaqārib-i*

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[11] Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Metres*, 244; see also 146. As for the set of seven poems in these traditional meters, compare the seven *masnavī*s in the *Haft Awrang* of the fifteenth-century poet ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī: *Silsilat al-zahab* in *khafīf-i musaddas-i makhbūn-i mahzūf*; *Salāmān-u Absāl* in *ramal-i musaddas-i mahzūf*; *Tuhfat al-ahrār* in *sarīʿ-i musaddas-i matvī-yi maksūf*; *Subhat al-abrār* in *ramal-i musaddas-i makhbūn-i mahzūf*; *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* in *hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzūf*; *Laylī-u Majnūn* in *hazaj-i musaddas-i akhrab-i maqbūz-i mahzūf*; and *Khiradnāma-yi Iskandarī* in *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*.

[12] Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Metres*, 244. See also Elwell-Sutton in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, on ʿarūż (meters):

> The *maṯnawī*. In this form each *meṣrāʿ* rhymes with its partner, the rhyme changing with each *bayt*. Because of this flexibility, the *maṯnawī* is particularly suitable for long epic, romantic, philosophical, and didactic poems. The choice of meter is somewhat restricted, preference being given to the shorter, ten- or eleven-syllable meters like 1.1.11, 2.1.11, 2.4.11, 3.1.11, 3.4.11, 4.5.11, 4.7.11, and 5.1.10. . . . According to the theorists, certain meters are particularly suitable for certain subjects, but there is little evidence of such discrimination in the works of the poets.

[13] Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Metres*, 2.

[14] A new perspective on these two groundbreaking works in Persian is presented by Justine Landau in *De rythme & de raison*.

[15] *Va īn vazn-i khusraw-u shīrīn-i nizāmī va vīs-u rāmīn-i fakhrī gurgānī ast*; Shams-i Qays, in his discussion on the meter *hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzūf* (*al-Muʿjam*, 97).

[16] *Va shāhnāma bar īn vazn gufta and va īn si vazn-rā pārsīgūyān rāh-i aʿshā khvānand az jihat-i ān ki abyāt-i aʿshā bar īn vazn ast* (*Miʿyār al-ashʿār*, 93).

musamman-i mahzūf. Nizāmī's successors, such as Amīr Khusraw and Jāmī, explicitly acknowledged Nizāmī's role, whereas Nizāmī himself credits Firdawsī for the composition of his *Iskandarnāma,* in one of the introductory sections of his *Sharafnāma* (see the table below). Jāmī acknowledges both Nizāmī and Amīr Khusraw.

Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*	Amir Khusraw, *Āʾīna-yi Iskandarī*[17]	Jāmī, *Khiradnāma-yi Iskandarī*[18]
Sukhangū-yi pīshīna dānā-yi Tūs *Ki ārāst rū-yi sukhan chun ʿarūs* The wordsmith of old, the wise man of Tus Who adorned the face of speech like a bride	*Kunūn bar sarīr-i hunarparvarī* *Kunam jilva-yi mulk-i iskandarī* Now on the throne of artisanship I'll make the reign of Iskandar shine	*Dil-i nawnīyāzān-i kūy-i umīd* *Khatt-i sabz khāhad na mūy-i safīd* The heart of the newly needy ones in the alley of hope Seeks the fresh beard line not the white hair
Dar ān nāma k-ān gawhar-i sufta rānd *Basī guftanī-hā nāgufta mānd* In the book in which he brought forth that pierced jewel He left many things unsaid	*Zi dānā har ān durr ki nāsufta mānd* *Fishānam, ba naw ʿ-ī ki dānam fishānd* Every pearl that remained unpierced from the wise man I will scatter, as I am wont to scatter	*Nizāmī, ki ustād-i īn fan vay ast* *Dar īn bazmgah sham ʿ-i rawshan vay ast* Nizāmī, the master of this craft Is the shining candle in this feast
Nizāmī ki dar rishta gawhar kashīd *Qalamdīd-hā-rā qalam dar kashīd* Nizāmī who drew pearls on a string Drew the pen for what was written	*Hunarparvar-i Ganja gūyā-yi pīsh* *Ki ganj-i hunar dāsht z-andāza bīsh* The artist of Ganja the speaker of old Whose treasure of skills was beyond measure	*Zi vīrāna-yi Ganja shud ganjsanj* *Rasānīd ganj-i gawhar-rā ba panj* From the ruins of Ganja he became treasure-keeper He multiplied the treasure of jewels by five
Ba nāsufta durrī ki dar ganj yāft *Tarāzū-yi khud-rā sukhansanj yāft*[19] For the unpierced pearl that he found in the treasure chest He found his own balance as the weigher of words	*Nazar chūn bar īn jām-i sahbā gumāsht* *Sitad sāfī-u durd bar mā guzāsht*[20] When he looked at this cup of red wine He took the clear liquid and left the dregs to us	*Chu Khusraw ba ān panja hampanja shud* *V-azān bāzū-yi fikratash ranja shud*[21] When Khusraw equaled that fivesome And his arm got sore of thinking

There is a clear line from Firdawsī to Nizāmī, and even more explicitly from Amīr Khusraw to Jāmī and poets after them, such as Hātifī, who followed Nizāmī in adopting the *mutaqārib* for the Iskandar or, in the case of Hātifī, the Tīmūr romance.[22] All these poets created new stories by rewriting existing stories, and in this process of rewriting and recreating they based their work on the subject matter and form of earlier models.

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[17] This work is part of Amīr Khusraw's *Khamsa,* composed between 1298 and 1302. See Sharma, "Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī."

[18] This work is part of Jāmī's *Haft Awrang* and was composed in 1485. See Losensky, "Jāmi."

[19] Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma,* 39, vs. 117–18 and 122–23.

[20] Amīr Khusraw, *Āʾīna-yi Iskandarī,* 26, vs. 385–88.

[21] Jāmī, *Khiradnāma-yi Iskandarī,* 434, vs. 349–52.

[22] Hātifī's *Tīmūrnāma* (903/1498). See Bernardini, "Hātefi."

What lies behind the choice of a certain meter? To what extent is this choice based on models of previous poets and part of a rewriting process, or of *istiqbāl*, literary reception? And what informed the choice of meter in the first place? These questions define potential for research into the function of meter in a given poem, and the relation between form and content. In previous studies, I focused on another meter in a different type of poetry: namely the *rajaz-i musamman-i sālim* meter in what are usually called lyrical genres, the ghazal and the qasida.[23] For a comparative perspective, I briefly return to this research on the *rajaz* and its relation to the content of poems in which it is used.

Meter and Content: *Rajaz*

The basic form of the *rajaz* is the unit (*rukn*) *mustafᶜilun*, two long syllables followed by one short syllable and one long syllable.[24] The only variety of *rajaz* commonly seen in Persian is the *rajaz-i musamman-i sālim*, the sound of eightfold *rajaz*, eight units of *mustafᶜilun*.

The poem the prosodist Shams-i Qays quotes to illustrate *rajaz-i musamman-i sālim* is a qasida by the court poet Muᶜizzī, who lived in the second half of the eleventh century and the early twelfth century and whose patrons were the Saljuq sultans Malikshāh and Sanjar. Muᶜizzī's poem in *rajaz* was clearly a favorite of the prosodists, as it also appears in later books on prosody.

> *ay sārbān manzil makun juz dar dīyār-i yār-i man*
> *tā yak zamān zārī kunam bar rabᶜ-u itlāl-u diman*
>
> *rabᶜ az dilam pur khūn kunam khāk-i diman gulgūn kunam*
> *itlāl-rā jayhūn kunam az āb-i chashm-i khīshtan*[25]
>
> Oh camel-driver, do not halt but in the realm of my beloved, that I may lament a while over the abode, the ruins and the traces left.
>
> With my heart I will make the abode full of blood, I will make the traces left behind rose-red with my tears, I will turn the ruins into the river Jayhun by weeping.

Muᶜizzī's qasida is *musajjaᶜ*, that is, it displays an internal rhyme: a poetic device that can be applied in eightfold meters, and specifically in poems written in *rajaz*, as confirmed by Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī.[26]

This qasida clearly inspired Saᶜdī, whose poem *Ay sārbān āhista raw* has the same internal rhyme, meter, and motif.

> *ay sārbān āhista raw k-ārām-i jānam mīravad*
> *v-ān dil ki bā khud dāshtam bā dilsitānam mīravad*
>
> *man mānda-am mahjūr az ū bīchāra-u ranjūr az ū*
> *gūʾī ki nīshī dūr az ū dar ustukhānam mīravad*[27]
>
> Oh camel-driver, ride slowly, for my soul's rest is leaving; and the heart that I had with me, is leaving with the one who stole my heart.

[23] Van den Berg, "Musammat or Musajjaᶜ?" 215–29; see also Van den Berg, *Minstrel Poetry*, 50–59; and Van den Berg, "Stanzaic Poetry."

[24] Thiesen, *Manual*, 130.

[25] Muᶜizzī, *Dīvān*, 597–99.

[26] Compare with Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, *Miᶜyār al-ashᶜār*, 65: *va musammat-i chahār khāna bar īn vazn khvush ast.* Tūsī does not quote Muᶜizzī's qasida in his section on *rajaz.*

[27] Saᶜdī, *Dīvān-i ghazaliyyāt*, 394, no. 268, vs. 1–2.

I remained, left behind by my beloved, helpless and full of pain because of my beloved; it is as if a sting goes into my bones from being separated from my beloved.

Sayfī of Bukhara, in a work known as *ʿArūz-i Sayfī*, composed in 1491, is more elaborate on the nature and background of *rajaz* than his predecessors Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī and Shams-i Qays, saying the following:

> *īn bahr-rā azān jihat rajaz gūyand ki rajaz dar lughat iztirāb-u surʿat ast va ʿarab bīshtar ashʿarī ki dar maʿraka-hā va jang-hā va dar mufākhirat az mardānagī-yi khud va qawm-i khud mīkhānand dar īn bahr ast va dar chunīn awqāt āvāz-i muztarab va harakāt-i sarīʿ mībāshad pas az īn jihat īn bahr-rā rajaz nām kardand. Va baʿzī gufta-and ki rajz ba fath-i-rā va sukūn-i jīm shuturī-rā gūyand ki dar raftan larzad va chun harakat kunad bāz sākin shavad.*

> This metre has been called rajaz, i.e., commotion [*iztirāb-u surʿat*], because the Arabs use this metre chiefly for war poems, and for songs expressing personal pride, or the glory of the tribe, which subjects require agitation in voice and gestures. Some derive the name of the metre from *rajz*, a camel, which trembles when running, or which moves on, and then halts.[28]

The *rajaz* is not a very common meter in Persian poetry, and it is connected to an idea of "Arabness" and *jāhiliyya* (pre-Islamic Arabic) poetry.[29] This also is clear in the Muʿizzī and Saʿdī examples above. Their verses reflect a certain topos that may be connected to the *rajaz* meter. In contrast to *rajaz*, *mutaqārib* may be seen to represent "Persianness": Shams-i Qays points to the non-Arabic origin of the *mutaqārib* in *al-Muʿjam*.[30] This Persian background of the *mutaqārib* is the topic of seminal articles by Jan Rypka and Gilbert Lazard.[31]

Meter and Content: *Mutaqārib* and *Hazaj*

Sayfī is much less informative on the *mutaqārib* meter and does not elaborate beyond the usual technical description.

> *īn bahr az ānjihat mutaqārib gūyand ki awtād-u asbāb-i ū ba ham nazdīk-and chirā ki har vatadī-rā sababī dar pay ast – va taqārub dar lughat ba yakdīgar nazdīk shudan ast va baʿzī gufta and īn bahr-rā az ānjihat mutaqārib gūyand ki awtād-i ū ba yakdīgar nazdīkand chirā ki dar mīyān-i har du vatad yak sabab-i khafīf ast.*

> This meter is called *mutaqārib* because its "pegs" (*watad*s) and "ropes" (*sabab*s) are close to one another, since every "peg" is followed by a "rope." And *taqārub* means to be close to one another. And some have said that this meter is called *mutaqārib* because its "pegs" are close to one another, since between every two "pegs" there is one light "rope" (*sabab-i khafīf*).[32]

If we look at the occurrence of *mutaqārib* in Persian poetry, we see that it is used in narrative (*masnavī*) poetry much more than in other genres.[33] Examples of narrative poems in *mutaqārib* (the *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf* variant) are:

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[28] Blochmann, *Prosody*, 34–35 (Persian text and English translation).

[29] Compare, for example, Jacobi, "Panegyrical Ode," 21.

[30] Shams-i Qays, *al-Muʿjam*, 57.

[31] Rypka, "La métrique"; Lazard, "Le mètre épique baloutchi."

[32] Blochmann, *Prosody*, 45. *Sabab* and *watad* (Ar. *watid*) are technical terms used in Arabic and Persian prosody to identify specific combinations of consonants and vowels, which in turn determine the length and quality of quantitative feet.

[33] Although this is not exclusively. Compare for example the Ghaznavid court poet Farrukhī, whose *Dīvān* includes four qasidas in *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*.

- Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*.
- *Shāhnāma*-related epics: Asadī, *Garshāspnāma*; *Sāmnāma*, *Barzūnāma*, etc., including *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*, ascribed to Firdawsī.[34]
- On the basis of the Iskandar episode in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, the *Iskandarnāma* by Nizāmī and *Iskandarnāma*-related epics by Amīr Khusraw, Jāmī, and other authors, written as a response (*javāb*) to Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma*.[35]
- Saʿdī, *Būstān*, 655/1257.
- Khvājū Kirmānī, *Humāy-u Humāyūn*, 732/1331 (part of his *Khamsa*).

The *masnavī*s listed here are related to one another, inasmuch as many of them are responsive to Nizāmī's *Khamsa* and Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*. The *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf* may have obtained its heroic quality in a later period; this also may be tied to later perceptions of the *Shāhnāma* as predominantly a heroic epic.[36] The adoption of the *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf* in the *Būstān* may reflect an appreciation of the equally important didactic qualities of Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* and its perception as a work of wisdom literature (*andarz*) in Saʿdī's time.

Khvājū Kirmānī's *Humāy-u Humāyūn* can be seen as the odd one out on this list. Although Khvājū Kirmānī's *Khamsa*, of which *Humāy-u Humāyūn* is a part, has been described as an early *javāb* to Nizāmī's *Khamsa* and Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, no acknowledgment of this can be found in *Humāy-u Humāyūn*.[37] The title of this *masnavī*, composed in 1331, refers to prince Humāy, son of the king of Syria, and his beloved, the Chinese princess Humāyūn.

Humāy and Humāyūn form one of the many couples after whom *masnavī*s, usually called "romantic *masnavī*s," have been named. However, by the time of Khvājū Kirmānī two variants of the *hazaj* meter, rather than *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*, had become specifically associated with this type of *masnavī* (often referred to as "romantic epics" or "verse romances"). The variants were *hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzūf* (‿ - - - / ‿ - - - / ‿ - -) and *hazaj-i musaddas-i akhrab-i maqbūz-i mahzūf* (- - ‿/ ‿ - ‿ - / ‿ - - -), a reflection of two *masnavī*s from Nizāmī's *Khamsa*, *Khusraw-u Shīrīn* and *Laylī-u Majnūn*.[38] Nizāmī in turn explicitly acknowledged his predecessor Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, composing his *Khusraw-u Shīrīn* in the same meter as Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī's *Vīs-u Rāmīn* (ca. 1050), namely *hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzūf*.[39]

In choosing the *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf* as the meter for *Humāy-u Humāyūn*, Khvājū Kirmānī (consciously or not) follows the model of a number of early narrative poems named after their hero-lovers, namely *Varqa-u Gulshāh* by ʿAyyūqī, *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā* by

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[34] Of these so-called later or secondary epics, the authorship is unknown or uncertain.

[35] Including also Hātifī's *Tīmūrnāma* (903/1498), modeled after the *Iskandarnāma*. See Bernardini, "Hātefi."

[36] Compare the choice of material made in the seventeenth-century *Tārīkh-i Shamshīrkhānī*, also known as *Tārīkh-i dilgushā-yi Shamshīrkhānī*, a summary of the *Shāhnāma* composed by Tavakkul Beg for Shamshīr Khān, governor of Ghazna under the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān (completed in 1063/1653). Tavakkul Beg, *Tārīkh-i dilgushā (Shāhnāma-yi nasr)*, ed. Āqāzāda.

[37] De Bruijn, "K̲v̲āju Kermāni," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*:

K̲v̲āju was one of the first poets to write a K̲amsa, a set of five masnavīs, after the model of Neẓāmi of Ganja. Although there are obvious similarities with the latter's poems—in particular in the choice of the meters—the subjects treated by K̲v̲āju are different. *Homāy o Homāyun*, in 4,435 couplets, and dated by the chronogram *B-Ḏ-L* (= 1331), is written in the meter of Neẓāmi's *Eskandar-nāma* (the *motaqāreb* meter).

See also Iraj Dehghan, "K̲h̲wādj̲ū," in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*:

His K̲h̲amsa, in imitation of Niẓāmī's poem, consisting of: 1. *Humāy u Humāyūn*, a romantic mat̲h̲nawī, in the metre of the *Iskandar-nāma*, containing 4,407 bayts. In addition to having the *Iskandar-nāma* as a model, the poem seems to be an imitation of the S̲h̲āh-nāma of Firdawsī.

[38] Khvājū uses the *hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzūf* in two *masnavī*s of his *Khamsa*, *Gul-u Nawrūz* and *Gawharnāma*. In this respect he does not follow Nizāmī's model.

[39] In early Persian verse romances, the male protagonist's name generally is the first part of the title; Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī's *Vīs-u Rāmīn* is an exception.

ʿUnsurī, and the anonymously written *Humāynāma*, named after its hero, prince Humāy.[40] These *masnavī*s were composed in the early to middle eleventh century, prior to both Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī's and Nizāmī's verse romances.

Three Early Verse Romances

Varqa-u Gulshāh, *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā*, and *Humāynāma* do not have merely their meter in common, but also their attested age and survival as single copies in the Persian manuscript tradition. Of these three, *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā* is the shortest, since only an incomplete version of 380 verses has been preserved; nevertheless this poem has been the subject of much study over many decades.[41] The verses of *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā* were found by the scholar Mohammad Shafi in 1950 in a manuscript that was part of the binding of a theological book dated 526/1132: an extremely early Persian manuscript, copied within a century after the death of ʿUnsurī, the author of the work. Mohammad Shafi worked extensively on the text during the 1950s and early 1960s, and the work was published by Shafi's son Ahmad Rabbani in 1967.[42] In 2003, Bo Utas and Tomas Hägg published a meticulous philological study on the background and connections between the Greek novel *Metiokhos and Parthenope* and the Persian epic *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā*, under the title: *The Virgin and Her Lover: Fragments of an Ancient Greek Novel and a Persian Epic Poem*. The authors also relate this Persian epic to the *Dārābnāma* of the twelfth-century author Tarsūsī.[43] ʿUnsurī is the author *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā* and of two other *masnavī*s, one of which is entitled *Khingbut-u surkhbut*, assumed to refer to the Buddha statues (*but*) from Bamiyan.[44] Of *Khingbut-u surkhbut* only a few verses survive. This work also was composed in *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*, attesting to the apparent popularity of this meter in narrative poetry, in particular verse romances, in the eleventh century.[45] ʿUnsurī (c. 970–1040) is one of the best-known poets of the Ghaznavid court, famous for the qasidas he dedicated to Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna and other patrons connected to the Ghaznavid dynasty.[46]

Unlike ʿUnsurī, the poet ʿAyyūqī, who composed *Varqa-u Gulshāh*, is only known through this *masnavī* of 2229 verses, of which only one manuscript is known.[47] This illustrated manuscript is kept in the Topkapı Palace Library (H. 481) and was produced in Konya between 1200 and 1250. This manuscript stands out for its seventy-one paintings, which have been the subject of an extensive study by A. S. Melikian-Chirvani.[48] Julia Rubanovich discussed the literary aspects of *Varqa-u Gulshāh* in a meticulous study on romances in medieval Persian poetry, in which she also dwells on the theme of ʿUdhrī love, as represented in *Varqa-u Gulshāh* (and in Nizāmī's *Laylī-u Majnūn*).[49] A notable feature of *Varqa-u Gulshāh* is

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[40] Bīzhan-u Manīzha, a well-known episode from Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, may be seen as being part of the same tradition, even though it is not naturally regarded as a separate *masnavī* (although in some *Shāhnāma* manuscripts we do find as an episode title "Bīzhan-nāma"). The heroes of the episode, Bīzhan and Manīzha, may well be compared to the eponymous heroes of later *masnavī*s. The digressive quality of the episode also should be taken into account. Compare to Yamamoto, *Persian Epics*, 82–83.

[41] Notably by Tomas Hägg and Bo Utas in *The Virgin and Her Lover*. For the Persian text and English translation of 380 verses or verse fragments, see 80–133.

[42] *Masnavī-yi Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā, taʾlīf-i Abūʾl-Qāsim Hasan bin Ahmad ʿUnsurī*; English title: *Wāmiq-o Adhrā of Unṣurī*.

[43] Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, 144–49. See also Rubanovich, "Mood of Love," 69.

[44] See Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, 198.

[45] However, since the meter of *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā* and *Khingbut-u surkhbut* is the same, it is often not easy to establish where the scattered verses ascribed to ʿUnsurī have been taken from (Hägg and Utas, *Virgin*, 150).

[46] See ʿUnsurī, *Dīvān*.

[47] On the basis of this manuscript, Zabihollah Safa prepared an edition of the text; see ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa-u Gulshāh*. The number of verses was established by Melikian-Chirvani; see "Le roman," 14.

[48] Melikian-Chirvani, "Le roman," 1–262; see also Gruber, "Between," 235–36.

[49] Rubanovich, "Mood of Love," 70–73. The term ʿUdhrī refers to a genre in Arabic love poetry in which love for an unattainable beloved plays a central role.

the insertion of ten ghazals in the *masnavī* text; these inserted ghazals also are in *mutaqārib-i musamman-i mahzūf*, but they stand out for their monorhyme.[50]

The first five verses of *Varqa-u Gulshāh* are identical to the first five verses of Khvājū Kirmānī's *Humāy-u Humāyūn*.[51] According to Zabihollah Safa, the beginning of the manuscript copy of *Varqa-u Gulshāh* is written in a different, more recent hand, and the first fifteen verses must have been added to the codex at a later stage.[52] This may explain the same first five verses in the two works:

> *ba nām-i khudāvand-i bālā-u past / ki az hastīsh shud har chi hast*
> *furūzanda-yi shamsa-yi khāvarī / farāzanda-yi tāq-i nīlūfarī*
> *muʿattarkun-i bād-i ʿanbar nasīm / nizāmāvar-i kār-i durr-i yatīm*
> *na paykar, nigāranda-yi paykarān / na akhtar, bar āranda-yi akhtarān*
> *jahāndār-i bakhshanda-yi kāmkār / khudāvand-i bī chun-u parvardigār*
> In the name of the Lord of the high and low / by whose existence everything exists
> He who lights the sun in the east / who raises the blue dome of heaven
> He who perfumes the ambergris-scented wind / who brings order in the making of the rare pearl
> No idol, but the creator of idols / no star, but he who raises up stars
> The fortunate and generous owner of the world / the Lord without attributes, the Creator

The text of *Varqa-u Gulshāh* then continues:

> *gar az khāk-i rah bar nagīrī saram / rūy-i mustafā-rā shafīʿ āvaram*
> If you do not pick up my head from the dust in the alley / I will bring the face of Mustafā as my intermediary

Whereas *Humāy-u Humāyūn* continues with the following verse:

> *nigāranda-yi naqsh-i har naqsh / bar āranda-yi kār-i har mustmand*
> The painter of every painting / he who picks up the affairs of every wretch

Khaleghi Motlagh is very dismissive about the work of ʿAyyūqī:

> ʿAyyūqī seems to have been a man of little education, without full mastery of the literary idiom of his time.

> In view of the manifest influence of Ferdowsī's style on many passages, *Varqa o Golšāh* is likely to have been composed after the *Šāh-nāma*. The use of archaic words, pronunciation, and certain grammatical peculiarities point to the early eleventh century as the date of its composition.[53]

In the aforementioned study on the thirteenth-century illustrated manuscript of *Varqa-u Gulshāh*, Melikian-Chirvani is equally dismissive of the quality of the textual part, emphasizing its colloquial style, "shocking" repetitive character, and probable popular origin:

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[50] For a detailed treatment of these ghazals, in connection to the Turkic reception of *Varqa-u Gulshāh*, see Dankoff, "Lyric," 10–11.

[51] Khvājū Kirmānī, *Humāy-u Humāyūn*, 261.

[52] ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa-u Gulshāh*, 41.

[53] Both quotations come from Khaleghi-Motlagh, "ʿAyyūqī."

Only the form connects *Varqe and Golšâh* to the classical literature: it is indeed a real poem, composed in *moteqâreb*, which is more frequent in epic poetry than in courtly romances. Otherwise its most noticeable characteristics—the abundance of repetitions, the traces of spoken style, a certain naivety in the construction, the psychological explanations, and the mode of expression; and also the occurrence of expressions rarely found in literature, which appear to be vulgarisms—all these elements give cause to assume that we have to do here with a distinctly popular work; and as already suggested, with regards to its background, it has been modified in accordance to the initial theme of the Arabic legend. The repetitions are constant, and even shocking.[54]

In the view of Melikian-Chirvani, the fact that *Varqa and Gulshāh* is written in *mutaqārib* verse is the only reason the work can be connected to classical literature at all.

Julie Meisami, in her *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, connects the rise of the verse romance, such as *Varqa-u Gulshāh*, to decreasing interest in the heroic epic. She argues that the heroic values represented in the *Shāhnāma* were "essentially those of the old Iranian *dihqāns*" and that the earlier heroic epic was replaced by two currents, which she describes as the "chivalric geste" and the "romantic" epic. The latter became "a major genre of court poetry."[55] Meisami joins Melikian-Chirvani with a comment on the oral style of *Varqa-u Gulshāh* and its lack of psychological depth.[56]

It appears that some works, like *Varqa and Gulshāh* and the so-called secondary epics (Meisami's "chivalric geste"), characterized by their use of the *mutaqārib* meter, are doomed by unfavorable opinions of scholars of Persian literature, who often repeat each other in their sentiments about the literary or not-so-literary qualities of the works they discuss. A reevaluation of the works in question without prejudice, value judgments, or other preconceived notions would be welcome, as would a more integrated approach toward the oral and the written in Persian literary texts.[57]

Although *Varqa-u Gulshāh* and *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā* are relatively well-known, the third verse romance in *mutaqārib* I discuss here is seldom mentioned.[58] This is an anonymous work entitled *Humāynāma*, preserved in a unique manuscript kept in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (MS 301). This manuscript has 126 folios and is written in *naskh.* An inscription on folio 2a reads *Kitāb-i Humāynāma*, followed by the possible name of the author, Shāyista.[59] It was bought by Sir Chester Beatty at a Sotheby auction in 1938.[60]

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[54] From Melikian-Chirvani, "Le roman," 26:

Seule la forme rattache Varqe et Golšâh à la littérature classique: c'est en effet un vrai poème, rédigé sur le mètre du *moteqâreb*, plus fréquent dans l'épopée que dans le roman courtois. Pour le reste ses caractéristiques les plus évidentes—l'abondance des répétitions, les vestiges du style parlé, les naïvetés certaines tant dans la construction du roman que dans l'explication psychologique, ou dans l'expression, la présence enfin d'expressions rares dans la littérature et que leur allure désigne comme des vulgarismes, prêtent à penser qu'il s'agit d'une œuvre nettement populaire, ainsi que le suggéraient déjà, quant au fond, les retouches apportées par rapport au thème initial de la légende arabe. Les répétitions sont constantes, choquantes même.

[55] Meisami, *Court Poetry*, 80–81 (also quoting Marijan Molé).
[56] Ibid., 84.
[57] This article seeks to start this reevaluation as part of a broader project on the topic of early Persian verse romances funded by the Dutch Research Council. As for the so-called secondary epics, reassessment started a few decades ago, when many of these epics, which were earlier discarded as being unworthy of study, came out in new editions and were the subject of new studies, such as for example Marjolijn van Zutphen's study of the *Farāmarznāma* (see van Zutphen, *Farāmarz, the Sistāni Hero*), based on research carried out within the framework of the Dutch Research Council Persian Epic Cycle Project (https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/the-persian-epic-cycle-project).
[58] Although it has sometimes been discussed as an aside; see, for example, Omidsalar, "Magic."
[59] Arberry, "Persian Epic," 12.
[60] Ibid., 11.

A. J. Arberry, who edited and published this manuscript in 1963, believes that it could date from the end of the twelfth century or at least the early fourteenth century, as the manuscript contains a waqf notice inscribed in the margin with the date Ramadan 712/January 1313.[61] On the basis of its style, Arberry attributes the *Humāynāma* to the middle of the eleventh century, contemporary with *Vīs-u Rāmīn* and *Garshāspnāma*. Like *Varqa-u Gulshāh*, this romance also takes place in Arab lands, as well as in Byzantium and India. It is a book of adventures as much as a romance, and the female protagonist, called Gul-i Kāmkār or Gul, princess of Syria, takes a leading role in the many battles that take place.[62] Her counterpart is Humāy, the son of the king of Egypt. The king of Syria, Gul's father, has to battle the Emperor of Rum, and Humāy offers his help, leading to a campaign that brings Humāy as far as India. The story of this Humāy and that of his namesake, Humāy in Khvājū Kirmānī's *Humāy-u Humāyūn*, show some similarities.[63] The male protagonist Humāy of *Humāy-u Humāyūn* is the son of the king of Syria, and his beloved, Humāyūn, is the daughter of the Emperor Faghfūr of China. The protagonists in both verse romances experience adventures that bring them to distant places (although this is a common feature in romances). *Humāy-u Humāyūn* contains 4435 verses, and *Humāynāma* 4332.

These three verse romances seem to represent an early tradition of writing narrative poetry in *mutaqārib*, a tradition that includes Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*. It should be taken into account that Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* contains a number of romantic episodes, whereas the three *masnavī*s discussed above, usually characterized as romantic, definitely display heroic aspects. It may well be that they were inspired by the *Shāhnāma*, although there is no obvious textual connection between them. As described earlier, when Nizāmī's *Khamsa* set a new standard for the use of the *mutaqārib* in narrative poetry, the *mutaqārib* became the choice meter for writing *Iskandarnāma*s and for versification of the lives of historical figures and contemporary rulers.[64] However, this does not mean that *mutaqārib* was from then on restricted to these particular kinds of narratives. Both before and after Nizāmī, the *mutaqārib* also was used for narrative poetry of predominantly didactic nature, as in Saʿdī's *Būstān* (1257), and three centuries earlier Abū Shakūr's *Āfarīn-nāma* (944).

Moreover, the continued use of the *mutaqārib* as a romantic meter after Nizāmī is demonstrated by two fourteenth-century *masnavī*s: The *Humāy-u Humāyūn* of Khvājū discussed above, and a less-known narrative poem by Salmān Sāvajī entitled *Firāqnāma*, composed for his patron the Jalāyirid sultan Uways (r. 1356–74) in 1368–69.[65] This *masnavī* of around 1050 verses commemorates the love between Sultan Uways and his favorite *nadīm*, or boon companion, Bayrāmshāh, who had passed away the year before.[66]

Another work that belongs to the group of verse romances in *mutaqārib* is a *masnavī* with the title *Yusūf-u Zulaykhā*, ascribed to Firdawsī. If it were proven to be by Firdawsī, or if it could be ascertained to date from the eleventh century, it would fall squarely into the group of the three early verse romances, *Varqa-u Gulshāh*, *Vāmiq-uʿAzrā*, and *Humāynāma*. However, both the date and authorship of this verse romance are debated. A brief look at this work will conclude this preliminary study of narrative poetry in *mutaqārib*.

A Verse Romance and Firdawsī

Yusūf-u Zulaykhā occupies a special place within the large group of *masnavī*s composed in *mutaqārib* and ascribed or connected to Firdawsī.[67] Most of these *masnavī*s complement

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[61] *Humāy-nāma*, I; for the notice itself see Arberry, "Persian Epic," 11.

[62] Paola Orsatti argues that the pre-Islamic setting allowed for a different treatment of women in narrative poetry. See "K̲h̲osrow-o Šīrīn."

[63] There also is the issue of the *Sāmnāma* and its relation to *Humāy-u Humāyūn*, which I do not address here. See van Zutphen, *Farāmarz*, 94–95.

[64] For both, the *Shāhnāma* was ultimately the source of inspiration.

[65] Salmān-i Sāvajī, *Dīvān*, 611–52.

[66] See Yūsofī, "Bayramšāh."

[67] For a seminal discussion of the story of Yusūf and Zulaykhā, see Rubanovich, "Joseph."

episodes of the *Shāhnāma*, and deal in particular with the offspring or ancestry of the great Sistani hero Rustam. They are written as prequels or sequels to *Shāhnāma* stories and are often referred to as secondary or later epics, or as post-*Shāhnāma* epics. Meisami uses the elegant label "chivalric geste." Examples are the anonymous *Barzūnāma, Farāmarznāma, Bānū Gushāspnāma,* and *Dāstān-i Jamshīd.* Asadī's eleventh-century *Garshāspnāma* also belongs to this group.[68] These epics clearly incorporate the storyline of the *Shāhnāma*. This connection is often quite literal: the epic texts increasingly appear as interpolations in *Shāhnāma* manuscripts (principally from the fifteenth century onward). They vividly illustrate the rich afterlife of the *Shāhnāma*. Although many of them are implicitly ascribed to Firdawsī, it has been broadly accepted that these epics were composed by other authors, often anonymously.

In contrast, *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* has long been seen as another work of Firdawsī, one that he wrote after the *Shāhnāma*. The first reference to Firdawsī as the author of this work can be found in the preface to the new edition of the *Shāhnāma* commissioned by the Timurid prince Baysunghur in the 1420s. In the preface, the story of the composition of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* is described as a response to the alleged rejection of the *Shāhnāma* by Mahmūd of Ghazna. Upon this rejection, it is said, a highly disappointed Firdawsī left for the court of the caliph in Baghdad, where he wrote *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*.

In his *Persian Literature*, François de Blois notes:

> None of the earlier biographical sources have anything to say about such a poem nor do there seem to be any quotations from it in pre-Timurid writings. And even in the Timurid period the work does not appear to have been universally known as a composition by Firdausi, otherwise it would be difficult to explain why Jami makes no mention of it in his own poem on the same subject, composed in 888/1483.[69]

In post-Timurid times, however, the work was firmly believed to be Firdawsī's, and as such it also was included in poetical biographies. The first biography to mention Firdawsī as the author of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* is *Ātashkada-ye Āzar*, written in 1174/1760 by Lutf ʿAli Beg Āzar Begdilī.[70] Although before the fifteenth century Firdawsī had not been connected to *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*, after the appearance of Baysunghur's preface to the *Shāhnāma* he gradually came to be seen as the author of a *masnavī* with this title, and manuscripts started to appear.[71]

In the first half of the twentieth century, the authorship of Firdawsī's *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* became a topic of debate. Sadly, this sometimes heated debate has overshadowed and even prevented research into the work itself.[72] The text as such has hardly been studied. Its date also is a matter of discussion. Nasrollah Pourjavady argues that the poem must be from an early date:

> The oldest versified form of the tale is a romantic *masnavī* under the title *Yusof o Zoleykha*, which had been wrongly attributed to the great epic poet Ferdowsi. Although its authorship by the poet of Tus has been convincingly rejected there can be no doubt about the early date of this narrative poem. It was composed in the second half of the 11th century, a period when the story of Joseph was drawing the attention of a number of Qur'anic commentators and other writers.[73]

Pourjavady bases this claim on research done in the 1940s and 1950s by the scholars Nafīsī, Mīnuvī, and Qarīb. They proposed, on the basis of verses in the manuscripts they

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[68] For a detailed overview, see van Zutphen, *Farāmarz*, 74–144.
[69] De Blois, "Poetry ca. AD 1100–1225," 576.
[70] As mentioned by Sadīq in Firdawsī, *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*.
[71] De Blois lists more than thirty manuscripts; with a few exceptions, these are from the nineteenth century ("Poetry," 581–83).
[72] Ibid., 581.
[73] Pourjavady, "Genres," 273.

used, that the work was dedicated to the Saljuq governor of Herat at the end of the eleventh century, Shams al-Dīn Tughānshāh b. Alp Arslān. This indeed would make this an early *masnavī*. Nafīsī also pointed out that the author of this *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* was a poet named Amānī, of whom no other works are extant and about whom we know nothing. According to François de Blois, however, the verses on which the attribution to a poet named Amānī is based do not offer conclusive evidence.[74]

In the published editions of the work, there is no trace of a dedication to Shams al-Dīn Tughānshāh, and the author of the work is said to be Firdawsī. In the text of the Ethé edition an extensive background to the composition of the *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* is provided, in which two poets are mentioned, Bu'l-Mu'ayyad ("from Balkh") and Bakhtiyārī.[75]

The three available editions are Hermann Ethé's critical edition of 1908, entitled *Yûsuf and Zalîkhâ, By Firdausî of Ṭûs*; Husayn Muhammadzāda Sadīq's edition of 1369/1990, entitled *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*, which is accompanied by the first Turkish *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*; and a newer edition by Sadīq prepared with Husayn Sha'bānī Āzād, published in 1395/2016. This latest edition has the title *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā-yi Firdawsī*. Ethé's edition contains only the first part of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* and has 3697 verses. Ethé based his edition on five manuscripts, all from British collections. These manuscripts date from between 1055/1645 and 1244/1828. In addition, he used two lithographed editions, from Tehran and Lucknow. Sadīq's edition of 1369/1990 is a full version: it contains 6408 verses and is based on a single manuscript, MS 5063/1, dated 18 Rajab 1207 (1793), preserved in the Central Library of the University of Tehran (Kitābkhāna-yi markazī-yi dānishgāh-i Tehran). The newer edition of 1395/2016 also is based on this manuscript, and on several other later manuscripts and lithographs.[76]

In contrast to most other contemporary scholars and the current general consensus, Sadīq is of the opinion that *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* is in fact Firdawsī's work, and he accuses Nafīsī, Safā, Mīnuvī, and others of politicizing Firdawsī for their own purposes. He goes so far as to call them "literary criminals":

> bisyārī az tārīkh-i adabiyāt nigārān-i guzashta payvasta sa'y kardand ki sukhanī az "yūsuf-u zulaykhā-yi firdawsī" ba miyān nayāyad. va agar ham jā'ī ishāra'ī ba ān dāshtand, kūshīdand intisāb-i ān-rā abu'l-qāsim mansūr bin hasan firdawsī sarāyanda-yi "shāhnāma" yā "jangnāma" nafy kunand

> ammā dar dawra-yi rezhīm-i guzashta ki firdawsī bīsh az dīgarān mawrid-i sū' istifāda qarār girift, īn manzūma-yi vālājāy-i akhlāqī-yi vay, badalā'ilī ki tahlīl-i ān khvāhīm nishast, mawrid-i bī mihrī-yi shadīd-i jināyatkārān-i adabī vāqi' shud.[77]

> Many literary scholars of the past have avoided speaking of a *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā* by Firdawsī. If they did refer to it, they have tried to deny its link to Abu'l-Qāsim Mansūr bin Hasan Firdawsī, the composer of the *Shāhnāma*, or *Jangnāma*. However, in the past regime, during which Firdawsī was, more than others, misused, this prominent moral poem of his, for reasons that we will study, has been subject to sharp unkindness by literary criminals.

The oldest manuscript of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* ascribed to Firdawsī seems to be an illustrated manuscript copy kept in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, shelf number Ms. Or. Oct. 2302.[78] It was not used

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[74] De Blois, "Poetry," 580–81.

[75] Firdawsī, *Yûsuf and Zalîkhâ*, 19–21.

[76] Regrettably, I had no access to this edition. The information I have is based on online descriptions, compare https://www.gisoom.com, no. 11210206.

[77] Firdawsī, *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*, 13, 14.

[78] Ms. Or. Oct. 2302, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz. The manuscript is mentioned by several art historians, including Eva Baer, "Joseph's Garments," 288; and Brend, *Perspectives*, 50. They refer to the work as *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* by Amānī.

in the editions of Ethé, Sadīq, or Sadīq-Shaʿbānī Āzād. This older manuscript was described as an incomplete copy of Amānī's *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* and was dated 819/1416. The manuscript is written in *nastaʿlīq* and has twenty-nine folios and ten paintings. On the inside cover an ex libris of Hermann Frankl is attached, an oriental image of a man sitting in a library with a hookah, which was drawn by the artist K. Hanke in the early twentieth century.[79]

The last verse of the manuscript, on folio 29b, corresponds with verse 5886 in the 1369/ 1990 edition of Sadīq, who used MS 5063/1 (1207/1793) as the basis for his edition. MS 5063/ 1 has a total of 6408 verses. Ms. Or. Oct. 2302 has only 2180 verses. The text of Ms. Or. Oct. 2302 differs in many places from the manuscript used by Sadīq and also from the manuscripts used by Ethé in his 1908 edition. The date of Ms. Or. Oct. 2302 can be found on folio 12a, which seems wrongly placed. The last verses on folio 12a correspond to verses 6375 and 6376 in Sadīq's edition, and clearly form the conclusion of the poem, which may therefore not be incomplete after all. On folio 1b we find a reference to Firdawsī:

> *dar ʿuzr āvardan-i firdawsī*
> *man az {har} darī sukhan dāram basī*
> *shinīdand guftār-i man {har ka} sī*
> *sukhanhā-yi shāhān-i bī dād-u rāy*
> *basakht-u basust {baband}-u gushāy*[80]
> About Firdawsī's justification
> I have said much on many accounts
> Everyone has heard what I had to say
> Stories on cruel and ignorant kings
> Harsh and feeble, in chains and free

This *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* manuscript predates the Baysunghur *Shāhnāma* by a little more than a decade. Apparently, a tradition of ascribing a *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* to Firdawsī already existed in the early fifteenth century, perhaps even earlier. It coincides with the appearance of other epic texts connected to Firdawsī in the *Shāhnāma* manuscript tradition, probably in the wake of a renewed interest in his *Shāhnāma* due to patronage of the Timurids. For example, the earliest recorded *Barzūnāma* is a manuscript dated 829/1425.[81]

The story of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* was a favorite topic in a variety of literary texts, both in prose and poetry. It has been contended that a poetic version of the story of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* was ascribed to Firdawsī to connect him more firmly to Islamic culture with a subject that also appears in the Qur'an.[82] The choice of *mutaqārib* meter would suffice to explicitly relate this version of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* to Firdawsī, who is not known for output in other meters.

Other extant versifications of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* are in the romantic meter *hazaj-i musaddas-i maḥzūf*, notably the most famous one by Jāmī, composed in 888/1483, but as well the Judeo-Persian version by Shāhīn-i Shīrāzī, composed in 1358–59. In this, they followed Nizāmī's *Khusraw-u Shīrīn*, who chose the *hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzūf* in recognition of Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī's *Vīs-u Rāmīn* (ca. 1050).

What can we conclude on the basis of this preliminary examination of *masnavī*s composed in *mutaqārib*? The three early verse romances, *Varqa-u Gulshāh*, *Vāmiq-u ʿAzrā*, and *Humāynāma*,

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[79] For the image, see https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-2015-26-2026. The library of Hermann Frankl (Orient-Bibliothek Hermann Frankl, Wien) was auctioned in April 1926. The catalog is digitally available. The catalogue entry is 1276 and reads: "FIRDUSI. Jusuf und Zulaiha, Anfang des Gedichtes. Persisch, 17. Jahrh. 8°. 32 Bll., davon 3 Zierseite, 1 Unwan, 10 Miniaturen. Roter Ldrbd. m. Umrahmung von Goldleisten u. Mittelstück, mit Klappe" (https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/graupe1926_04_13/0103). This description was cut out and glued on the first, blank page of the manuscript.

[80] Ms. Or. Oct. 2302 has some light damage; the words or letters that are barely or not at all legible appear in braces.

[81] King's College Pote 56, Cambridge University Library. See Sims, "*Barzunama* manuscript?" 189–202.

[82] De Blois, "Poetry," 577–78.

reflect a tradition of composing narrative poetry in *mutaqārib*; other than narrative poems connected to the *Shāhnāma* and some fragments, no other early examples survive. To what extent these three verse romances are related to Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* requires further exploration, although it can be surmised that the *Shāhnāma* (and the smaller narrative poems connected to it) was another example of the tradition of writing narrative poetry in *mutaqārib*.

From the thirteenth century onward, the meter *mutaqārib* became fixed by the emergence of a *Khamsa* tradition and its subsequent adoption as the meter for the *Iskandarnāma* genre, which enhanced the perception of the *mutaqārib* as an exclusively heroic meter in literary histories. As the meter of a hugely important work, the *Shāhnāma*, it became consciously connected to Firdawsī, yet not to heroic contents alone, as demonstrated by the explicit reference to Firdawsī's work in Saʿdī's *Būstān*, which is usually described as didactic. Finally, *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* in *mutaqārib* demonstrates that more than anything else the choice of the *mutaqārib* meter established the desired connection with the poet Firdawsī.

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