

PLSJ

Vol. 6, No. 9, 2017

DOI: 10.22099/JPS.2017.4966, ISSN: 2322-2557

pp. 105-107

Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jāmī's Salāmān va Absāl, Chad G.

Lingwood. Brill, Leiden, 2014. ix + pp. 280.

ISBN 9004255893

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Great poet and outstanding writer Abu Abdul- Rahman Jāmī is a prominent figure of Timurid era. Apart from being a man of letters, he was a dominant leader of the Naqshbandī order as well. Various socio-political and mystical aspects can be observed in his work. One of his multifaceted narrative works is the Mathnavi of Salāmān va Absāl, which is an allegorical expression of the spiritual voyage of the soul. *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran*, as its subtitle suggests, introduces new perspectives on Jāmī's Salāmān va Absāl and claims that this longish poem if read closely, uncovers subtle realities about the Āq Quyūnlū court, and the political situation of the capital Tabriz specially under the reign of Ya'qūb Āq Quyūnlū (r.1478 to 1490). The book consists of an introduction, five chapters, conclusion and two appendices.

In the introduction Lingwood indicates that the work of Jāmī is based on a complicated and multilayered plot that operates on three levels: the ethico-political, the mystical and the historical, which are integrated and involved in the concept of "The Just Ruler". A question that had occupied Iranian political minds for centuries was: what are the main characteristics of a qualified ruler? The answer to this question constitutes the bigger portion of Iranian book of advice (Andarz Nama) and the Mirror for Princes (Adab ul Muluk), which is a perso-

Islamic book of advice for rulers. This leads the author to a thorough investigation of the Iranian didactic tradition, placing emphasis on Iranian scholar Jalal al-Din Dawānī (d.1502), whose pedagogical views are derived from Nasir al-Din Tūsī and other earlier thinkers. These inquiries lead the writer to the conclusion that Jāmī's *Salāmān va Absāl* is indeed a Mirror for Princes of Āq Quyūnlū dynasty.

Second chapter is devoted to exploring the concept of spiritual leader (*pir*) in Sufism and its relevance to the tradition of advising the rulers. In this connection, the influence of Sufi ideas in the Āq Quyūnlū political system and the capital Tabriz, and the importance of Sufi orders such as Naqshbandīs and Khalvatīs in 9th/16th century Iran and Transoxiana are illuminated, and many western researches of the Timurid era up to date are introduced and referred to.

The same topic is expanded in the next (3rd) chapter by bringing a vast body of historical documents and accounts to the light. Among prominent Sufi figures who attained high political positions at that time the author mentions the Sufi master Ibrahim Gulshanī (d.1562). Correspondence between Jāmī and the Āq Quyūnlū ruler Ya'qūb is another evidence to show how highly-respected Jāmī was in the eyes of Sultan and to confirm the penetration of Naqshbandī ideas in the Sultan's mind. Although Jāmī was away from the Āq Quyūnlū court during that time, according to Naqshbandī idea of spiritual connection between Master (Sheykh) and disciples, his image is claimed to have been fixed in the heart of Ya'qūb, and Lingwood suggests that Jāmī, playing the role of Sufi sheikh, aimed to make Ya'qūb quit drinking and to encourage him to become a real Sufi-sultan.

Apparently, the first three chapters of the book are somehow interrelated, but being devoted to the literary atmosphere of the Ya'qūb's court and the place of poets therein, the fourth chapter is distinct from the first three chapters. In this chapter, a good and detailed account for a number of poets and their attitude towards the court is given. Distinguished poets of the time were affiliated with the Āq Quyūnlū court, among them one can mention Ahlī Shīrāzī, Kamā al-Din Banā'ī Hiravī, Shahidī Qumī and Bābā Faqānī. Many of these poets had mystical tendencies or were disciples of great Sufis of the time. According to a research done by Hamid Algar, Shahidī Qumī was a pupil of Jāmī himself and he was also

a follower of Naqshbandī order. This suggests that Shahidī Qumī might have had an important role in conveying the mystic message of Jāmī's romance to the courtiers. Even Baba Faqani whose poetic craft flourished just after joining the court of Ya'qūb, had been, in the eyes of recent hagiographers, taking lessons as a pupil of Jāmī before getting into Tabriz court. However, earlier hagiographers are silent on this assumption.

Fifth chapter is a comparative study of Salāmān va Absāl and the story of the maiden and Goldsmith in the first book of Rumi's Mathnawi. Having similar structures and themes, Both poems are composed in the same meter and are an allegorical expression of the cure of carnal soul by surpassing the natural love and reaching spiritual love by the help of a sage. In this concern, since Jāmī was a devoted adherent of ibn al-Arabi and a commentator of his works in many ways, Lingwood has emphasized the ideas of Ibn al- Arabi on the concept of love and the way Jāmī deployed these ideas in his romance.

In the same chapter, the visionary experience of mystics is explained in which a theophanic image is perceived in the heart of Sufī as a "sign of the desire of God to reveal himself". Such an image, which is induced by the help of the sage, is depicted toward the end of Salāmān va Absāl as a dream-vision of Venus in the heart of Salāmān.

As was mentioned, there are two appendices in the book. One of them is a translation of Jāmī's epistolary reply to Ya'qūb and the other is a translation of Salāmān va Absāl, from Persian into English. The translations are done precisely and accurately, word by word. Even poetical figurative language, metaphors and other devices are translated literally. In this precise style of translation, accuracy comes at the cost of beauty and lucidity.

This new research on Jāmī should be considered as one of the best investigations not only on this outstanding figure of 9th/15th century, but also on the greater historical perspective and social context of the era. Many historical documents along with the artistic works and theoretical accounts of that period of time are addressed and have been thoroughly examined by the author. At the same time, the book provides a good account of the scholarly research done in the field, especially concerning the western academic circles.