

## ŞUFĪ SYMBOLS OF "BIRDS" IN SANĀ'Ī'S POETRY *QAŞĪDAT TASBĪH AT-TUYŪR*

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It is quite clear now that some popular themes of the early Persian poetry, both court and mystic, have Pre-Islamic roots. Images of singing birds, which were widely used in *qaşīdas* devoted to Nawrūz by such famous poets as Rūdakī (about 860-941) and Manūšihri (1000-1040), were obviously adopted from the song tradition of Pre-Islamic court minstrels. This tradition had been cultivated at the Sāsānian court (224-651), and its songs and melodies were called the *Surūd-i Husrawānī* ("The Royal Songs"). The main author, who is mentioned in connection with it, is Barbad, the legendary minstrel of Husraw II Aparwīz. Among these old calendar songs and melodies we can find some with "bird" names, for example, the *Kabk-i darī* (mountain partridge) or the *Şakāwak* (skylark). In the exordiums of Manūšihri's spring *qaşīda* some birds are mentioned along with the correspondent names of ancient songs which they are singing. It seems that in the 11th century, when Manūšihri wrote his poems, the ancient melodies and songs were still remembered, but the practice of their performance had already been lost. In the Pre-Islamic period, when Zoroastrianism was the main belief in Iran, these songs were part of the system of rituals at the great season festivals like Nawrūz and Mihraġān. In the early Islamic period of Iranian history they were gradually changed by gala performance of panegyric *qaşīdas*, which had no ritual sense, but played an important etiquette role in court life.

In the same 11th century, the first symbolic interpretation of spring motifs appeared in Persian poetry. We can find it in the allegoric *qaşīda* of Nāşir-i Husraw (1003/4-1077) who was the greatest Ismā'īlī poet in medieval Persia. Standard spring exordiums in his *qaşīdas* became the basis for complicated allegoric pictures. In several texts, for example, the image of waking-up spring nature is used as the metaphor of the Resurrection after the Last Judgment. A symbolic description of the end of Time by using spring imagery looks quite organic, because in accordance with medieval conceptions in the short period of Nawrūz festival the lost innocence and harmony of the world come back.

The theme of Doomsday connected with the conception of the finiteness of Time has certain associations with the system of cosmogonical ideas: both in the beginning and in the end of Time the World is free of sin and disharmony. The connection of these two motifs gives the perspective of development of *nawrūziyya* genre in the mystic poetry of the 12th century.

From this point of view we can characterize Sanā'ī (about 1048 – after 1126) as a direct heir of Nāşir-i Husraw in allegoric interpretations of spring motifs in *qaşīda*.

He is at the same time one of the forerunners of the Ġaznawids' court poetry tradition and one of the first great Šūfī writers. In mystic circles he became very popular for the poem *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*, but he is also an author of an imposing number of *qaṣīdas* and *ġazals*. His *qaṣīdas* (both panegyric and allegorical) are the typical example of the "florid" style of that epoch – they are full of refined artistry and rhetoric decoration.

One of the most complicated texts in his *Dīwān* is the *qaṣīda* entitled "*Tasbīḥ at-tuyūr*" ("The Prayer of Birds"). This poem contains 45 *bayts* and significantly begins with the following words:

The Creator decorated the World all over again,

Turned all existence into the Garden of Eden (Sanā'ī, *Dīwān* 29).

The first part of this text contains a short and quite traditional description of the spring landscape with its flowers, blossoming trees and green grass. The beginning of spring appears like some metaphoric repetition of the Creation, and the earthly garden seems to be similar to the Heavenly Garden, Paradise. The central part of "The Prayer of Birds" consisting of 25 *bayts* gave the name to this composition, because in every distich there is one bird with its own prayer mentioned. But there are some exceptions: in *bayts* 22, 23, 25 the poet named two birds (natural enemies) – hawk and dove, owl and sparrow, falcon and pheasant, in *bayt* 26 there are even three of them – starling, skylark and chaffinch. This section of "The Prayer of Birds" looks like a long poetical commentary to one of the *āyāt* of the Qur'ān, in which it is said: "Everyone knows his prayer and praise" (24:41). In Sanā'ī's *qaṣīda* birds do not sing old Pre-Islamic songs as it was in spring exordiums of Manūšihri's *qaṣīdas* – they mention God's names. The type of prayer, which contains mentioning of names and attributes of Allāh, is known as *dīker*. It is widely practiced both by orthodox Muslims and followers of mystic sects. *Dīker* was especially popular in Šūfī circles, so we can suppose that Sanā'ī gave the metaphor of this Šūfī ritual, and all these praying birds symbolize dervishes exercising *dīker*. This supposition can be confirmed by some images of the poem: in *bayt* 23 is said that a sparrow is mentioning God's names while escaping from an owl, in *bayt* 39 nightingale is called *mudakkir*, or the one who is exercising *dīker*. Sanā'ī also used the second motif in one of his short epic poems entitled *Sanā'ī-nāma*. There is a paragraph in this poem devoted to *dīker*, the beginning of which is as follows: "Learn the nightingale's language for performing *dīker*" (Sanā'ī, *Matnawī* 71). The notion of "birds' language" (*mantiq at-tayr* – Arabic, *zabān-i murġān* – Persian) was borrowed by mystic poets from the Qur'ān. It is associated with Sulaymān, to whom understanding of this language was granted as God's grace. In some Šūfī interpretations of the Qur'ān (for example, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings) Sulaymān was called the first who mentioned two basic names of Allāh – Raḥmān and Raḥīm, so he can be called the first person performing *dīker*.

It seems that the subsequent tradition of connecting the term *manṭiq at-ṭayr* to the Şūfî symbolic language in Persian classic literature began not from 'Aṭṭār's poem of the same name, but from *qaṣīdas* of Sanā'ī and Hāqānī (1129-1190). The latter also gave his writing the Arabic title *Manṭiq at-ṭayr* (the same as 'Aṭṭār's poem) and mentions the names of birds as the part of constant topics of *nawrūziyya* genre. His *qaṣīda* cannot be characterized as a direct answer (*nazīra*) to Sanā'ī's writing because these two *qaṣīdas* differ in metre and rhyme, but without any doubt they are based on the same tradition of symbolic variations on the spring theme, which can be traced back to Nāṣir-i Hūsrāw. As a result we can establish the fact that after the appearance of Sanā'ī's *qaṣīda*, the images of birds along with spring motifs assumed a special sense of symbolic terms. These connotations or additional meanings of images were achieved by transposition of religious motifs from the Qur'ān, *ḥadīṭ*, didactic epistles or esoteric treatises to the context of traditional season poetry. Owing to mystic connotations old season images could partly revive their lost sacred sense, which had a direct connection to the Zoroastrians' concept of the material world created by Ahura-Mazda.

This concept may be reconstructed with the help of the *Bundahišn* ("Creation of the Beginning"), one of the late but very important Pehlevi writings whose main topics are the Creation and the nature of earthly creatures.

The long register of birds, 31 names, in the *Tasbīḥ at-ṭuyūr* has rather close correspondence with some Zoroastrian writings like the *Bundahišn* or the *Frahang i Pahlavīc* ("Pehlevi lexicon"). The principle of register is used in Pre-Islamic literature for descriptions of the material world. Both Pehlevi books include similar lists of animals (divided into different types), birds, plants and fruits (also divided into sorts) and so on. In order to clear up the way of development of birds' symbols in "The Prayer of birds" we must take into account the principal likeness in descriptions of creatures in Pehlevi writings and the Ismā'īlī epistles of the *Iḥwān as-Ṣafā'* (9th c.), which was noticed by the Russian scholar, Andrei Bertels (1997:224). In a section of the 22nd epistle entitled "The Argument of the Man and Animals" there is a part which is known as "The Birds Discussion". In this part of the treatise, the birds' assembly (like that of other animals) must choose their messenger to the King of People. All birds came to their king, Sīmurǧ, who asked his vizier, the peacock, to introduce every bird to him. Introductions of birds have a constant form and its model is as follows: first the peacock characterizes one of the birds, than cites the short prayer of this bird. This is, for example, what the vizier said about the dove: "As to the dove (the peacock said), he shows us the direct way, and his short prayer is: "You are Allāh, there is no God besides You, oh, Allāh!" (Bertels 1997:226). Practically the same model was used by Sanā'ī in his *qaṣīda*: in every distich, where one of the birds is mentioned, the poet gives us a typical feature of this bird and then its prayer:

17. The stork says: "Praise to You! Thanks to You! You gave me that horrible snake as my everyday food"

24. Hundred times a minute the red pigeon repeats: "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Its throat is created for pronouncing "Oh, Lord!" (Sanā'ī, *Dīwān* 30-31).

It seems quite obvious that "The Prayer of Birds" follows the 22nd epistle of the *Iḥwān*. It is also clear that there is a certain connection between the Ismā'īlī epistles and late Pehlevi writings. But it is rather doubtful that the work of the *Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā'* was the source of direct adoption for Sanā'ī. The poet had not been the follower of Ismā'īlism. To be quite objective it is also necessary to remark that there is no trustful evidence that Sanā'ī was the member of a Ṣūfī order. As a matter of fact, the period in which Sanā'ī lived was designated by Henry Corbin as the time of "the coalescence of Ismā'īlī ideas with Ṣūfism" (1975: IV, 526). There is practically no doubt that Sanā'ī was the direct follower of Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw in the tradition of allegoric *qaṣīda* (Reisner 1997:122). From this point of view it is possible to suppose that the writings of Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw were the mediator between the *Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā'* and the *Tasbīḥ at-tuyūr*. This supposition can be confirmed by the fact that Ismā'īlī tradition considers Nāṣir a translator of the epistles from Arab into Persian. On the other hand, he was the first poet who used season topics and imagery in mystic and allegoric verses.

Now we can sum up the results of this study. It is only a kind of preliminary conclusion, which still needs more precision, but several things are quite clear even at this stage:

1. Behind the standard season exordiums of the Persian classic *qaṣīda* the ancient Zoroastrian concept of the Universe is to be found. This system of mythological and ritual traditions lost its sacred role in the period of Islamic history of Iran, but preserved its actuality in the sphere of culture, philosophic ideas and literature. This stable picture of the material world in the form of register of creatures, plants and other objects of the created world is used as an imagery system and topics of season lyrics both by court and mystic poets.

2. Mystic (allegoric, symbolic) interpretations of traditional season motifs may lead to a partial renewal of old sacred meanings of the groups of images like, for example, images of the spring blossoming garden and singing birds.

3. For the period of the 12th century it is rather difficult to divide Ismā'īlī and Ṣūfī elements in esoteric Persian poetry, especially in Sanā'ī's mystic writings.

4. We are used to associate the symbols of birds with the name of Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār and his famous epic poem *Mantiq at-tayr*, but we also must take into account that he based his work not only on the writings of philosophers or theologians like Ibn Sīnā or Aḥmad Ġazālī, but he also adopted the images of birds from lyric or lyrico-epic poetry of the predecessors – Sanā'ī and Ḥāqānī.

5. The images of birds passed the stage of formation and development of the *qaṣīda* genre, and after that they were brilliantly used by 'Aṭṭār in his allegoric poem. All these writings of Persian mystic poets about birds, their dialogues and their wandering have common basis. There are some significant details which are coincide

in all of them, and the most important is the special role of the Nightingale in the system of the "birds' language". In the epistles of *Iḥwān aş-Şafā'* the nightingale is the messenger from the assembly of birds to the King of People. In Sanā'ī's *qaṣīda* this bird is the one who is performing *dīkr*. In *Sanā'ī-nāma* the author advises to learn the "nightingale's language" for *dīkr*. In *Hāqānī's qaṣīda*, *Mantiq at-tayr*, the nightingale defends the superiority of the Rose in comparison with other spring flowers and blossoming trees, and the King of Birds, 'Anqā' acknowledges his victory in the argument of birds about spring flowers.

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