The transmission of early Persian ghazals
(with special reference to the Dīvān of Sanā’ī)

by J.T.P. de Bruijn

It is still difficult to say exactly when the Persian ghazal came into being. There can be no doubt that, from the very beginning, love poetry was an important element of the Persian tradition. The term 'ghazal' itself, a borrowing from Arabic poetry, was in use as early as the Samanid period, though it is not quite clear whether it denoted a specific type of poetry or merely the erotic genre in general. Rūdakī, the great minstrel poet of the 4th/10th century, was regarded as a specialist of the ghazal. The dīvāns of some of the poets at the Ghaznavid court in the early 5th/11th century, contain examples of fine love poetry incorporated in qāšīdas; there are also a few short pieces of a similar nature which, however, are suspected of being actually fragments of qāšīdas, the panegyrical sections of which have not been preserved.

In spite of these early references to the ghazal, the number of specimens preserved as independent poems from the earliest period (i.e. up to about 1100 A.D.) remains very small indeed. When the evident popularity of love poetry at the courts of both the Samanids and the Ghaznavids is taken into consideration, the virtual absence of ghazals from the recorded literature seems hard to explain. It is true, of course, that the works of the early poets have not been handed down to us full. The remnants of Samanid poetry which were reassembled by modern scholarship are too few to allow any certain conclusions as far as the ghazal poetry of the 4th/10th century is concerned. Even the dīvāns of early Ghaznavid poets such as 'Unṣūrī, Farruxī and Manūchīrī are known to us only in comparatively late and probably recast forms, no older than the 10th/16th or the 11th/17th century. However, these unfortunate philological circumstances do not provide a sufficient explanation for the fact that we do have a fair number of qāšīdas, stanzaic poems and maqāmāts from this period, but hardly any ghazals.

If the available documents do not provide a direct answer to the question how the earliest ghazals were actually transmitted, it might be worthwhile to try an indirect approach. The period under discussion is still very close to the origin of classical Persian poetry. This event involved in many ways a decisive break with the literary past of Iran, not least because it introduced the written transmission of poetry, which the Arabic philologists had evolved during the previous centuries. The dīvān, as a 'register' of a poet's collected work, was an essential element of this innovation. Primarily it served to save, for a wider circulation, poems which would have been forgotten quite soon after they were produced under the conditions prevailing in pre-Islamic Iran where the songs of the minstrels were not committed to writing.

We might, therefore, raise the question whether the absence of ghazals from the earliest Persian dīvāns might not have been caused by the nature of these poems rather than by the hazards of textual transmission. Ghazals are only seldom panegyrical poems. From the point of view of the main social function court poetry had to fulfil — namely, spreading the name of the patron mentioned in the poems — there was, therefore, little reason to include them into the dīvāns. Very likely, they were still mainly regarded as a kind of oral poetry which belonged to the repertoire of the minstrels. Their appearance in the dīvāns of Persian poets, on an equal footing with other forms of poetry, should thus be seen as an indication of the rise of the ghazals to the level of 'serious' literature, to that of poetry which was worthy to be recorded in writing.

The first poet to leave a collection of ghazals large enough to become the subject of a philological inquiry was the religious poet Sanā’ī, who died at Ghazna in 525/1131. The number of ghazals in his Dīvān not only exceeds by far anything to be found in the dīvāns of predecessors or contemporaries, such as Mas’ūd-i Sa’d-i Salmān and Sayyid Hasan-i Gaznavi Aṣraf, but it is even greater than the number of ghazals contained in the Dīvān of Hāfiz.
comparatively recent innovation in the transmission of
the text. All existing copies of the Divān older than the
late 16th century are arranged in a non-alphabetical
order. The alternative principle of arrangement is, in
some cases, a thematic one, explicitly marked by rubric
titles; in other cases no guiding principle can be noti-
ced at first sight, although it is possible that thematic
considerations did play a role in determining the order
of the poems.

For our purpose it is even more important to note
that the early manuscripts of the Divān differ from
each other to a degree which makes it unlikely that
they all go back to a single codification of Sanā'ī's
lyric poetry, either compiled by himself or by
someone else who lived close to the time of Sanā'ī's
life. If it is not possible to reconstruct an original
version of the Divān from the extant copies by means
of standard philological procedure, one is led to ques-
tion the philological status of the Divān as such: is it
still possible, in this case, to speak of a 'book' in the
ordinary sense of the term? Are we really dealing with
an identifiable unit of literature which remains basi-
cally the same, in spite of all the changes it underwent
in the course of its existence, either through the process
of copying or as a result of the work of editors, and
one which, conceivably, could be reduced to an origin-
al 'author's version'? To my mind, Sanā'ī's Divān
does not conform to this definition. In fact, the title is
nothing more than a collective name referring to a
group of texts which, in one configuration or another,
contain a collection of the poet's lyrical poems. Al-
though some of them are evidently more related to
each other than others, their great variety in content as
well as in the order of their arrangement, reflects the
vicissitudes of a textual history, but does not reveal the
traces of an original, authoritative collection.

Combining the conclusions of these preliminary
observations, the following model for the transmission
of these ghazals can be constructed as a working
hypothesis:

(1) At the basis of our model is merely a set of
separate poems. Each ghazal was composed at a speci-
fic time and place, and must have been intended for a
specific occasion. In most cases nothing about the
origin is known to us, but it is essential for our under-
standing of the individuality of each poem that we
postulate such circumstances at the starting point
of its literary life. As Sanā'ī's career as a writer of
ghazals was very close to the oral period in the history
of the Persian ghazal, it may be assumed that the
idiosyncrasies of oral poetry still exerted some
influence. It is possible that, at this early stage, the
form of these ghazals was not quite fixed but still open
to modifications or even adaptations, made either by
the poet himself or by others who were involved in the
oral transmission of the ghazals. We must, therefore,
take into account that a number of the most ancient
variant readings belong to an ancient layer of author-
ized variations, or that they represent an alternative
form reflecting the early use of the ghazal in oral
presentations.

(2) It is conceivable that the first recordings of
Sanā'ī's ghazals, made in order to preserve them as
part of his literary heritage, were albums containing
small sets of poems which were produced in the same
period of the poet's life and in the same surroundings.
We know that the poet lived both in Ghazna and in
several cities of Khurasan, and that he produced parts
of his poetry at various times and places. Separate
strains of transmission may very well have begun from
each of these places. The early manuscripts contain
evidence that such locally differentiated collections did
actually exist. The clearest example is a number of
ghazals which all contain panegyrical references to
Sultan Bahramshāh of Ghazna, a patron of the poet in
Ghazna during the final years of his life. Albums of
this kind could easily have circulated separately and
may have played a major role in the spread of Sanā'ī's
reputation in the course of the 6th/12th century.

(3) At the third stage of this model appear the
medieval copies of the Divān. They show that, at least
from the early 7th/13th century onwards, attempts
were made to assemble as much as possible of the
poems of Sanā'ī into comprehensive collections. In the
extant copies older than the earliest alphabetical collec-
tions which can be dated, no less than six separate
strains of transmission can be discerned on the basis of
an inventory of the contents of these manuscripts and
the order of the poems in each of them.

(4) The most decisive moment in the later develop-
ment of the Divān was the change-over to an alphabeti-
cal order of the poems: in the case of Sanā'ī, this is not
earlier attested to than about 1600 A.D. The printed
texts, which were produced since the middle of the last
century, are mainly based on these alphabetically
arranged versions, although increasingly older manu-
scripts have been taken into account in the most recent
editions.

The validity of this model can, of course, only be
tested through a recension of the available sources.
The prerequisite of such an undertaking, i.e. the regis-
tration of all the variants to be found in the medieval
manuscripts, is still far from being fulfilled. We do not
even have a full inventory of the ghazals ascribed to
Sanā'ī. A survey of the ancient manuscripts of the
Divān accessible to me has shown that quite a few
ghazals which do occur in the modern editions cannot
be found in any of the older manuscripts. The possi-
ble-ity that genuine material was handed down in ways
the earliest traces of which are — only by chance —
not represented in the copies which survived, cannot be
excluded. A judgment on the authenticity of individual
poems is, therefore, only justified when other argu-
ments can be found to substantiate or counter a
judgment based solely on their absence from the early
manuscripts.
These general remarks on the transmission of Sānā'ī’s ghazals can be illustrated by an example of such a recensio based on a single poem. The following table contains a comparison based on (a) the text as it reads in the modern editions; (b) three early MSS of the divān, only one of which is explicitly dated; and (c) an indirect source, namely, a quotation of two lines from the poem which can be found in the famous collection of ‘paradoxes of the Šūfs’ (ṣāḥīyah) by Rūzbihān-i Baqli.

The poem is classified as a qaṣīda in some of the printed Divāns, but both its form and content indicate that it should properly be regarded as a ghazal. The absence of the poet’s pen-name at the end does not contradict this conclusion because this feature of the classical Persian ghazal is still very often missing in the ghazals of this poet. In the final line the name of one of the poet’s patrons is mentioned, i.e. the Hanafi judge Mūhammad-i Mānsūr of Sarakhs, who played an important role in Sānā’ī’s career as a religious poet. This ‘panegyrical’ ghazal is comparable to the series of poems which were written a few years later for the Ghaznavid Sultan Bahramšāh. The present poem celebrates the majlis of the judge by means of a phantasy: Sānā’ī and the other people who come to the majlis to listen to the preaching of the judge are presented as ‘lovers’ making their way to a party (ṣur) of their beloved friend (yār, dilbar or but). When the poet is admitted to the presence of his friend he sees him holding a book containing in a short phrase the essence of the judge’s teachings.

The transmission of one of Sānā’ī’s ghazals

Sources:

VEL: MS Velieddin No.2627, Istanbul (dated 684/1285), fol. 229a-b.
BOD: MS Bodleian Library, Elliot No.108, Oxford (not dated; 9th/15th cent. ?), fol. 85a-b.

A. Concordance of the lines in the ed. MR2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MR2</th>
<th>VEL</th>
<th>KAB</th>
<th>BOD</th>
<th>Baqli</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Concordance of the lines in VEL/KAB:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VEL/KAB</th>
<th>BOD</th>
<th>MR2</th>
<th>Baqli</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Survey of variant readings:

1a VEL ay | Sānā’ī | dāš | dar sar yār-i mā-rā | sūr/ | būd
KAB ————- | andar sarāy-i yār-i mā | sūr(+)/ | —— |
BOD — | rafṣā andār mā-rā dāš dar sar | sūr/ | —— |
MR2 — | ———- | ———- | mā-rā dar sarā’ī | sūr/ | —— |

1b VEL raftam anjā garchi | rā’h-u šab dirāz-u dār | būd
KAB ————- | rā’h-i dār šab da dàyūr | —— |
BOD —— | ———- | ———- | ——— |
MR2 — | ———- | ———- | ——— |

2a VEL didām | anjā bar dar-ū | dargāh-i ʿan šāh-i butān
KAB ————- | andār rāb | bar | ——— |
BOD ————- | ———- | ———- | ——— |
MR2 — | ———- | ———- | ——— |

2b VEL harči andār kull-i ālam | ʿāsiqī | mastuṣ būd
KAB ————- | ———- | ——— |
BOD ————- | ———- | ——— |
MR2 — | ———- | ——— |

3a VEL az ārāq u šam’ kas-rā yād | nāmad | z-ān šahb
KAB ————- | ———- | ——— |
BOD ————- | ———- | ——— |
MR2 — | ———- | ——— |

3b VEL k-az jānsāl-i xūb-rāyān nār | andār | nār būd
KAB ————- | ———- | ——— |
BOD ————- | ———- | ——— |
MR2 — | ———- | ——— |

4a VEL kās nišār kard navi[ni]st andār x’ard-i ā
KAB ————- | ———- | ——— |
BOD ————- | ———- | ——— |
MR2 — | ———- | ——— |

4b VEL -z-āntk ašk-i ʿāsiqīn-āš lu’l-u’ mantūr būd
KAB ————- | ———- | ——— |
BOD ————- | ———- | ——— |
MR2 — | ———- | ——— |
The tables A and B show the presence of the lines and their arrangement in the five sources. The first table takes the printed text MR2 as its point of reference (left column). If we look at the length of the ghazal it can be noted that the poem of 16 lines occurring in the printed texts corresponds to two shorter forms: (1) VELiKAB with 13 bayts, (2) BOD with 14 bayts. The omitted lines are different in each form. The two sources containing the shortest form of the ghazal are alike, also as far as the order of the lines is concerned: the deviations from the printed text all occur in the middle section of the ghazal. The BOD version, on the other hand, shows differences from MR2 only in the first and the last sections.

Table B presents the conclusions to be drawn from this: there are clearly two early versions of the poem preserved in our sources which cannot be reduced to each other (resp. version VEL/KAB and version BOD). The text in the editions evidently represents an amalgamation of these authentic versions into a sixteen-line ghazal. The Baqli-quotation could, as far as the order of its two lines is concerned, have been derived from each of the latter versions.

The survey of the variant readings (Table C) can be used to check the validity of this distinction of versions and to consider its consequences. Even a superficial look at the facts (no more is possible within the limits of this paper) can learn us something if we seek answers to the following questions:

(1) Where does the division of the variants confirm the distinctions based on the preceding tables?
(2) Where does it contradict them?
(3) Where is it inconclusive?

* Answer to question 1: the opening words of the poem (ay Sana‘i dui ll ay rafiqan baz) provide a particularly strong confirmation by their prominence in the structure of the poem; further positive indications can be derived from the lines 3a (nadmad || nayad), 3b (andar || -ha dar), 5a (kas bad-u || k-ü öy-ü), 7a (may didam || mididam?), 7b (hazara, || faravan),...
8a (bīs // xīra), 10b (šahrhā // 'āšiqī) and 13a (darān mašāf nigah kardam // nigah kardam dar-ān mašāf).

Baqli allows a positive conclusion only in one place (9a mansūr // tawī') where it confirms the reading of BOD, suggesting that at least one of BOD's variants might be as ancient as the late 6th/12th century.

* Answer to question 2: contrary evidence is given by 1b (dirāz-u dīr // šah daifūr), 2a (ānjī bar // 'andar rāh), 5b (vay // ay), 7b (sāx as // sāx-i), and 12a (dilbar-am dar // ān but andar), where KAB takes sides with BOD. Possible explanations are: (a) these are deviations from the text, as it was common to both versions, which are characteristic only of VEL; or (b) they are the results of a contamination, in KAB, of separate strains in the textual transmission. A comparison of several other poems is needed before any decision on this issue can be made.

* Answer to question 3: inconclusive are, in the first place, the lines 6 and 11 which are not represented in BOD, and the lines which are identical in both versions. There are places in the poem where the confusion is too great to allow a clear-cut decision; conspicuous among them are a number of places which are particularly important to the meaning of the poem as a whole: (1a) the characterization of the scene evoked in the poem, (5b) the qualification of those admitted to the presence of the friend, (12b) the contents of the mašāfat, and (13b) the first name of the patron, to wit, Ahmad/ Mahmad/ Muhammad (in this case the problem seems to have been how to fit the name into the metre ramal). It is most likely that the variant readings of this type have their origin in editorial changes made in either one of the two versions at some stage of the textual history.

4

The significant position of Sanā'tī's collection of ghazals in the development of this poetical form makes it imperative that sufficient weight be given to all the evidence which can be derived from the ancient manuscripts of his Divān. Such inquiries should not be aimed at the reconstruction of the 'original' text of the Divān as a whole, for it is doubtful that an authoritative comprehensive collection of the poet's lyrical poetry really stood at the beginning of its textual history. If, in this case, there is any sense in seeking to establish a stemma, it can only be the stemma of each individual poem. Even so, however, it remains unlikely that all of the variations which the sources contain can be satisfactorily arranged on the assumption of the gradual change of a single original. The survival of traces of early adaptations, even authorized ones, can never be absolutely excluded.

Notes

1. Cf. 'Auli, Lubāb al-albāb, ed. London-Leiden, 1903-06, 616, where 'Unsūrī compares his own ghazals with the superior specimens in Rādākī's poetry.
6. The collection gazalīyat in the second edition by Mudarris-i Radavi contains 408 poems; to this number a least one hundred poems in the collection of qasidas should be added; this brings the total of Sanā'tī's ghazals well above five hundred. The edition of the Divān of Ḥāfiz by P.N. Xānlarī (Tehran, 1362/1983) contains 486 ghazals.
7. See the discussion of the textual history of Sanā'tī's Divān in the present writer's Of Poetry and Poetry, Leiden 1983, pp. 91-112.
8. Headings attached to individual poems in the early MSS of the Divān sometimes refer to Balkh, Sarakhs or Nishapur as places where the poems were written.
9. In the MS Kitābxāna-yi Millī, No. 2353, p. 70, the epitheton 'xalldā'lāhu mulkahu wa-sultānahu' is added to the Sultān's name at the beginning of a group of ghazals addressed to him; this does not prove that the MS itself (which is not dated) was copied during the reign of Bahrām-Sāh, but the formula may have been copied from a small collection of poems made at that early date.
11. N. Ahmad, Indo-iranica xvi/2 (1963), pp. 48-65, showed that some of the later Sanā'tī MSS contain quite a few poems which are not incorporated in the printed collections.
12. The text of the poem in the ed. MR(2) has been compared with: ed. lith. Tehran, 1274/1858, p.177; ed. lith. Bombay, 1328/1910, II, p.40; ed. Mazāhir-i Musaffā, Tehran, 1336/1957, p.99. These printed editions all present the same version of the ghazal as ed. MR(2), with only minor variations.
13. This mystical writer frequently quotes Sanā'tī in his works (cf. Of Poetry and Poetry, pp. 11, 172, 233). The early dates of Baqī's lifetime (1128-1209) add a philological relevance to these citations.
15. In this table --- means: = VEL; ... means: = one of the other sources.
19. Also in edd. lith. Tehran and Bombay.
20. A comparison with the textual histories of other collections of ghazals would be worthwhile, but cannot be attempted in the present article; see especially the account of the problems encountered in the editing of the poems of Ḥāfiz by P.N. Xānlarī, in his 'Guzārī-i kār', Divān-i Ḥāfiz, II, pp. 1117 ff.