

Biographies of the Poets³⁷³

‘Abbâsi He can probably be identified with Abu ‘l ‘Abbâs al-Fazl ibn-e ‘Abbâs al-Rabenjâni, originally from Rabenjân, near Samarkand, a poet at the Samanid court who flourished in the first half of the 10th century and enjoyed considerable fame in his lifetime and over the following few centuries. Included in the *Loghat-e Fors* and other contemporary texts, only around a hundred of his lines have survived, some in a satirical vein. His style is characterised by both archaisms and simple direct expressions.

Abu ‘l- ‘Alâ’ He was born in Ganja between 1096 and 1106. In some verses, he described himself as master and father-in-law of Khâqâni. He wrote for the Shirvanshah ruler Manuchehr, and was his poet laureate; he also helped Khâqâni to enter court circles. Relations between the two poets deteriorated so badly, however, that they even came to engage in fierce exchanges of obscene satirical poetry. Around a hundred lines of his poetry have survived. His probable date of death is 1160.

Abu ‘Âsem We know very little about this poet, and only a few of his lines have come down to us. Two are included in the *Loghat-e Fors*, and so we can deduce that he was active at the beginnings of Persian poetry, probably around the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries.

Adib Sâber Active in the first half of the 12th century, he began his career in his native city of Termez, in Central Asia, before moving to Marv, then Balkh and, lastly, Chorasmia. Official panegyrist to the Saljuq ruler Sanjar, he also wrote poems in praise of the Khwarazmshah sovereign Atsiz. His poetry is characterised by simplicity and elegance and was admired by Anvari. His ghazals are particularly refined, and he was familiar with Arabic poetry and the rules of versification. Although devout, Adib Sâber nonetheless wrote satirical and obscene poetry, albeit less bold than that of his contemporaries Anvari, Sanâ‘i and Suzani. He had a fierce poetic dispute with Vatvât. His much admired rich *divan* has survived. After thwarting an attack on Sanjar’s life by Atsiz, he

was drowned on the orders of the latter some time between 1143 and 1148.

Āgahi Originally from Khorasan, he lived in the age of the Timurid ruler Hoseyn Bâẓqarâ (1469–1506). A well-educated and erudite poet, he composed *qaside* but was also fond of writing playful and obscene poetry.

‘Am‘aq He was born in Bukhara, where he spent his childhood and lived in the late 11th and early 12th centuries. In 1068 he moved to Samarkand and the court of the Qarakhanid sovereign Shams ol-Molk Nasr, becoming his respected panegyrist. He had a famous dispute at court with his rival poet Rashidi. His son Hamid is said to have exchanged satirical poetry with the great Suzani. ‘Am‘aq often made clever use of rhetorical figures in elegant, fluent language. His poetical comparisons are particularly successful. He was greatly admired by his contemporaries, even by major poets such as Anvari and Suzani. The latter mentions him as an important writer of satirical poetry among his predecessors. In addition to the two poems translated here, we have not found other passages of this kind. In the *tazkere* they claim that when the daughter of the Saljuq sultan Sanjar died in 1130, the ruler invited the by then elderly and blind poet to write the funerary elegy. Around 600 lines have survived from his *divan* and include *qaside*, *robâ‘i* and *qet‘e*. According to some sources, he lived to a very old age and probably died around 1149.

‘Ammâre Born in Marv, he lived in the late 10th and early 11th centuries and was active at both the Samanid and Ghaznavid courts. We can deduce from some sources that he was still alive in 1005 and that he spent his whole life in his native city. His around one hundred surviving lines are all characterised by clarity and elegance. The fact that many of his lines are in the *Loghat-e Fors* and other 11th-century dictionaries testifies to his reputation at that time. His obscene verse is particularly scurrilous.

Anvari One of the great Persian poets, he lived and wrote in the 12th century. He was born at Abivard, in Khorasan, at an unknown date. Many of the details of his life mentioned in the sources are not very reliable historically (for example, he was described as having squandered his father’s wealth but also as a devout student of religious matters). He arrived at the Saljuq court of Sanjar around 1135 and stayed on as a panegyrist there until the death of the sovereign in 1157. In any case he also wrote poetry in praise of many other important people. He appears to have spent some years in Balkh. During the military campaign against the Khwarazmshah sultan Atsiz, he exchanged invective poems with the poet laureate at

that court, Vatvât. He wrote *qaside*, ghazals, *robâ'i* and *qet'e* but his fame rests mainly on his *qaside* and *qet'e*. Anvari is considered to be an erudite poet (hence his title of Hakim/'Wise Man'), and his poetry often features terms and themes from various disciplines (logic, music, astronomy, mathematics, metaphysics, religious law and natural sciences). His *qaside* are very complex, rich in Arabic words and often difficult to interpret. Indeed commentaries have been written for his most difficult lines. He is famed for his elaborate metaphors. Sometimes, however, especially in the ghazals, his language is close to everyday use. Many of his compositions have been included in anthologies and texts on rhetoric, proof that his work was important and influential. Most critics consider Anvari to be the greatest panegyrist in Persian poetry, but he also wrote many fierce invectives against a wide range of people, which led to him being acknowledged as one of the founders of Persian satirical poetry. Because of this fame, some poetic attacks, including a short poem on Balkh, were falsely attributed to him, which made him a laughing stock in the streets of the city. Highly irascible, he wrote in a satirical and obscene vein, specially in the *qet'e* and partly in the *robâ'i*; some manuscripts include an incomplete *masnavi* entitled *Hajv-e Qâzi-ye Kirang*. The language in these texts is very rich, creative and at times particularly scurrilous. Some critics describe him as the most audacious writer in Persian literature, after his contemporary Suzani (to whom he refers explicitly in his poetry). His satire was often directed against the corrupt customs of the age. In his last years he is said to have abandoned writing poetry in favour of a quiet life of solitude. In a famous quatrain, Jâmi calls him, together with Ferdowsi and Sa'di, one of the 'three prophets' of Persian poetry. He died in Balkh, at an uncertain date for which there are various suggestions (1160/1, 1169/70, 1186).

Âref-e Ardabili He was born in Ardabil, in the north-west of Iran, around 1311. He went to the Shirvanshah court at the bidding of the sovereign Key Kâ'us ebn-e Key Qobâd, and became his son's tutor. He wrote a *masnavi* entitled *Farhâdnâme* in which he retold in desecrating tones the story of Farhâd narrated in the *Khosrow o Shirin* by Nezâmi-ye Ganjavi and at the same time praised Key Kâ'us and his son Hushang. The text seems to have been begun at the Shirvanshah court and completed on the poet's return to Ardabil. One feature of this *masnavi* is the description of carnal relations, while there is also an interesting use of words borrowed from local dialects. His date of death is not known, but he lived for over 70 years.

Asir od-Din-e Akhsikati He was originally from Akhsikat, the chief city in the central Asian region of Ferghana. Around 1153 he emigrated to the court of the Saljuq sultans in western Iran and other principalities in those regions. He wrote *qaside* for the Saljuq Alp Arslân and for the Ildeguzid Qezel Arslân, among others. At the court of Qezel Arslân, he is said to have taken over as poet laureate from Mojir od-Din. He had some famous poetic disputes with the latter and also with Khâqâni. He had no scruples about using scurrilous words. An erudite and innovative poet, he was considered a great writer of *qaside* and was particularly clever in his use of refrains. He also wrote some elegant ghazals. His date of death is not certain (some suggest 1181, 1183 or 1211).

‘Asjadi Originally from Marv (or, according to some sources, Herat), he lived in the late 10th and the first half of the 11th centuries. He wrote for Ghaznavid rulers and was a companion at court of two other great poets, ‘Onsori (some believe ‘Asjadi was his student) and Farrokhi. A prolific author and one of the first to focus on a wide use of rhetorical figures, ‘Asjadi was admired for his encomiastic poetry, lyrics and also satirical verse, in which at times he used a very scurrilous vocabulary. Around 200 of his lines have come down to us, preserved in anthologies and dictionaries.

‘Attâr Born in Nishapur, Khorasan, around 1145, he is one of the most celebrated mystic Persian poets. There is very little reliable information about his life. He not only studied Arabic and religion but also medicine and had inherited from his father the profession of apothecary, which guaranteed him a living without having to work as a panegyrist. He travelled a good deal. His literary output was not very well known in his lifetime and his greatness as a poet and mystic was appreciated only from the 15th century on. There are many doubts, however, concerning the authenticity of all the works attributed to him. He wrote ghazals, *robâ’i* and *qaside*, even though he was not really a court poet. His greatest fame, however, is due to some *masnavi*, the best-known being the *Manteq ot-Teyr*, a masterpiece of Persian literature. ‘Attâr’s poetic thinking focused on various aspects of the Sufi world, and its theoretical, practical and educational aspects. His production was a source of inspiration for the other great mystic poet, Rumi. ‘Attâr also wrote the text entitled *Tazkerat ol-Owliyâ*, consisting of biographies of the most important Sufi masters. In his criticism of certain aspects of social life, he did not resort to bold or obscene language. He died in 1221 during the Mongolian invasion of his native city, Nishapur.

Bâbâ Sowdâ'i Originally from Abivard, Khorasan, and active in the 15th century, his first pen-name was Khâvari, which then changed to Sowdâ'i ('The Mad Man') after he had gone out of his mind during a period spent in the desert and mountains. He wrote *qaside* in praise of the Timurid prince Bâysonqor (1397–1433). He also composed ghazals and verse of social criticism. His compositions often had the accents typical of *hazl* poetry. He died at the age of about 90 in around 1449.

Badr-e Jâjarmi Born at Jâjarm, north Khorasan, at an unknown date, he moved to Isfahan, where he was received as a poet at the court of the governor Shams od-Din Mohammad-e Joveyni and his son Bahâ od-Din, for whom he wrote *qaside*. He also wrote in praise of another member of the family, the historian 'Atâ Malek-e Joveyni. Although his poems reveal great technical and rhetorical skills, they were never considered examples of good poetry. His son Mohammad (known by the name of Jâjarmi) wrote the *Mo'nes ol-Ahrâr fi Daqâ'eq ol-Ash'âr*, an important source for contemporary poets and containing works by Badr-e Jâjarmi himself, who died in 1287.

Boshâq He was born in Shiraz, probably in the second half of the 14th century, and attended the Timurid court. As can be evinced from his title (Hallâj), he worked in the cotton business. He used traditional forms to express critical and playful content and is famous for his satirical poems devoted to the gastronomical world. His poems include imitations of classical poets, such as Hâfez, Sa'di and Salmân. He was greatly influenced by 'Obeyd's satirical style but refrained from using his obscene language. He died in 1423 or 1427.

Dibâji Born in Samarkand, he lived in the 11th century and, according to some scholars, was active at the Ganja court of the Shaddadid rulers (others claim, on the other hand, that he was active the Ravvadid court in Azerbaijan). He had a shrewd, witty nature, but we have no further information about him. Only a dozen of his lines have survived.

Ebn-e Khatib Also known as Pur-e Khatib, he was the 'son of a preacher' (this is the meaning of both variants of his pseudonym, while his first name was Ahmad) from the city of Ganja. Since he was celebrated as the companion of the poetess Mahsati, he must have lived in the 12th century. With Mahsati he was involved in a famous love affair, characterised by outrageous aspects and exchanges of satirical poems, narrated in a text of uncertain date but 14th century.

Ebn-e Yamin Born into a family of landowners at Faryumad, western Khorasan, in 1286/7, he found employment at various courts (especially

the Âl-e Kart court in Herat), and was thus a witness to the power struggle that beset Khorasan at the time. He was a man of great moral and religious virtue. His *divan* includes all the major poetic genres, but he was one of the acknowledged masters of the *qet'e*. He wrote both in Arabic and Persian and his compositions are generally simple and clear, but already reveal the syntactic complexities and the typical Arabicisms of the following centuries. He wrote some satirical and playful poetry, also resorting to scurrilous language. He lost the only manuscript of his *divan* during a battle, and so was forced to redraft it later. In the last years of his life he returned to his birthplace of Faryumad, where he died in 1368.

Farghâni He was a Sufi poet, originally from the region of Ferghana, in Central Asia. The little information we have about his life comes from his own *divan*. Active in the 13th century, he was forced to leave his region during the Mongolian invasion, settling first in Tabriz and later in Asia Minor. Neglected for several centuries, his verse mainly consist of poems in praise of the Lord and the prophet Muhammad. His dates of birth and death are unknown.

Gorgâni He was originally from the Caspian region of Gorgân. Little is known about his life and the information all comes from his *masnavi* entitled *Vis o Râmin*, composed around 1055. He moved to Isfahan after the city was conquered by the Saljuq Toghril and lived under the protection of the new governor Abu 'l-Fath Mozaffar, to whom he dedicated *Vis o Râmin*. This *masnavi* was often the subject of local censure, because it describes, without condemning, adultery committed by a woman, the princess Vis.

Hâfez Traditionally considered to be the greatest Persian poet, he was born in Shiraz, in the heart of the Iranian plateau around 1320. Despite his great popularity, there is very little firm information about his life. The sources do agree, however, about his name: Shams od-Din Mohammad. His pen-name, Hâfez, is due to the fact that he knew the Koran off by heart. He rarely and reluctantly left his native city. He is once said to have gone to the Persian Gulf to embark on a ship for India, but terrified at the sight of the sea, he immediately went back to Shiraz. His *qaside* reflect the political instability of the period and are dedicated to various local dynasties: the Injuids, Muzaffarids and the Jalayirids. Hâfez is greatly loved at home and much admired in the Western world (Goethe, in his *West-Eastern Divan*, described him as his 'twin'). He is famed for his ghazals, in which earthly passion and mystical reflection

are often inextricably combined to give rise to a perfect blend of sensible and supersensible elements to the background of great wisdom. In this context, in his *divan* we can find a wide range of feelings and sensations of both a religious and profane type, expressed through the filter of the fashionable canon. Significantly, the two titles most frequently attributed to him are *Lesân ol-Gheyb* ('The Language of the Unknown') and *Tarjomân ol-Asrâr* ('The Interpreter of Secrets'). His poems show a learned and harmonious plurality of themes described in elegant language. Some of his compositions are severe critiques of the hypocritical and corrupt behaviour of the religious authorities and Sufis of his day, expressed in refined and subtle ways, often also ironic. He died in Shiraz around 1390.

Homâm A poet in the Ilkhanid period, we have no information about his birth (probably around 1238) and initial career. At a mature age he was a politician and poet at Tabriz. He is mainly famed for his ghazals, which he composed by emulating the content and style of Sa'di, and in fact he was known as the Sa'di of Azerbaijan. He also wrote some *masnavi*, one of which takes as a model Sanâ'i's *Hadiqat ol-Haqiqe*. He was admired by various later poets, including 'Obeyd and Hâfez. He died in 1314.

Jamâl od-Din He flourished in the second half of the 12th century. Almost all the biographical information about him is derived from his *divan*. He was born in Isfahan, where he had a religious upbringing and spent much of his life. Initially he seems to have worked as a painter and gilder in the Isfahan bazaar. He wrote his first *qaside* in 1160 and his last in 1187/8. Apart from some poems in praise of Saljuq and Bavandid rulers, most of his *qaside* were for local dignitaries in Isfahan. He had four children. One of them, Kamâl od-Din, also became a poet and achieved greater fame than his father. Besides *qaside*, written in a very straightforward style, Jamâl od-Din composed particularly elegant ghazals, *tarkibband* (strophic poem), *robâ'i* and *qet'e*. His poems were addressed not only to rulers and political personages but also poets, such as Vatvât, Khâqâni and Mojir od-Din (with the latter two he had disputes). He was a successful author of satires, mainly written in the form of the *qet'e*. He acknowledged his indebtedness to Anvari. According to some sources, he probably died not long before 1202/3.

Jâmi A celebrated poet and mystic, he is one of the great writers of Persian literature. He was born in Kharjerd, between Mashhad and Herat, in 1414, but adopted his pen-name from the nearby village of Jâm. He soon moved to Herat and then Samarkand, where he completed his

studies, revealing his great talent and a prodigious memory. Following a spiritual crisis, he took the mystical way and associated with the Sufi in the order of the Naqshbandiyya. He entered the service of the Timurids and had close relations with the sovereign Hoseyn Bayqarâ and his counsellor and minister ‘Ali Shir Navâ’i. After a pilgrimage to Mecca, he returned to Herat in 1474, establishing increasingly good relations with the court circles. Significantly, ‘Ali Shir Navâ’i became a member of the Naqshbandiyya, of which Jâmi was the spiritual leader at the time. In the last years of his life, he enjoyed great prestige, even though he continued to lead a modest life in the country. Jâmi was a prolific author and wrote in both Arabic and Persian. His vast *divan* includes *qaside*, *ghazals*, *robâ’i* and *qet’e*. His seven *masnavi* are known under the name of *Haft Owrang*. Another of his major works is the *Bahârestân*, a mixture of prose and poetry written following the model of Sa’di’s *Golestân*. The sixth chapter contains many light-hearted anecdotes, some obscene. He also drafted prose treatises, including many on religious and theological themes. Among his other writings are a text on music, grammatical compendia and short studies dedicated to rhyme, metre and the genre of the enigma. As a mystic, he combined the theories of the Arab philosopher and poet Ibn ‘Arabi (1165–1240) with the Persian literary tradition. Some 19th-century critics gave him the title of *Khâtam osh-Sho’arâ* (‘Seal of Poets’), thus acknowledging him as the last great representative of the classical tradition. He died in Herat in 1492. At the time he was the most celebrated writer of the Persian language, widely esteemed from India to Turkey.

Kâferak He was born in Ghazna and wrote poetry in the 11th century, probably during the reign of the Ghaznavid Ebrâhim. Only a dozen of his poems survive, all on satirical and obscene subjects and also with scurrilous terms. He was famed and feared for his verbal attacks.

Kamâl od-Din He was active in Isfahan in the late 12th and early 13th centuries. Born around 1172, he succeeded his father, Jamâl od-Din, as panegyrist of the Hanafite judge Rokn od-Din Sâ’ed and subsequently his son. He wrote many *qaside* for other personages, including the Khwarazmshah rulers who, having defeated the Saljuqs, became the lords of Isfahan. Kamâl od-Din was very skilled not only in inventing new images and meanings (hence his title: *Khallâq ol-Ma’âni*/‘Creator of Thoughts’) but also in the use of complex refrains. Besides *qaside*, he wrote much admired *ghazals* and many satires especially in the *qet’e* form (many of them were protests against his patrons and at times in scurrilous terms),

in which he shows his notable verse-making skills. He also wrote religious poems and a brief treatise in Arabic. Given his skill, he was often compared to Anvari. In old age he retired from court life. According to some sources, he was killed by the Mongols in 1237, after they had occupied Isfahan.

Kesâ'i He was born in 953, as he himself states in a poem from which we can also deduce that he was still alive in 1000/1. He was very probably originally from Marv, where he spent most of his life in the service, first of the Samanid and then the Ghaznavid rulers. He wrote very competently both in Arabic and Persian and composed encomiastic, lyrical and didactic poems, but was known above all as a religious poet. His poems about nature reveal a special sensibility. A number of his compositions have survived, as well as a series of fragments, some recorded in the *Loghat-e Fors*. His date of death is unknown.

Khâju He was born in Kerman in 1290. After various journeys, he returned to Iran in around 1335 and settled in Shiraz. He tried to obtain a position at court by dedicating *qaside* to the rulers of contemporary dynasties: the Ilkhanids, Muzaffarids and Injuids. He also cultivated important relations with the religious authorities and Sufi masters. His work undoubtedly exercised an influence on the formation of Hâfez. He composed *qaside*, *robâ'i* and, especially, ghazals. Following the example of Nezâmi-ye Ganjavi, he was one of the first poets to write a *Khamse*, i.e. a set of five *masnavi*. Critics are not unanimous in their assessment of his poetry, but he undeniably played an important role in the history of Persian literature. He died in Shiraz around 1349.

Khâqâni A major Persian poet, he was born in the Caucasian region historically known as Shervân in around 1127. Of modest origins (his mother was a cook and his father a carpenter, opposed to his decision to become a poet) he was brought up and educated by his uncle in various disciplines after his father had died. He thus became an erudite poet at an early age, admired for his powerful imagination and rhetorical devices. His very unusual knowledge of the Christian tradition was due to the Nestorian origins of his mother and the specific syncretic milieu (Christian-Islamic) of the places where he trained. His language is very precise and often inspired by the scientific world. Khâqâni's poems are so difficult that from the 15th century on explicative commentaries have been written for his more complex lines. He also wrote in Arabic and had a great influence over later poets, even the great Nezâmi-ye Ganjavi; his texts were included in many *tazkere*. He wrote *qaside*, ghazals, *tar-*

ji'band, *robâ'i*, *qet'e*, a celebrated *masnavi* entitled *Tohfât ol-'Erâqeyn* and a series of letters. His fame is principally due to his *qaside*, some also non-panegyric and many characterised by the presence of a refrain. He wrote poems of praise principally to the Shirvanshah rulers, and especially to Manuchehr and his son Akhsetân; for most of his life he resided in their capital, Shamakha. He also dedicated various compositions to other powerful figures. Conceited and irascible, he wrote at times virulent poetic attacks on a wide range of people: Abu 'l-'Alâ' and Mojir od-Din (according to some sources, the former was his master and father-in-law and the latter his student), his poet contemporaries (Vatvât and Asir od-Din-e Akhsikati), a master from the past like 'Onsori, his father, wife, daughters, political and religious representatives and the women of Baghdad. He mainly expressed his satire in *qet'e* and partly in *robâ'i*. He also excelled in the literary genre of the *habsiyyât*, poetry associated with imprisonment, which he had himself suffered. He died in Tabriz some time between 1186 and 1199.

Labibi Very probably originally from Khorasan, he lived in the late 10th and first half of the 11th centuries. According to some historians, he was active at the courts both of the Âl-e Mohtâj of Chaghâniyân and of the Ghaznavids. Some of his compositions in a fine style and various fragments have survived (a total of around 200 lines). The fragments are often invectives and in many cases contain scurrilous terms. As evidence of his popularity with later poets, we can point to one of his poems that inspired a *qaside* by Mas'ud-e Sa'd.

Lâme'i Originally from the Caspian region of Gorgân, he lived in the 11th century. We have very little information about his life. He seems, however, to have been in the service of Saljuq rulers, including Toghril and Alp Arslân. His poems have a simple elegant style and follow the example of the great poets of the Khorasanian style: 'Onsori, Farrokhi and Manuchehri. Around one thousand of his lines have survived.

Mahsati Midway between legend and historical reality, she has been described in a great variety of terms: erudite, courtesan, dissolute, musician, singer, poetess and scribe. She is thought to have originally been from Ganja and lived in the 12th century, and as such was one of the first poetesses writing in Persian. In his *Elâhinâme*, 'Attâr mentions her as a woman close to the Saljuq king Sanjar (she is also said to have been his mistress); others claim that Mahsati lived in the 11th century, at the Ghaznavid court of Mahmud. Numerous *robâ'i* (around 250) have been attributed to her, many on sentimental subjects and some obscene. Mah-

sati was the main character in a famous love story narrated in a text of uncertain date but 14th century, in which she is depicted as a woman who frequents the taverns in the outskirts of Ganja and who exchanges outrageous lines with her lover, Ebn-e Khatib.

Manuchehri He was born in Dâmghân, to the south-east of the Caspian Sea, in around 1000. An important panegyrist at the Ghaznavid court, he was a leading exponent, together with ‘Onsori and Farrokhi, of the so-called Khorasanian style, the first style of Persian poetry. He is credited with the invention of the *mosammat*, a strophic composition. He had a strong predilection for pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and at times sought to imitate it. He showed a special interest in describing vivid, dynamic details. He died in around 1040.

Ma’rufi Originally from Balkh, he lived in the 10th century and was active at the Samanid court. We have no information about his life. Only a few dozen of his lines have survived in anthologies and dictionaries, including the *Loghat-e Fors*. Some of these lines are satirical and obscene.

Mas’ud-e Sa’d He was born around 1046 in Lahore, where his father, originally from Hamadân, had moved to enter service with the Ghaznavid rulers. He was the first major Indo-Persian poet, admired by other poets, such as Mokhtâri and Sanâ’i. His poetic career was linked to the Ghaznavid campaigns of expansion in India. Having fallen into disgrace at court, he spent several years in prison. He was then pardoned and became the court librarian at Ghazna. His poetry follows the classical canon of the early poets but also has some innovative features: besides the moving *habsiyyât*, he wrote works on days and months of the year and *shahrâshub* dedicated to young artisans in the city, which were among the earliest examples of this genre. He composed only a few lines of satirical and obscene verse. He died in 1121/2.

Mojir od-Din He was born in Beylaqân, a city in the Caucasian region, and was active in the 12th century. Some sources claim he was a student of Khâqâni, to whom he addressed some poems (both praise and satire). He wrote *qaside* for Shirvanshah, Ildeguzid and Saljuq rulers. He was at the centre of a diatribe concerning Isfahan: after writing some lines criticising the city, he received replies from various local poets, including obscene poetry by Jamâl od-Din. Mojir od-Din’s satirical lines on Isfahan were initially attributed to Khâqâni, who confuted the accusation in verse. Mojir od-Din is celebrated for his extreme formal sophistication (see, for example, his lines written using only letters with no diacritic signs). At times, however he uses clear, fluent language. He wrote just a

few satirical and obscene poems. He also wrote poetry while in prison. He was murdered in obscure circumstances in around 1197.

Mokhtâri Originally from Ghazna, he flourished as a poet in the late 11th and first half of the 12th centuries. A panegyrist, especially of the Ghaznavid ruler Mas'ud III, he then fell into disgrace and moved to the Saljuq court at Kerman, but eventually returned to the Ghaznavid court. He also wrote *qaside* for the last Buyid rulers. In his later years he went to the Qarakhanid court in Samarkand. He was esteemed by Sanâ'i and wrote lines in honour of Mas'ud-e Sa'd. His few satirical and obscene lines were not greatly admired. Two dates have been suggested for his death: 1149 and 1159.

Monjik Active in the second half of the 10th century, he wrote *qaside* at the court of the Âl-e Mohtâj ruling in the region of Chaghâniyân, to the north of Termez, his birthplace in Central Asia. After the fall of the Âl-e Mohtâj, according to some sources, he joined the Ghaznavid court. His around 300 surviving lines are generally characterised by a distinct elegance and considerable inventive power. His *divan* became famous in the following centuries. His many satirical and obscene lines (around 80 have survived) were considered to be the best of his age and include both social criticism and personal diatribes. The importance of this production is mentioned by Suzani, the great master of the genre. Monjik is one of the most often cited poets in the *Loghat-e Fors*. He was also an esteemed musician.

Morâdi Originally from Bukhara, he lived in the 10th century and was active at the Samanid court. We know nothing of his life and only a few of his lines have survived. He mainly wrote in Arabic. Rudaki wrote an elegy to commemorate his death.

Nâser-e Khosrow A poet, philosopher and celebrated traveller, he was born at Qobâdiyân in the region of Marv in 1004. He studied various disciplines and several languages. He initially worked as a secretary for some local princes and then, inspired by some visions, set off on a long journey, which he described in his *Safarnâme*. In Egypt he became a fervent follower of Ismailism. He wrote religious and philosophical texts and a *divan* also mainly consisting of religious and philosophical poems. He spent the last part of his life in exile in the Badakhshân mountains, where he died sometime between 1072 and 1077.

Nezâmi-ye 'Aruzi Born in Samarkand around the end of the 11th century, he wrote a celebrated work called *Chahâr Maqâle* (between 1155 and 1157), a text on four professions (secretary, poet, astronomer and

physician), which is very important for knowledge of many aspects—not just literary—of the contemporary culture. This same work provides us with the little information that we have about his life. He worked at the Ghurid court and met some of the great poets of the age, such as ‘Omar Khayyâm and Mo‘ezzi. Very few of his lines have survived. Not of great literary value, they are mainly satirical and also obscene.

Nezâmi-ye Ganjavi He was born in 1141 at Ganja, now in Azerbaijan but at the time mainly inhabited by people of Iranian origins. Little information has come down to us about his life. His mother was of Kurdish origin and died prematurely. He received a very broad education and mastered various disciplines. He is mainly famed for his celebrated quintet, *Khamse*, consisting of five *masnavi*: *Makhzan ol-Asrâr*, *Khosrow o Shirin*, *Haft Peykar*, *Leylâ o Majnun* and *Eskandarnâme*. He also composed ghazals and *qaside*, mostly now lost. Although his works are dedicated to rulers, he was not a proper court poet. He was renowned for his powerful imagination, mastery of language, narrative skills, understanding of society and deep religious feeling. He exercised a great influence over subsequent developments in the history of Persian literature. His poetic production was a source for various imitations and inspired paintings by many miniaturists. He died in 1209.

Nezâri Born at Birjand, Khorasan, around 1247, he was one of the most important poets in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. An Ismailist, he wrote *qaside* for the rulers of the Âl-e Kart dynasty. His rich, varied *divan* includes not only *qaside*, but also ghazals, *qet‘e* and *masnavi*. He often criticised the hypocrisy of his age and defended the weaker classes. He admired and imitated poets such as Khâqânî and Sa‘di. After several journeys (Isfahan, Tabriz, Caucasus, etc.), he returned to his native region, where he died in around 1321.

‘Obeyd Also known as Zâkânî, he is the greatest satirical poet in Persian literature. He was born at Zâkân, a town near Qazvin, a few years before 1319. His well-educated family was closely associated with the administrative apparatus. As a young man, he held public office for several years. When the Ilkhanid kingdom fell, he moved to Shiraz, where he was active at the court of Abu Eshâq Inju, for whom he wrote many *qaside*. When that ruler was defeated and killed by the Muzaffarid sovereign Mobârez od-Din Mohammad in 1357, ‘Obeyd fled Shiraz and was to return only in the reign of Shâh Shoja‘, to whom he dedicated several poems. Like Abu Eshâq Inju, Shâh Shoja‘ was a patron of Hâfez, but there is no evidence suggesting that the two poets knew each other. While staying in Bagh-

dad, he composed some poems in praise of the Jalayirid ruler Sheikh Oveys. 'Obeyd wrote serious and comic works, but his fame is mainly due to the latter: satirical and obscene works both in verse and prose. They marked the transition from the invective *ad personam*, typical of Suzani and other poets in the Saljuq age, to criticism of a more political and social nature. Among other things, he condemned despotism, hypocrisy, religious intolerance, the malfunctioning of the legal system, immorality of all kinds and various forms of cultural backwardness (without, however, distancing himself from the deep-rooted misogyny of his age). These compositions, usually in a clear, elegant style, at times are in outrageous, scurrilous language. He also made many parodies of poems by other poets. He was well versed in Arabic and often demonstrated his broad knowledge in various sciences and disciplines. His works include the *Akhlâq ol-Ashrâf*, the *Resâla-ye Dah Fasl*, the *Resâla-ye Delgoshâ*, the *Resâla-ye Sad Pand*, the *Maktub-e Qalandarân* and the *Rishnâme*. He probably died in around 1370. Despite his great popularity, 'Obeyd was long neglected by the critics, especially because of his outrageous aspects, and only recently have his works been translated and adequately studied.

'Omar Khayyâm Born in Nishapur, Khorasan, in around 1048, he was a celebrated mathematician, astronomer, philosopher and poet. The Saljuq ruler Malek Shâh commissioned him to undertake a major reform of the calendar. His famous *robâ'i*, whose authenticity is widely debated, combine philosophical and mystical reflections with hedonistic and sceptical ideas. Edward Fitzgerald made a celebrated translation of 'Omar Khayyâm's *robâ'i* in the 19th century. His probable date of death is around 1131.

Owhadi He was born in Marâghe, north-west Iran, in around 1274/5. His most important work is the *masnavi Jâm-e Jam*, modelled on Sanâ'i's *Hadiqat ol-Haqiqe* and dedicated to the Ilkhanid ruler Abu Sa'îd. Besides mysticism, Owhadi was also notably interested in social and educational issues, which led him to be involved in town planning and schooling. Some critics believe his ghazals are not inferior to those of Hâfez. He is famed for his elegies. After a few journeys, he returned to his native city of Marâghe, where he died in 1338.

Pur-e Bahâ Also known under the name of Ebn-e Bahâ, he was originally from Jâm, a town between Mashhad and Herat, and lived in the 13th century, at the beginning of the Ilkhanid period. Very little is known about his life. His father was a judge, but Pur-e Bahâ chose a career as a poet. Having grown up in Khorasan, and especially in Herat, where he

wrote poems in honour of the local governors, he then went to Azerbaijan, Isfahan and Baghdad. He composed *qaside* for various personages at the Ilkhanid court. His fame mainly rests on his satirical and obscene poetry, at times attacking corrupt rulers and the clergy. In this kind of production, he considered himself to be a disciple of Suzani. His poems on the male member are celebrated, and he liked to write playful replies to *qaside* by important poets, such as Sanâ'i and Nezâmi-ye Ganjavi. One special feature of his poetry is the use of Mongolian and Turkish words. He also knew Arabic. Some studies (Hoffmann 1990 and the entry in *Encyclopædia Iranica* 1982–) attribute to him a *masnavi* entitled *Kârnâme-ye Owqâf*, where he criticises and mocks the abuses of power and vices of the administrators in the pious foundations of Khâf. It is not clear where he spent the last part of his life, before his death in around 1284.

Qamar We know very little about his life. He was originally from Isfahan and was probably born in around 1155. He mainly wrote *qaside*, in the style of the ancient poets. His poems are important from the lexical point of view, since they contain references to various disciplines (botany, medicine, astronomy and philosophy) and everyday customs and practice. He composed *qaside* for the Salgurid sovereigns and eulogies to some powerful religious families in Isfahan. He also wrote satires and playful verse. He probably died between 1202 and 1217.

Qari Originally from Yazd, he lived in Shiraz in the second half of the 15th century. He is famed for his satirical poems devoted to the sartorial world. Many of them were written as imitations of poems by celebrated poets, including Hâfez.

Qomri There is very little information about him. He was born in around 1164 or 1184, probably in Âmol, Mâzanderân, as suggested by the fact that many of his *qaside* are addressed to princes in that region. After a period spent in Mâzanderân, he seems to have gone to Ray, and then Khorasan before eventually settling at the Khwarazmshah court. His style is reminiscent of Anvari's erudite manner. He was particularly skilled in the use of new compounds and complex refrains. He wrote in Arabic and Persian. Many of his works, especially the *qet'e* and *qaside*, are satirical and evoke the audacious, obscene spirit of Anvari and Suzani. He wrote a celebrated playful *masnavi* entitled *Kârnâme* (a clear allusion to his model, the *Kârnâme-ye Balkh* by Sanâ'i). In old age, he is said to have ceased writing outrageous and satirical poems. His probable year of death is 1227.

Rashidi Originally from Samarkand, he was active in the 12th century in Transoxiana, writing *qaside* at the Qarakhanid and Saljuq courts. He was particularly skilled in using rhetorical figures as regards both form and content. He is known to have engaged in poetic disputes with ‘Am‘aq and Mas‘ud-e Sa‘d.

Rudaki He was the first great Persian poet, active in the 10th century. As his name suggests, he was originally from the village of Rudak, near Samarkand. He was active at the Samanid court. He was also a court singer and musician. Some whole poems and many scattered lines have survived from his rich *divan*. He is the most often cited author in the *Loghat-e Fors*. He laid the foundations for the so-called Khorasanian style, the earliest style of Persian poetry, and excelled in both panegyric and lyrical poems, at times characterised by great simplicity. His few satirical and obscene lines are moderate in tone. His poetry enjoyed great fame for at least two centuries and its power is attested to by a famous episode: one of his compositions is said to have convinced the prince Samanid Nasr II to return to Bukhara and abandon the pleasures of his country retreat at Herat. At the end of his life, Rudaki fell into disgrace, having also lost his sight (although some claim he was blind from birth). His probable date of death is around 940.

Ruhi Originally from Valvâlej, near Balkh, he lived at the Saljuq court in the 12th century. In his verse he mentions Farrokhi, Mas‘ud-e Sa‘d and Qatrân (some say the last was his master). His fame as a satirical and obscene author was so great that, according to an anecdote fashionable in his age, he only had to move his lips—even if he were about to pronounce the name of God—for everyone to fear they would be the butt of his poetic attacks. He earned the pseudonym of Kun-e Mardom (‘People’s Arse’) for having mentioned in verse that the posterior was his favourite part of other people’s bodies. His qualities as a serious poet, however, were also acknowledged and admired. Only a few of his lines have survived.

Rumi Known as Mowlavi or Mowlânâ, he is a great mystical poet and one of the masters of Persian poetry. He was born into a family with erudite traditions in Balkh in 1207. His father was a well-known preacher. Fear of the Mongols and various controversies induced the family to leave Balkh and move to Konya, Turkey, in around 1222. Here he became closely involved with mystical circles, and when the dervish Shams od-Din Mohammad-e Tabrizi arrived in Konya in 1244, Rumi became a fervent follower. After the dervish left the city, the poet was so enthu-

siastic about him that he adopted Shams-e Tabrizi as a pen-name in memory of his beloved master, and thus in a certain sense became identified with him. Rumi is said to have composed his poems when in a mystical trance. He left a rich divan of poems often simple and direct in tone, but especially the *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi*, a kind of compendium of Sufism, also known as the Persian Koran. Some of the spiritual messages in this text are illustrated in obscene anecdotes, since Rumi was convinced that these kinds of stories could help spread his work. This means that the passages concerned in the *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi* are a singular mixture of the sacred and the profane. He died in Konya in 1273. His funeral was attended by Muslims, Christians and Jews, evidence of his open mind and tolerance. His spiritual legacy has been kept alive by a confraternity of dervishes who practise ritual dances and are inspired by his teachings.

Sa'di He is a major figure in Persian literature. There are only a few firm details about his biography. Born in Shiraz some time between 1213 and 1219, he moved to Baghdad, where he studied at the celebrated Nezâmiyye. He subsequently undertook many journeys but became famed as a poet only when he returned to Shiraz in 1256/7 and composed the *Bustân* and the *Golestân*, dedicated to the local rulers. His interests lay not so much in theoretical speculations as in the observation of everyday life and its attendant teachings. Especially in the *Golestân*, a work of both prose and verse, his deep experience of earthly matters emerges along with his very understanding and tolerant spirit. He also wrote *qaside* and *ghazals*. Composed to earn him a living, the *qaside* suffer at times from a certain verbosity and repetitiveness, whereas the *ghazals*, often simple and musical, are some of the first accomplished examples of that melding of the sacred and the profane, or spiritual love and earthly passion, that was to pave the way to Hâfez's *ghazal*. A hallmark of his style is the so-called *sahl-e momtane'* ('inimitable facility'). His works include—although there are no definitive critical studies on the subject—several playful and obscene compositions gathered in a collection which goes under various titles: *Khabisât*, *Majâles ol-Hazl*, *Mazâhekat* and *Motâyyebât*. There are also facetious lines by him in the *Golestân*. Some of his satires are directed at the corrupt mores of the age. In a celebrated quatrain, Jâmi describes Sa'di, together with Anvari and Ferdowsi, as the three 'prophets' of Persian poetry. He was famed and greatly loved in his lifetime. He died in 1292, and his tomb in Shiraz is still often visited and venerated.

Salmân He was born in Sâve, in central-north Iran, in around 1300. He mainly sang the praise of the Jalayirids, and his *qaside* were among the last of the classical tradition. He also wrote ghazals and some *masnavi* on epic and love themes. His production reveals a solid technical and cultural background rather than true poetic inspiration. His most famous works include his *qaside-ye masnu'*, poems rich in rhetorical expedients. Some of his ghazals are reminiscent of those of Hâfez. He died in Sâve in around 1376.

Sanâ'i A great religious poet and one of the masters of Persian poetry, he was born in Ghazna, very probably in around 1087. At the beginning of his career, he wrote eulogies to some dignitaries at the Ghaznavid court. He was in contact with the poets Mas'ud-e Sa'd and Mokhtâri. Before the end of the reign of the Ghaznavid ruler Mas'ud III, he left for Balkh, where he wrote the *Kârnâme-ye Balkh*, a portrait of life in Ghazna. He then moved to Sarakhs, where he composed the *Seyr ol-'Ebâd ilâ 'l-Ma'âd*, dedicated to a religious authority in that city. Finally, he returned to Ghazna, which was under the rule of the Ghaznavid Bahrâm Shâh, to whom he dedicated some *qaside* and his principal work, the long didactic poem *Hadiqat ol-Haqiqe o Shari'at ot-Tariqe*. His life is generally divided into two distinct periods: initially he cultivated earthly and courtly interests, but subsequently devoted himself entirely to spiritual thinking. He is considered to be the first important mystical poet, who also laid the technical foundations for the ghazal. He wrote the earliest Sufi didactic *masnavi*. His works abound so much in religious references that they require commentaries and explanations. He was praised by the two later great mystical poets, 'Attâr and Rumi. His compositions include satirical and obscene lines often expressed in scurrilous language but at times also rhetorically refined, addressed to various types of people, even his own relatives. They mainly consists of *qet'e* (around a third of them), but similar lines are also found in the *Hadiqat ol-Haqiqe*. This production was met with very varied responses from the critics. According to some, influenced by the poet's spiritual tendencies, these lines should not be attributed to Sanâ'i, while others, anxious to circumscribe them, claim that they are lines only written during his time at court. It appears, on the contrary, that Sanâ'i wrote this kind of poetry throughout his life. He was the butt of satirical and obscene compositions by Suzani, one of the masters of the genre. The textual questions concerning his *divan* are particularly convoluted. He died in around 1130.

Shahid Originally from Balkh, he was active in the 10th century at the court of the Samanids, for whom he wrote *qaside*. An expert on philosophy and a skilled calligrapher, he composed both in Arabic and Persian and was greatly admired by other poets, such as his contemporaries Daqiqi and Rudaki (he wrote Shahid's funeral elegy), and later Farrokhi, Khâqâni, Manuchehri and Mo'ezzi. Around a hundred of his lines, characterised by intense content and a straightforward style, have survived. Only a few are of satirical and obscene inspiration. His probable year of death is 936.

Shamsi 'l-A'raj He was born in Bukhara, where he was active in the reign of the Âl-e Borhân, towards the end of the 12th century. He was lame and had a jovial and generous disposition. Only a few of his lines have survived.

Sharaf od-Din Yahyâ al-'Owfi He is the grandfather of the anthologist Moḥammad 'Owfi, the famous author of *Lobâb ol-Albâb*, who was probably born in around 1180. Thus he is likely to have flourished in the mid or late 12th century.

Shatranji Very probably originally from Samarkand, he was active in the 12th century in the service of the Qarakhanid sovereigns. Some sources claim that he was a student of the great satirical poet Suzani. Many of his surviving lines (a total of around a hundred, mostly *qet'e*) are effectively of the satirical type. He was highly skilled in using rhyme and complex refrains.

Suzani A great satirical poet, he was renowned for his crude obscene language. Born in Nasaf, near Samarkand, in around 1096, he spent most of his life in that city. He followed in his father's footsteps as a poet. His pen-name, Suzani, is derived from the word *suzan* ('needle') and he chose it, according to some sources, because of business matters or a love story involving a young tailor, but a more likely explanation is the sharp nature of his verse. He addressed most of his *qaside* to the Qarakhanid rulers of Samarkand, but he also praised the Bukhara religious authorities and the Saljuq sultan Sanjar. He is famed above all for his many satirical and obscene poems, which exercised a great influence over later authors. His texts on the penis, for example, inspired similar compositions by Pur-e Bahâ, and his parodies of Sanâ'i were among the sources of inspiration for various verse reworkings by 'Obeyd. Besides Sanâ'i, his illustrious 'victims' included Mo'ezzi, Nezâmi-ye 'Aruzi and Vatvât. His favourite target, however, was a poet whom he called Khar-e Khomkhâne ('Tavern Donkey'), the addressee of around a third of his satirical compositions.

His refrains on the pudenda are well known, as are some introductory obscene sections to his *qaside*. Among his models were the Arab poet Abu Nuwâs and the celebrated Anvari. In his verse he mentions, as illustrious predecessors, ‘Am‘aq, Hakkâk, Khatiri, Monjik, Qari‘ od-Dahr and Tayyân, while Shatranji was one of his followers. Suzani’s satirical verse has great inventive power and is rich in rare and dialect terms. As such, it is also very interesting from the lexical point of view. At times his texts are difficult to interpret, and the difficulties are further complicated by the shortcomings of the current edition. He was one of the few authors to compose ghazals on satirical and obscene themes. According to some sources, late in life he was said to have expressed regrets about his obscene writings, but this suggestion may simply be a literary *topos*. He probably died in 1173/4.

Tayyân He was born near Marv and was active in the 10th century. Most of his around 80 surviving lines are playful and often use scurrilous language, hence his nickname Zhâzhkhây (‘Fribble’ or ‘Chatterbox’). According to some sources, in old age he reneged on this behaviour and gave up poetry to become a stonemason. Suzani, the great master of satirical and obscene poetry, cites him as a predecessor. He is also mentioned by Anvari and Khâqâni.

Vatvât He was born in Balkh, probably in 1088/9. His real name was Mohammad and his title was Rashid od-Din. He is mainly known as Vatvât (‘Bat’), a nickname due to his small height and baldness, which may have accounted for his bad-tempered nature. He was chief secretary of the Khwarazmshah ruler Atsiz, in whose honour he wrote several *qaside*. His poems are often refined from the formal point of view but the same cannot always be said for their content. His surviving texts include not only a good deal of poetry, but also an important work on rhetoric, entitled *Hadâ‘eq os-Sehr fi Daqâ‘eq osh-She‘r*, and numerous public and private letters, some in Persian and others in Arabic. He was initially a friend of two other poets, Adib Sâber and Khâqâni, but their relations deteriorated and he engaged in some fierce invective exchanges with them. He also had problematic relations with other poets, but few of his satirical and obscene lines have survived. Some considered him to be one of the most erudite men of his age. A possible date for his death is 1182/3.

Zahir od-Din-e Fâryâbi As his name suggests he was born in Fâryâb, near Balkh, probably in around 1156. He wandered between various courts, but his most important patrons were the two Ildeguzid sovereigns of

Azerbaijan, Qezel Arslân and Abu Bakr, to whom he dedicated various *qaside*. He became famous as a panegyrist, but also wrote ghazals. He was an erudite poet, well versed in Arabic and several fields of knowledge. He wrote in a straightforward fluent style. He wrote only a few satirical and obscene lines. At the end of his life he left court circles and chose to lead a solitary existence. He died at Tabriz in 1201.

