



## Impressibility of Qul Ali from *Bahr al-Mahabbah* and *al-Settin al-Jame'* in composing *Qissa'i Yusuf*

Radman Rasooli Mehrabani<sup>1\*</sup>, Mona Babayi<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

This research aimed to demonstrate that Ali, a Muslim Volga Bulgar poet, drew inspiration from *Bahr al-Mahabbah fi Asrar al-Mavaddah* and *al-Settin al-Jame' le-Lataif al-Basatin* (or *Qissa-I Yusuf*) in composing *Qissa'i Yusuf* (The Story of Joseph). Then, the author's writing style and method of adaptation of the two works were analyzed. In so doing, the French School of Comparative Literature, which is based on direct effect, was utilized. This study asserts that Ali's *Qissa'i Yusuf* has many similarities with and few differences from *Bahr al-Mahabbah* and *al-Settin al-Jame'* in the plot narrative (and even sub-narratives). Moreover, some parts are entirely similar to the two said works in expression and the arrangement of story details. In some non-fictional aspects, he has also adapted the two works. In some instances, in addition to similarity with *al-Settin al-Jame'* in expression, Ali has used its Persian words in his book. Ali has also pointed out that he was proficient in Persian and Arabic. In general, it seems that Ali has considered the two works and, in disagreements, has gathered and versified the narratives of the two works together, and at times has selected a more detailed narrative, and wherever appropriate, he has elaborated on emotional dialogues and descriptions.

**Keywords:** *Volga Bulgar, persianate world, Qol Ghali, the story of Joseph, Qissa'i Yusuf.*

\* Corresponding author, Ph.D. candidate of Persian language and literature, University of Tehran, Iran; Email: [R.Rasooli.M@ut.ac.ir](mailto:R.Rasooli.M@ut.ac.ir). ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8437-1110  
<sup>2</sup>Ph.D. in Persian language and literature, University of Tehran

### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

The story of Yusuf and Zulaikha is called "Ahsan al-Qisas" in the Holy Qur'an (Yusuf: 3). It is the only story told thoroughly in a Surah. This story has been elaborately described and interpreted in detail in numerous exegeses for so long. Additionally, mystical monographs have been written and composed about it. Aside from the individual verses of different surahs which have been interpreted by many mystics, it can be stated that mystics have studied and examined Yusuf Surah with a mystical perspective more than other Surahs of the Qur'an and have described and presented its esoteric meanings through implicative and interpretive (ta'wil) approach. The existence of a continuous narrative structure and the predominance of the theme of love and affection, in addition to the semantic nuances of this Surah, may account for this.

besides the works of mystics, there are a significant number of Persian and Turkish poems of Yusuf and Zulaikha (or Yusuf's story), which demonstrates the impressiveness of this story in the Islamicate world. Ali, one of the Volga Bulgarians, was the first poet who versified the story of prophet Yusuf in Turkish literature. Ali was also acquainted to Persian and Arabic and intended to compose this story in these languages as well (Gali, 2010: 187), but apparently, he could not conduct his intention. This work is recognized as the origin of the written literature of the Volga Bulgarians and the Kazan Tatars (Mousavi, 2006). Ali probably studied in Khwarezm and Transoxiana, where the Volga Bulgarians had strong ties. In this research, we seek to recover the Persian and Arabic sources of Ali's poem and study this work comparatively with *Bahr al-Mahabbah fi Asrar al-Mavaddah* and *al-Settin al-Jame'* using the methodology of the French School in comparative literature.

#### 2. Literature Review

Fleischer first introduced a manuscript of Ali's poem in the Dresden Library's manuscript catalog in 1831 (see Yaman, 2007: 185). Orientalists and Turkish literature scholars have since accorded this work. Houtsma in 1889 and Brockelmann in 1917 published extensive studies on the story of Joseph (see Yaman, 2007: 186; Gulensoy, 2021). In 1926, Barthold considered Crimea to be the location of this poem's composition (Barthold, 1997: 166). Köprülü (2006: 216-217) and Yaman (2007) have also authored works on this subject.

West has accepted Dolu and Ertaylan's viewpoints: Ali was affected by the exegeses of the Qur'an and histories and added some details to the story himself. He also considers Ali's sources the same as Rabghuzi's (who completed his work approximately a century after Ali) Qisas al-Anbiya sources (West, 1983: 72).

Hisamov identifies *Anis al-Muridin and Shams al-Majalis*, misattributed to Khwādja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī, as one of Ali's primary sources and notes that this book was written more than one hundred years before Ali's poem (Hisamov, xxxvi: 2009). Nevertheless, Shamshirgarha, Editor of *Anis al-Muridin and Shams al-Majalis*, properly refused the attribution of this book to Khwādja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī (Introduction to *Anis al-Muridin and Shams al-Majalis*, 2018: 15). Analyzing the stylistic and linguistic aspects of this book, as well as the presence of a verse by Saadi in the text, she deduced that an anonymous author published this work in the late seventh century AH/ thirteenth century CE (Ibid: 18). Since this work was written after Ali's poem, it cannot be considered its source.

Among Persian researchers, Khayyampour was the first to study Yusuf and Zulaikha's poems in detail in Persian and Turkish literature. Initially he published a series of articles in the journal of *Tabriz Faculty of Literature* (Nos. 46-48, 50, and 52); subsequently, he compiled them into a book (1960). Also, Ahmad Nikuhemmat published a collection of articles about Persian poems of Yusuf and Zulaikha (1974).

Although several comparative researches have been conducted on Jami and Turkish poems, Ali's story of Yusuf has not been the subject of comparative research..

### 3. Methodology

This research aimed to identify Ali's sources for composition the story of Yusuf. Thus, the monographs, the commentaries, the stories of the prophets, and other works that were written prior to the seventh century AH, in which the story of Yusuf the Prophet was recounted in detail have been examined: Persian translation and interpretation of Qur'an which famed as *Translation of Tabari's Exegesis, History* by Abu Ali Bal'ami, *Murūj al-Dahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* [Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems], *Sūrābādī's Exegesis*, *Arāis al-Majālis fī Qisas al-Anbiya*, *Taj al-Qisas*, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa al-Tā'rīkh*, *Qisas al-Anbiya* by Nishaburi, *Bahr al-Mahabbah fī Asrar al-Mavaddah*, *Jāwami' al-Jāmi'*, *Mojmal al-Tawārikh*, *Rawd al-jinān wa rawh al-janān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*, *al-Settin al-Jame' le-Lataif al-Basatin*, *Kashf al-asrār wa*

'*Uddat al-Abrār*, *Yusuf and Zulaikha* poem by Taqanshahi (misattributed to Ferdowsi), and *Qisas al-Anbiya* by Rawandi.

Three works, among others, are very similar in particulars and distinct from others: *Bahr al-Mahabbah fi Asrar al-Mavaddah* attributed to Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Tusi al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH/1111 CE) in Arabic, *al-Settin al-Jame' le-Lataif al-Basatin* by Ahmad bin Mohammad bin Zayd Tusi (Probably written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AH/ 12<sup>th</sup> century CE) in Persian and *Qissa-i Yusuf (The Story of yusuf)* poem by Qul Ali (d. probably 633 AH/ 1236 CE) in Bulgar Turkish.

These three works were comparatively analyzed using the approach of the French school in comparative literature. Since the late nineteenth century, comparative literature has been recognized as a distinct major. Apart from the French school, significant schools of comparative literature include the American and Russian schools, each with its own approach to the study of the works. The theoretical subjects of this field of study have thrived, so it is not realistic to expect a single universal definition of comparative literature applicable to all time periods. Some comparative literature scholars, including Marius-Francois Guyard, Siegbert Salomon Praver, and Francois Jost, consider the term "comparative literature" to be inexpressive and misleading.

Guyard asserts that comparative literature is not a comparison of different literary works. History of international literary relations is the proper definition (Guyard, 1995: 16). According to Yost's statement, this term confirms the subject of comparison, but does not express its circumstances (Jost, 2018: 45).

The French school has been recognized as the initiator of the study of comparative literature. The basis of this school is examining the process of affecting and being affected rather than the artistic value of literary works, so the study of influences and mentalities predominates. Based on this school's principles, the comparative literature researcher seeks to discover how the literature of other nations was woven into and influenced by the texture of French literature (Jost, 2018: 50). The works studied in this school must be written in different languages, and there should be clear historical relations between them. It is noteworthy that the French school was influenced by positivism in the discussion of causing and receiving effects and clear historical relations between the two works.

The close connection between Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages in the Islamicate world does not require evidence. Arabic is the first language of the Islam and the language of the Quran. Persian

can be considered the second language of the Islamicate world and even in some regions during the Middle Ages such as India and west of China the first language of the Islam. In the early stages of the formation of Turkish literature, Persian and Arabic works had a direct influence on Turkish literature. Consequently, the comparative literature approach of the French school seems to be an apropos approach for studying these works.

#### 4. Results

Qissa-i Yusuf (The story of Joseph) by Qul Ali has fundamental significance in the history of Turkish literature and is an essential work left by the Volga Bulgarians. The Volga Bulgar had strong ties with the Persianate world, particularly with Khorasan and Transoxiana. Ali himself resided and studied in several cities of Volga-Bulgaria and probably Transoxiana. He is also believed to have traveled to Persia and other territories of Islamdom (Bukharaev, 2009: xxiv). Also, In Qissa-i Yusuf, he pointed out that he acquainted with Persian and Arabic.

According to the evidences provided in this study, it can be concluded that Ali's Qissa'i Yusuf has many similarities with and few differences from *Bahr al-Mahabbah fi Asrar al-Mavaddah* and *al-Settin al-Jame' le-Lataif al-Basatin* (or *the Story of Yusuf*) in terms of plot narrative (and even sub-narratives). Moreover, some sections are entirely identical to the aforementioned works in terms of expression and the arrangement of story details. In some non-fictional aspects, he has also adapted the two works. In some instances, in addition to similarity with *al-Settin al-Jame'* in expression, Ali has used its Persian words. In general, it seems that Ali has considered the two works and, in disagreements, has gathered and versified the narratives of the two works together, and at times has chosen a more detailed narrative. On some occasions, he has elaborated on emotional dialogues and descriptions and even added some events to the story. The similarity of these three works paves the way for editing these works and also for further studies.

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