

# Life and Works of Abu 'Abd Allah Rudaki

by

Dr. Iraj Bashiri

The University of Minnesota, U.S.A.

Copyright © 2002, 2008 by Iraj Bashiri



## Summary

Rudaki lived during a very turbulent time in the history of Iran. It was a time when Persian political power was on the wane but Iranian intellectual power was on the rise. Rudaki played a crucial role during this time of transition. He created a literary atmosphere in which, in spite of the political uncertainty under the Turks, Persian literature went on to produce great poets like Firdowsi, Umar Khayyam, Rumi, and Hafiz. This article deals with Rudaki's life and works and assesses the contributions of Rudaki to Iranian and world literatures.

According to Sam'ani in *Lubab Al-Ansab*, Rudaki's full name is Abu 'Abd Allah Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Hakim ibn Abd al-Rahman ibn Adam.<sup>1</sup> He has the distinct privilege of being not only the founder of Perso-Tajik literature but also one of its most prominent poets.<sup>2</sup> He is also the first among his peers to have a *diwan* and the first to use poetic meters in the composition of longer pieces like *Kalila wa Dimnah* and *Sandbad Name*.<sup>3</sup> Some have attributed Rudaki's fame to the grandeur of the court of his patron Nasr ibn Ahmad II (914-943). Fortunately, enough of his poetry (in various genres: *masnavi*, *qit'ah*, *ghazal*, *ruba'i*, and *marsiyyah*) is extant to establish his unequivocal mastery of the art and to prove that, on his own, he merits the unsurpassed greatness that is attributed to him.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the poetic standards that he established in the 9<sup>th</sup> century endured for centuries and guided Persian poets until the advent of Muhammad Taqi Bahar (1880-1951).

The contributions of Rudaki in setting standards are remarkable. Although the revitalized Persian language used during his time had developed sufficiently to express the sentiments, needs, and aspirations of the people, it lacked the means necessary to convey those aspects of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Safa, 1988, p. 371.

<sup>2</sup> Ravandi, 1969, vol. 2, p. 235; Ghafurov, 1998, P. 614.

<sup>3</sup> Suleymani, pp. 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Some scholars believe that Rudaki entered the Samanid court before the advent of Nasr ibn Ahmad II. See Anushe, 1997, p. 432.

culture in a technical, yet elegant and thought-provoking manner.<sup>5</sup> Rudaki met that challenge. Additionally, the Persian language, which had been neglected for two hundred years prior to his time,<sup>6</sup> did not have sufficient letters to represent all its sounds.<sup>7</sup> However, when a new script was developed based on the Arabic alphabet, Rudaki used it to reeducate Iranians and to alert them to the significance of their language in any project that would attempt to revitalize Iran's ancient heritage.<sup>8</sup> He was also wise when writing his own verses to avoid using ornate Arabic words and *Qur'anic* phrases, especially at a time when the other court poets promoted their works in just that way. This is not meant to deny that Rudaki used common themes from pre-Islamic Arabia or Islamic terminology like *shabi lilt al-qadr*, *halal*, *makruh*, *haram*, and the like. In fact, the names of a number of prominent Islamic figures like al-Shafi'i, Abu Hanifa, and Abu Tammam Taii appear in his verses. In this regard, his "Three Shirts of Joseph" is noteworthy. It reads:

#### Transcription

*Nigarina shenidastam ki gahi mehnatu rahat  
Si pirahan salab budast yusef ra bi 'umr andar  
Yaki az kaid shud pur khun, duwwum shud chak az tuhmat  
Siwwum Ya'qubra az bush rushan gasht chishmi tar  
Rukham manad ba-dan awwal, dilam manad ba-dan sani  
Nasibi man shawad dar wasl an pirahani digar*

#### Translation

Dearest. I have heard that during his toil and comfort,  
Altogether, Joseph had three shirts to his name.  
One was bloodied by mischief, the other torn by slander,  
The third returned sight to the tearful eyes of Jacob.  
My face resembles the first, my heart the second,  
Only if in reunion, would I be blessed with the third.<sup>9</sup>

In general, however, instead of on religion, Rudaki relied on his unique poetic talent and his gift of singing his lyrics while playing the lute.

Rudaki was born in the village of Banuj, in the Rudak district of Samarqand, in AD 858. We are better informed about Rudaki's early life than about the early lives of his contemporaries,

<sup>5</sup> See Lazard, 1975, pp. 595ff.

<sup>6</sup> "One of his [Rudaki's] contemporaries from western Iran, Abu Hatim of Ray (d. 322/934), who wrote in Arabic but probably knew Persian, stated contemptuously: "What has recently been created in Persian by way of poetry is only talk without meaning, without titles and without usefulness: there is no *divan* among Persians", a remark which proves that the predecessors of Rudaki had not yet succeeded in bringing their work to the notice of literary circles and having it recognized as true literature." See Lazard, 1975, p. 618.

<sup>7</sup> Middle Persian had only sixteen letters and used some of those in two or three different positions to convey some of the sounds.

<sup>8</sup> Rypka, 1968, p 67.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Babaev, pp. 11-21.

thanks to the contributions of the chronicler 'Awfi. According to him, Rudaki was so intelligent and sharp that by the age of eight he had memorized the entire text of the *Qur'an*. Soon after he learned to read Persian, he composed poetry that was most appealing to his people who were scattered in the foothills of the Zarafshan Mountains. Again, according to 'Awfi, Rudaki had a pleasant voice, a talent that connected him with the world of the musicians and dancers of his time. We learn that his lute teacher was the famed Abu al-'Anak Bakhtiyar<sup>10</sup> under whom the art of *patvazhak*<sup>11</sup>—singing—was elevated to its highest level. In due course, he excelled his master and created the *ruba'i* and the *taraneh* genres. His poetic talent combined with his skill at playing the lute, and his good voice gained him great renown. Eventually, he was summoned to the court of Amir Nasr ibn Ahmad II where he spent most of his life. A good part of his time was spent on the supervision of the work of junior poets, a position that became a prominent feature of the courts of later Samanid and Ghaznavid rulers and which benefited 'Unsuri the most.<sup>12</sup>

At the time of Rudaki, the Samanid court was the hub of the literary, scientific, economic, and social activities of the lands of the eastern caliphate. The Arab invasion had dislocated Iranians from Ctesiphon, Susa, and Ray, and relocated them in Transoxiana. In two centuries, a new Iranian milieu had developed and gained semi-independence. Saman Khuda seized upon this opportunity that had come to the Iranian lands. Centering his rule on Bukhara, he created the Samanid dynasty with a firm policy of reviving the lost legacy of the Iranian peoples.<sup>13</sup>

Rudaki served at the court of the Samanids of Bukhara (874-999), the only dependency in the Caliphate that was strong enough to promote nationalism and opulent and wise enough to push the frontiers of knowledge, rivaling Baghdad. Al-Tha'alibi, a contemporary traveler, provides a vivid description of life at the court of the Samanid Amirs:

"Bukhara was, under the Samanid rule, the Focus of Splendour, the Shrine of Empire, the Meetingplace of the most unique intellects of the Age, the Horizon of the literary stars of the World, and the Fair of the greatest scholars of the Period. Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Musa al-Musawi related to me as follows: 'My father Abu'l-Hasan received an invitation to Bukhara in the days of the Amir-i-Sa'id [Nasr II b. Ahmad, reigned A.D. 913-942], and there were gathered together the most remarkable of its men of letters . . . And when these were settled in familiar conversation one would engage with another in plucking the fringes of some discussion, each offering to the other fragrant flowers of dialectic, and pursuing the perfumes of Culture, and letting fall in succession necklaces of pearls, and blowing on magical knots. And my father said to me, "O my son, this is a notable and red-letter day: make it an epoch as regards the assembling of the standards of talent and the most incomparable scholars of the age, and remember it, when I am gone, amongst the great occasions of the period and the notable moments of thy life. For I scarcely think that in the lapse of the years thou wilt see the like of these met together." And so it was, for never again was my eye brightened with the sight of such a gathering.' "<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This name is variously recorded as "al-'Anak" and "al-'Abak."

<sup>11</sup> *Patvazhak* was originally used under the Sassanians in reciting poetry accompanied by *dutar*, *chang*, *barbat*, *'ud*, *tanbur*, and *rubab*. See Rajabov, 2003, p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> See Ghafurov, 1998, p. 512.

<sup>13</sup> For further details, see Anushe, 1979, p. 432.

<sup>14</sup> See Browne, 2002, pp. 365-66.

Rudaki's acquaintance with Bakhtiyar opened a new vista in his life—music. He traveled with Bakhtiyar all around the Kuhistan (the present-day Tajik highlands), composing and singing. When Bakhtiyar passed away and left him his famous lute, Rudaki continued the tradition and enjoyed a growing fame. By this time, he could have served at courts of lesser lights like Ahmad ibn Isma'il, Abu Ja'far Banuyeh, and Makan ibn Kaki. It is his acquaintance with Abu al-Fazl Bal'ami, however, that leads to his access to the court of Bukhara and to a prosperous life.<sup>15</sup>

There are several questions in Rudaki's life that have engaged the attention of researchers the most. For instance, there is an assertion in 'Awfi to the effect that Rudaki was blind from birth (*az madar nabina amadeh*).<sup>16</sup> But 'Awfi's assertion is not supported by other chroniclers of the time such as Sam'ani, Nizami 'Aruzi, and the anonymous author of *Tarikhi Sistan* (The History of Sistan). Could a poet conjure up delicate and delightful images of nature in the way that Rudaki has and be blind from birth? Some scholars, like Abu Hayyan Tawhidi, who lived close to Rudaki's time, give a positive answer. "Rudaki was born blind," Tawhidi says. "When he was asked about how he visualized colors, he answered, like camels." ([*Rudaki*] *az madar kur bizad, guftand rang dar nazdi to chegune ast? Guft manandi shutur*).<sup>17</sup> The response is ambiguous. It can mean he saw colors in the same way that he saw camels, or it can mean he saw color in the same manner that camels visualize color!

Could Rudaki have lost his vision gradually, or suddenly, due to an illness or unknown circumstance? In the West, Herman Ete was the first to cast doubt on Rudaki's blindness from birth; he was then followed by other scholars.<sup>18</sup> M. M. Gerasimov, who examined Rudaki's remains (1970), concluded that towards the end of his life the poet refused to follow tradition to produce empty praises of the ruler for pay. They held red-hot iron rods before his eyes and blinded him.<sup>19</sup> Aini states that the poet's ability to compose poetry is related to his hearing rather than to his vision. His verdict is that the poet was blind from birth. In either case, there is no doubt that Rudaki has a keen appreciation of images—seen or described to him. They form a wonderful reservoir on which he draws for the similes and metaphors with which he enriches his verse.

On the basis of 'Awfi's report, Gerasimov's effort at reconstructing Rudaki's physical features, and taking into account Sadridin Aini's and Abdulghani Mirzoev's studies of Rudaki's life, the following general assertion can be made. Rudaki lived a happy life as a child, listening to his people's stories and songs, learning about his contemporaries' ways, as well as about their aspirations and needs.<sup>20</sup> He lived a highly protected life at court and a forlorn and frustrating one after his banishment. He put words to his diverse experiences and expressed his peoples' desires alongside his own sentiments. Blindness to him seems to have been a nuisance, by no means a hindrance.

<sup>15</sup> See Dekhuda, 1956, p. 123; see also Safa, p. 372; see also Isomatov, pp. 46-64

<sup>16</sup> Safa, 1988, p. 373.

<sup>17</sup> Brazinskii, p. 432.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Rypka, for instance, agrees that Rudaki became blind later, but does not provide a cause. He asserts that on the basis of the fact that, according to Firdowsi, *Kalilah wa Dimnah* was read to him as he versified it. Rypka, 1968, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> Brazinskii, "Rudaki," *Ensiklopediai Sovetii Tojik*, vol. 6, P. 448.

Another issue that scholars have dwelled on is related to religion, especially Isma'ili Shi'ism that played a major role at the courts of the region; the Isma'ilis were seeking prominent personalities to support their doctrine and *da'wa*. It is alleged that Amir Nasr ibn Ahmad II was an Isma'ili and shared the faith with Abu al-Fazl Bal'ami who served as his prime minister for a long time. It is further speculated that Rudaki was a favorite of Abu al-Fazl Bal'ami and, according to Ravandi, there is evidence that Rudaki, and a number of other figures of the time, had Isma'ili tendencies.<sup>21</sup> According to Rypka, Amir Nasr ibn Ahmad II shared his Isma'ili tendencies with Rudaki.<sup>22</sup> This indicates that Nasr II, Bal'ami, and Rudaki shared the same views, if not the same faith. A fallout between Bal'ami and the Amir resulted in the dismissal of Bal'ami from the court in 937, and the banishment of Bal'ami's protégé, Rudaki, soon after. Whether the fallout was politically motivated, or was the result of religious intrigue, is hard to tell. What is certain is that Rudaki did not survive the humiliation and the lack of support at the court that he had enjoyed for the greater part of his life. According to *Al-Ansab* of Sam'ani, Rudaki died in wretched poverty in 940 (329 AH) in the village of Banuj.<sup>23</sup> Some of his later poetry describes his sentiments about his past and his disappointment with Fate. His *qasidah* entitled *Shikayat az Piri* (Complaint about Old Age) is an example.<sup>24</sup> Power politics, it seems, may have played a decisive role in the double banishment from the court rather than shared religious sentiments.

Yet another issue is related to Rudaki's connection with *Kalilah wa Dimnah*. The difficulty here is that this work was considered lost in its entirety until recently when some 120 *bayts* of it were discovered. The original work known variously as *Pancha-Tantra*, or the "Fables of the Bidpai," was part of the treasury of the rulers of India. Burzuyeh, the famed physician of Khusrow I Anushirvan (531-579), brought *Pancha-Tantra* to the Sassanian court, translated it into Pahlavi (Middle Persian) and, using other Indian sources, expanded it. Buzurgmehr, the well-known Sassanian wazir of Anushirvan, in recognition of the contributions of the physician, added yet another chapter about Burzuyeh to the work. After the fall of Iran to Islam, Ibn Muqaffa' (d. AD 762) translated *Kalilah wa Dimnah* into Arabic and Aban ibn Abd al-Hamid Lahaqi (d. AD 815) rendered the text into Arabic verse. It was not until the time of Nasr ibn Ahmad II that, encouraged by Abul Fadl Bal'ami, Rudaki produced a versified Dari (Farsi) version of the work. According to Firdowsi, Rudaki rendered the stories into Dari verse while the stories were being read to him.<sup>25</sup> Since 120 verses of the work have been attested to, it is safe to assume that Rudaki's connection to *Kalilah wa Dimnah* is firm.

Rudaki's life was quite eventful, especially during his youth. In fact, a good deal of the *qasidah* (ode) called *Shikayat az Piri* is a recollection of his youth, discussing his appearance, his association with women, and regret over the wealth that he had acquired and squandered.<sup>26</sup> His opulent life style and the fact that at the time he had the ear of the Amir have spawned a number of stories about him. The most fabulous among these stories is the one about an event in Herat

<sup>21</sup> Ravandi, 1969, vol. 2, pp. 227-28; see also Habibi, 1985, p. 874.

<sup>22</sup> Rypka, 1968, p. 144.

<sup>23</sup> Cf., Brazinskii, "Rudaki," *Ensiklopediai Sovetii Tojik*, vol. 6, P. 449.

<sup>24</sup> Brazinskii, p. 450. See further below for explanation.

<sup>25</sup> For a more complete account, see Habibi, 1985, p. 736.

<sup>26</sup> It is related that when Rudaki was young, he owned 200 slaves and that 400 camels carried his baggage from Herat to Bukhara.

that led to the composition and recital of his *Buy-e Ju-ye Muliyan*, or "The Fragrance of the Muliyan Brook."

The story is centered on Rudaki's power of persuasion. According to Nizami Samarqandi in his *Chahar Maqala* (Four Discourses), Amir Nasr ibn Ahmad II, Rudaki's main patron, wintered in Bukhara but spent spring and summer time in other delightful spots. One year the Amir had not only overstayed his visit to Herat but intended to spend the winter there as well. The Amir's retinue, the commanders of the army, and others who had been anxious to return to Bukhara, and to their families were disappointed at the revelation. They approached Rudaki and asked him to use his power of persuasion to move the Amir so that he would depart for his beloved Bukhara. Here is the transcription of the text of the poem that Rudaki composed and recited for the occasion. The transcription is followed by this author's translation:

#### Transcription

*Buy-e Ju-ye Muliyan ayad hami,  
Yad-e yar-e mehraban ayad hami.  
Rig-e Amu-yu doroshtiha-ye u,  
Zir-e pa chun parniyan ayad hami.  
Ey Bukhara shad bash u dir zi,  
Mir zi tu shadman ayad hami.  
Ab-e Jaihun az neshat-e ru-ye dust,  
Khenge ma-ra ta miyan ayad hami.  
Mir mah ast u Bukhara aseman,  
Mah su-ye aseman ayad hami.  
Mir sarv ast u Bukhara busetan,  
Sarv su-ye busetan ayad hami.*

#### Translation

The sweet fragrance of the Muliyan brook,  
Recalls memories, so long ago forsook.  
Rough sands of the Oxus beneath my feet,  
Caress them as would silk, soft and sweet.  
O Bukhara, live long, always full of cheer,  
Your guest's the Amir, joyous and dear.  
The Oxus, seeing the friend's joy and mirth,  
Leaps up warmly, to our horse's girth.  
Bukhara is the Sky, brilliant Moon is He,  
O mighty Sky, embrace Thy Moon with glee.  
Thou art the Mead, stately Cypress He,  
Receive Thee anon, Thy beloved Cypress tree.  
Adulation is beneficial, by any measure,  
Withheld would harm, O' Worthy Treasure.

جوى موليان  
سروده ابو عبدالله رودكى

بوى جوى موليان آيد همى  
ياد يار مهربان آيد همى  
ريگ آموى و درشتى هاى او  
زير پايم پرنيان آيد همى  
اى بخارا شاد باش و دير زى  
مير زى تو ميهمان آيد همى  
آب جيحون از نشاط روى دوست  
خنگ ما را تا ميان آيد همى  
مير ماه است و بخارا آسمان  
ماه سوى آسمان آيد همى  
مير سرو است و بخارا بوستان  
ماه سوى بوستان آيد همى  
آفرين و مدح سود آيد همى  
گر به گنج اندر زيان آيد همى

The story goes that the Amir did not wait for the *qasidah* to conclude. While Rudaki was still strumming his lute and singing, the Amir set off for Bukhara, leaving his riding-boots to be carried after him.<sup>27</sup> The circumstances of this event have been immortalized in a number of ways. To begin with, four hundred years after its composition, Vassaf composed an imitation of *Buy-e ju-ye Muliyan*. Rypka speculates that Vassaf felt that the poem did not carry the weight that it had been afforded.<sup>28</sup> In more recent times, Satim Ulughzoda, a major Tajik playwright, wrote a film script called *Qismat-i Sho'ir* (the Lot of the Poet),<sup>29</sup> and a movie was produced around the theme in 1957. Rasul Hadi-Zade's short story, "A Wind From Home," deals with the same subject.<sup>30</sup> But nowhere are the circumstances as neatly and appropriately recreated as in Haydn's Symphony 45 in F Sharp Minor; the symphony is appropriately called the "Farewell Symphony." It is the symphony's final movement that brings Rudaki's skill to mind most prominently.<sup>31</sup>

As is the case in "The Fragrance of the Muliyan Brook," the 4<sup>th</sup> movement is intended to gently remind Prince Nicholas Esterhazy that Vienna was waiting for his arrival, and that he should pack up and leave his summer palace. The prince had spent the entire fall of 1772 in Esterhazy and the length of his stay had affected the men in Haydn's orchestra; they were anxious to get home to their families in Vienna. In the same way that the soldiers and commanders in the camp of the Amir had approached Rudaki, the men of the orchestra approached their master, Haydn, and persuaded him to compose a symphony that would persuade the prince to hasten his departure for Vienna.

Haydn obliged with Symphony 45 in F Sharp Minor. In the last movement, Haydn's fast, driving dramatic music gives way to a gentle conclusion. At this point, per Haydn's instructions, the players, as they finished their solo parts, put out their candles and, one by one, left the stage. At the end of the movement only two violinists, one of whom was Haydn himself, remained, playing muted violins in the dark hall. They, too, in due time, blew out their candles and left the dark stage. Within a week of the performance, Prince Esterhazy and his courtiers arrived in Vienna and all was well. Needless to say, Haydn's "Farewell Symphony" became Prince Nicholas Esterhazy's most favorite symphony.

Persian sources attribute anywhere from 100,000 to 1,300,000 *bayts* to Rudaki.<sup>32</sup> Of these, only 1,000 *bayts* are in existence, and even those are fragments scattered among a number of biographies, histories, and books of advice.<sup>33</sup> Rudaki's major themes include passage of time, old age, the inevitability of natural death, the fickleness of fortune, importance of the matters of the heart, and the need to stay happy. He pays special attention to the role of the individual in the improvement of one's self and society. The individual, he says, must strive to achieve what is

<sup>27</sup> Aryanpur, 1973, pp. 71-72; see also Arberry, 1958, pp. 32-33; Browne, 2002, vol. 1, pp. 16-17.

<sup>28</sup> Rypka, 1968, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> Rypka, 1968, p.574. For information on Ulughzoda, see Bashiri, 2002, pp. 362-63; See also Rahimov, p. 652ff..

<sup>30</sup> Hadizade, pp. 147-155. For information on Ulughzoda, see Bashiri, 2002, pp. 111-12.

<sup>31</sup> Ajamoughli, [www1.gcs.k12.al.us/~techblitz06/ppt/composers.ppt](http://www1.gcs.k12.al.us/~techblitz06/ppt/composers.ppt). Downloaded January 30, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Safa, 1988, p. 378.

<sup>33</sup> Anushe, 1997, p. 433; see also Mulloahmad, pp. 159ff.

best for him. Although he lavishly showers kings, nobles, and champions with praises, his most cherished idols are knowledge and experience. This *bayt*, which until recently was thought to have been the only one surviving from the nearly 12,000 *bayts* of *Kalilah wa Dimnah*, appears on Rudaki's monument in Dushanbe.<sup>34</sup> It underscores the poet's lasting dedication to knowledge and experience:

*Har ki namukht az guzashti ruzgar,  
Niz namuzad zi hich amuzgar.*

No ordinary teacher will ever reach,  
Those whom Time has failed to teach.

Early court poetry used a very simple style. Rudaki's poetry follows that tradition and, while avoiding Arabism, reflects the charm of the pre-Islamic poetry of Iran. This is remarkable considering that his predecessors, two generations ago, had adopted the Arabic meter and rhyme schemes, as well as Arabic style, thought, and expression.

Because he avoids Arabism and does not use *Qur'anic* verses, his poetry is accessible to schoolchildren of today who enjoy his verses with little need for either explanation or interpretation.<sup>35</sup> It must be stated that, in spite of their simple diction, Rudaki's verses include a complete array of Persian poetic meters, used for the first time, and some 35 Persian rhythmic variations.<sup>36</sup> Altogether these account for why he is regarded as one of the greatest poets of the Khurasan school.

In general, Rudaki's poetic legacy can be divided into three categories. In the earlier stages of his career, he wrote love lyrics. Later on, love poetry gave way to poems focused on ethical themes. A prominent example of this is his versification of the *Kalilah and Dimnah* discussed earlier. Towards the end of his life, he wrote about his dissatisfaction with the situation in which he found himself, forlorn and in abject poverty. A good example of the poetry of this period is his *Shikayat az Piri*. This *qasidah*, like his other *qasidahs*, is unique in that it begins with a simple introductory set of remarks in the form of a *ghazal*, dealing with the main theme of the poem—old age.

*Mara besudu foru rikht anchi dandan bud,  
Nabud dandan labal chiraghi taban bud;*

Every tooth, ah me, has crumbled, dropped and fallen in decay!  
Tooth it was not, nay say rather, 'twas a brilliant lamp's bright ray;<sup>37</sup>

Old age is inevitable, he says. There is no reason, therefore, to look for either Providence, or Saturn's curse, to blame it on. The memories of the hours, days, and years that have resulted in one's old age remain unchanged. Those memories are as vivid at the end of life as they were

<sup>34</sup> At the present, about 120 *bayts* from the 12,000 original *bayts* are available. See Brazinskii, p. 450.

<sup>35</sup> Zarrinkub, 1968, p. 265.

<sup>36</sup> See Anushe 1997, p. 433.

<sup>37</sup> Arberry, 1958, p. 35.

when the Master of Time dealt them. Two things lingered in his imagination: the beauties he took to bed and the wealth he squandered.

Unfortunately, Rudaki's *diwan*, even though comparatively smaller in size than those of others, has not received the attention that it deserves. As Halimjan Za'irov clearly states, there are instances in the *diwan* where a closer scrutiny would yield better results than what is available today. This is not to deny the great work of Sa'id Nafisi and many others. Nevertheless, Rudaki's scattered verses deserve much more attention.<sup>38</sup> The study of the poetry of Rudaki in the West has a relatively long and productive history. It begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Amede Jardin's 1814 work entitled *Iran*, followed by Hammer Purgshtal's *History of Persian Poetry* in 1818, and Louis Liobo's *Iran*, which includes a biography of Rudaki (1841). With the appearance of the German scholar Herman Ete's *Rudaki: the Poet of the Samanids* (1873), the study of Rudaki enters a new phase. In his essay, Ete culls Rudaki verses from 23 sources and provides translations for each. In subsequent decades, Ete's work becomes the standard work for further study of Rudaki.

The contribution of the French appeared in James Darmesteter's *The Appearance of Persian Poetry*, published in 1887. Darmesteter evaluated Rudaki's verses, gave him very high marks, and called him the Homer of Iran. In 1890, the British author Charles Pickering called Rudaki Iran's Chaucer and reminded his audience that at the time that Rudaki contributed his masterpieces, Europe was passing through its dark ages.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West, the American scholar Paul Horn's 1904 *History of Persian Literature* is followed by William Jackson's *The Ancient Poetry of Iran* (1919). A most remarkable contribution in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is, of course, Jan Rypka's *The History of Perso-Tajik Literature* in Czech (1956), followed by an English translation, *The History of Iranian Literature* in 1968.

In the East, contributions begin in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the Urdu scholar Shibli Nu'mani's five-volume work entitled *Shi'r ul-Ajam* (1924), wherein he provides a comprehensive view of Rudaki.<sup>39</sup> This is followed in Iran by the three-volume contribution of Sa'id Nafisi entitled, *Life and Verses of Abu 'Abdullah Ja'far ibn Muhammad Rudaki*. This work, completed during the decade of the 1930's, provides the most comprehensive study of the life and works of the poet. Other Iranian scholars who followed Sa'id Nafisi in providing information on Rudaki are Hushang Mustawfi, *Prominent Iranian Poets* (1934); Rezazade Shafaq, *History of Iranian Literature* (1943); and Zabihullah Safa, *History of Literature in Iran* (1955). In Russia, A. Krimskii's *History of Iran, Its Literature and Sufism*, appeared in 1914, followed by Tajikistan's Sadridin Aini's *Ustad Rudaki*. Aini not only studied the poetry of Rudaki but also investigated the circumstances of the poet's birth and death. He even discovered the burial place of Rudaki.<sup>40</sup> His findings resulted in a celebration of the anniversary of the birth of the poet in Tajikistan in 1958. In 1960, E. Bertles examined the whole corpus of Rudaki's work in light of the documents of the time.<sup>41</sup> The literary historian Abdulghani Mirzoev, who has published a number of articles and treatises on the poet, has also contributed a great deal to our better understanding of Rudaki's life and times.<sup>42</sup> Mirzoev's contributions include *Rudaki wa Inkishafi Ghazal dar*

<sup>38</sup> Za'irov, 2005-06, pp. 23-46.

<sup>39</sup> For a comprehensive look at Nu'mani, see Rypka, 1968.

<sup>40</sup> For more information, see Ghafurov, 1998, vols. 1-II, p. 512.

<sup>41</sup> For a more comprehensive account, see Brazinskii, p. 452.

<sup>42</sup> Rypka, 1968, p. 599.

*Sadahai Dah to Panzdahi Miladi* (Rudaki and the Discovery of *Ghazal* during the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries) and *Asari Rudaki* (Rudaki's Works), both published in 1958.<sup>43</sup> Rasul Hadizadeh's article regarding the most recent activities in Tajikistan regarding Rudaki is also noteworthy.<sup>44</sup> The study of the works of Rudaki is an ongoing event in the various countries of the Middle East. Rather than in monographs, Rudaki's works appear in textbooks, letters, and journals in Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Tunis.<sup>45</sup>

Little can be added to the body of literature on Rudaki other than stating that his life took the trajectory that the lives of many of the poets of his generation took—from poverty to riches and back to poverty. His assets were his talent as a first-rate poet, good looks, eloquence in reciting his own superb poetry, and the ability to accompany his recitations with his own musical performance. His deficits included an allegation of Isma'ilism within a triangle of power that led to the demise of both his patron and himself. His contributions include some 1000 verses in almost all the genres, and his inclusion in that poetry of a nearly complete prosodic scheme for future Persian poets to follow. His *Kalilah wa Dimnah* remains a superb contribution in Iranian and Islamic ethics. It would not be an exaggeration to assert that without the foundation that Rudaki established for Iranian nationalism, and without the urgency with which he prompted Iranians to return to their roots, phenomena like the codification of the *Khudainameh* and the creation of Firdowsi's monumental *Shahname* might not have happened.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Ja'far Yahaqqi, who assesses the impact of Rudaki's verses on Persian poets who followed him, states that Rudaki's influence on Khayyam was great because Khayyam built upon the Iranian thought that was sustained by Rudaki. Furthermore, he regards this influence to be cumulative. Rumi, he says, used Iranian thought in a unique way while Hafiz summarized it into what we recognize as his wisdom and *rendi*.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> For further information on Mirzoev, see Bashiri, 2002, pp. 195-96

<sup>44</sup> Hadizadeh, pp. 208-213.

<sup>45</sup> For details, see, Karimian, pp. 87-99.

<sup>46</sup> Cf., Mirshahi, pp. 296-301.

<sup>47</sup> Yahaqqi, pp. 213-224.

### Selected Bibliography

- Ajamoughli, Allie. *Little Known Facts about Classical Composers*,  
[www1.gcs.k12.al.us/~techblitz06/ppt/composers.ppt](http://www1.gcs.k12.al.us/~techblitz06/ppt/composers.ppt), Downloaded January 30, 2007.
- Anushe, Hassan. *Daneshnameye Adabii Farsi* (An Encyclopedia of Persian Literature),  
 Daneshnameh Publishers, 1997.
- Arberry, A. J. *Classical Persian Literature*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958.
- Aryanpur, Manoochehr. *A History of Persian Literature*, Kayhan Press, 1973.
- Babaev, Faizullah, "Se Pirahani Yusef," *Rudaki*, vols. 8-9, 2005-06, pp. 11-21.
- Bashiri, Iraj. *Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century*, The International Borbad  
 Foundation, Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, 2002.
- Browne, Edward G. *A Literary History of Persia*, vols. I-IV, Goodword Books, 2002.
- Brazinskii, I. "Rudaki," *Ensaiklopediai Sovetii Tojik* (Soviet Tajik Encyclopedia), vols. I-VIII  
 (M.S. Osemi, ed.), Dushanbe, 1986.
- Dehkhuda, Ali Akbar. "Letter R," *Lughatnama*, Tehran University Press, 1956.
- Ghafurov, Bobojon. *Tojikon: Ta'rikhi Qadimtarin, Qadim, Asri Mianah, va Davrai Nav*, (The  
 Tajiks: Their Most Remote History, Remote History, Medieval Times, and Modern  
 Days), Irfan Publishers, 1998.
- Hadizadeh, Rasul, "Az Rudaki ta 'Ruzi Rudaki'," *Rudaki*, vols. 8-9, 2005-06, pp. 208-213.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "A Wind From Home," *At the Foot of the Blue Mountains: Stories by Tajik Authors*,  
 Raduga Publishers, Moscow, 1984.
- Habibi, Abdulhai. *Tarikhii Afghanistan Ba'd az Eslam* (History of Afghanistan After Islam),  
 Dunyai Kitab, 1985.
- Isomatov, Ma'ruf. "Ustad Rudaki wa Bal'amiyan: Az Nigahi Ta'rikh," *Rudaki: Diruz wa Emruz*,  
 2007, pp. 49-64.
- Karimian Sardashti, Nader, "Jaigahi Rudaki dar Adabiyiyati Arab," *Rudaki*, vols. 8-9, 2005-06,  
 pp. 87-99. Lazard, Gilbert. "The Rise of the New Persian Language," *Cambridge History  
 of Iran*, vol. IV, Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Mirshahi, Mas'ud. "Rudaki wa Ferdowsi," *Rudaki: Diruz wa Emruz*, 2007, pp. 296-301.
- Mulloahmad, Mirza. "Asar-i Rudaki," *Rudaki*, vols. 8-9, 2005-06, pp. 159-180.
- Rahimov, Saadulloh. "Qismati Sho'ir: Shinosnomai Millat," *Rudaki: Diruz wa Emruz*, 2007, pp.  
 652-672.
- Rajabov, Askarali. "Historical Traditions of the Time of Rudaki," *From the Hymns of  
 Zarathustra to the Songs of Borbad* (I. Bashiri, ed.), The International Borbad  
 Foundation, Dushanbe, 2003.
- Ravandi, Murteza. *Tarikhii Ijtima'ii Iran* (A Social History of Iran), vols. I-VI, Amir Kabir  
 Publishers, 1969.
- Rypka, Jan. *History of Iranian Literature*, D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1968.
- Safa, Zabihullah. *Tarikhii Adabiyiyati Iran* (History of Persian Literature), Tehran, 1988.
- Suleymani, Qahraman, "Chera Rudaki Buzurg Ast," *Rudaki*, vols. 8-9, 2005-06, pp. 5-6.
- Yahaqqi, "Rudaki wa Khayyam," *Rudaki*, vols. 8-9, 2005-06, pp. 213-224.
- Za'irov, Halimjan, "Bahsi Piramuni Chand Bayti Rudaki," *Rudaki*, vols. 8-9, 2005-06, pp. 23-46.
- Zarrinkub, Abdul Hussein. *She'ri Bidrugh, She'ri Bineqab* (Truthful, Unmasked Poetry),  
 Muhammad Ali Ilmi Publishers, 1968.