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The Career of Mirzâ Qâsem Jonâbâdi in the Light of Afzal al-tavârîx*

Mirzâ Moḥammad Qâsem Jonâbâdi, also known by his nom de plume Qâsemi, was an eloquent poet contemporary with Šâh Esmâ‘īl and Šâh Ṭahmâsp Ṣafavi. He was best known for his mastery of the ‘epic or historiographical maqâna’ style of poetry which recommended him to both Safavid monarchs. Although manuscript copies of his works have survived in abundance his life and the course of his career at Šâh Ṭahmâsp’s court still remain obscure. This is largely due to a lack of sufficient documentary evidence. We have to depend mainly on numerous tagkeres or a scattering of biographical information found in the poet’s own poems to reconstruct his life. Both sources however are limited in that they serve to delineate only the broadest outline of his life and career. The tagkeres are mainly concerned with his social background and a list of his works.¹ We still have only tentative answers to many questions such as: did he enjoy an official position at court or did Ṭahmâsp reward him for his Šāhnâmes? Did he remain in the service of Šâh Ṭahmâsp or did he emigrate in search of a new patron?

The seventeenth century court chronicle Afżal al-tavârîx² (pls. I-II) offers new independent evidence which should help us place Qâsemi’s career at the Safavid court and his relationship with Šâh Ṭahmâsp in a clearer perspective. The evidence consists of an official document (farman) appointing Qâsemi the poet laureate at the court of Šâh Ṭahmâsp and also an obituary notice which reaffirms the official position which he enjoyed at court. The primary aim of this study is to examine the authenticity and reliability of the evidence presented here. It is also hoped that the process will throw some light on Qâsemi’s life and literary career. Last but not least, this preliminary study

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¹ The most important of these tagkeres are: Sâm Mirzâ Ṣafavi (1314: 26-28); Qazvini (1340: 169-80); Āzar (1336-40: I, 278-80).

² Fażl b. Zeyn al-ʿ Ābedin b. Ruḥ Allâh al-Xuzâni al-Eṣfâhâni, Afżal al-tavârîx II, India Office OR. 4678; hereafter, Afżal II.
will question the conventional wisdom based on the notion that unlike the Ottoman Sultans, the Safavid Šâhs did not appoint poet laureates who would compose a versified history of their reign.

The Poet

Qâsemi, was a native of Gonâbâd in Khorasan. He belonged to a family of sayyids and was the son of Amir Sayyid Jonâbâdî who was the religious leader (pišvā va moqtadā) of his town. Qâsemi’s brother Amir Abu’l-Fath continued the family tradition and succeeded his father as the mayor (kalân-tar) of Gonâbâd (Šafâ 1369: 363) while Qâsemi himself emulated the poverty of the lives of the Prophet and the Imams and adopted an ascetic life (Šâm Mirzâ Šafavi 1314: 26).

Qâsemi had studied with Mir Ğiyās al-Din Manṣur Širāzī and had a reputation as a master mathematician. He was also a pupil of Mowlānā ‘Abd-Allâh Hâtefī, a native of Xargird (modern Langar), a dependency of Jâm, who was the nephew of ‘Abd al-Rahmân Jâmi and also a celebrated poet at the Timurid court in Herat. Like his mentor Hâtefī, Qâsemi belonged to the late Timurid school of poetry and continued this literary poetic tradition into the Safavid period. Both Hâtefī and Qâsemi were the guardians of the Mausoleum of Qâsem-e Anvâr at Xargird (Bernardini 1996: 116).

A number of poetic forms and genres flourished in this period, the most popular and extensive of which was the magnavi (Vittor 1978: 602). This form was an imitation of the Šâhnâmâ genre which used rhymed couplets in the motaqareb meter of Ferdowsi’s original (Woodhead 1983: 159). Qâsemi

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3 Qazvini (1340: 168) notes ‘another variant of the name of this town is “Jonâbâd” which is at present known as Gonâbâd’.

4 Šafâ claims that Mirzâ Qâsem inherited this office from his father but he withdrew and his brother took the office.

5 Qazvini (1340: 169, n. 1), cites Nafâ ‘es al-Ma’âser.

6 Qazvini (ibid.: 113), notes ‘‘Abd al-Rahman Jâmi held his nephew Hâtefī in high esteem and whenever ‘Abd-Allâh Hâtefī went from Jâm to Herat, Soltan Ŵoseyn Mirzâ [Bâyqarâ] and Mir ‘Ali Šîr, his Vazir and sepâhsâlûr, bestowed on him great honour and affection’.

7 Šâh Qâsem Anvar was originally from the Sarâb district of Tabriz. He became a disciple of Sayx Şadr al-Din Ardabili, the leader of the Safavi order, and according to his instructions moved to Gilan. He later went to Herat where he found many followers. He was a Sufi and a poet of high standing. He finally settled in Jâm where he died in 837/1433 (Âzar 1336-40: I, 109-11; see also Bernardini 1996: 116, n. 69).

8 For a survey of literature during the Safavid period see Šafâ (1986: 948-64).

9 Šafâ (1369: 354) has traced the revival of the magnavi to Majd al-Din Muḥammad Pâyizi, the twelfth-thirteenth century poet, who wrote the ŠâhnâseŠâhnâmé and dedicated it to Šultân Moḥammad Xârazmshâh. See also Bernardini (1996: 99).
Afżal al-tawāřix, Ms Or 4678, f. 3v. (By permission of the British Library).
Afżal al-tavārīx, Ms Or 4678, f. 4r. (By permission of the British Library).
devoted himself to writing in this poetic form and as was the fashion at the
time, he imitated the major *magnavīs* by earlier poets, most notably the *Xamse*
by Nezāmī. A large number of manuscript copies of Qâsemi’s works have
survived in an unrefined form which suggests that his works had a wide read-
ership (Bernardini 1996: 102).¹⁰ In a letter to the Mughal Emperor Akbar,
Qâsemi listed his works as follows (Ṣafâ 1364: 719):

1. Šāhnâme-ye Mâži
   (Šâh Esmâ’îl)¹¹
   940/1533
2. Šāhnâme-ye Šâh Ẓahmâsp
   (Also known as Šāhnâme-ye Navvâb-e ‘Alâ)¹²
   950/1543
3. Šāhnâme-ye Šâhroxi
   (On the reign of Šâhrokh Timuri but written
   at the time of Šâh Ẓahmâsp)
   950/1543
4. Xosrow va Širin-e Qâsemi
   (In honour of Sâm Mirzâ)
   950/1543
5. Layla va Majnun
   (In honour of Šâh Ẓahmâsp)
   947/1540
6. Zobdat al-ašʿâr
   ?

We may also add the following works to this list:

7. Čogânnâme
   (Commissioned by Šâh Ẓahmâsp)¹³
   947/1540
8. Šâhnâme-ye Xâni
   (Possibly at some date after 963/1555 in
   honour of Soltân Mahmûd the governor of
   Bhakkar in the Sind region of India).
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*The Position of Qâsemi at the Court of Šâh Ẓahmâsp*

One major factor in the decline of the language and literature in general
and poetry in particular, in the Safavid period, is thought to have been the

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¹⁰ Bernardini also examines the revival in popularity of Qâsemi’s historical epics in the later Sa-
favid period.

¹¹ This *magnavi* is partly attributed to Hâtefi. Sâm Mirzâ Şafavi (1314: 96-97) notes that in
917/1511 during his Khorsan campaign, Šâh Esmâ’îl met Hâtefi and commissioned him to
write an account of his victories in verse and named it *Fotuhat-e Šâhi*. Hâtefi was already
ninety four years old and he only wrote one thousand *hayts* of this *magnavi* before he died in
927/1520 (see also Qazvini 1340: 115-18). It is generally believed that Qâsemi continued the
work of Hâtefi and completed it ten years after Šâh Esmâ’îl’s death.

¹² Šafâ (1986: 957) has noted this work as Šâhnâme-ye Navvâb ‘Ali.

¹³ Qâţî ʿĀhmâd Qomi (1395: 590) claims Qâsemi dedicated *Guy va Čogân* or *Čogânnâme* to
Soltân Ibrâhîm Mirzâ.
court’s failure to patronise the poets and authors adequately. To a large extent this was the effect of the Safavid religious policy which only encouraged composers of elegies and panegyrics of the Shi‘i Imams – that is the chief figures of Shi‘i hagiology – and discouraged any secular artistic activity (Ṣafā 1986: 949-50, 953-54). The absence of active royal patronage of secular arts reached its peak during the reign of Šāh Ṭahmāsp who developed a particular disdain for all secular arts and poetry in particular. The course of the artistic career and fortunes of Qâsemi too were affected by the attitude and the culture which prevailed at Ṭāhmasp’s court.

It is generally believed that although Šāh Ṭahmāsp commissioned Qâsemi to write several masnāvis he did not reward the poet for his labours. Poetic expressions of Qâsemi’s indignation at his treatment by Šāh Ṭahmāsp are widely reported in both primary and secondary sources (Qâži Ahmad Qomi 1395: 590; Rumlu 1347: 462; Ṣafā 1364: 718, 723). However, it seems that the notion that Šāh Ṭahmāsp did not compensate Qâsemi for his works is entirely based on the brief obituary of the poet which originally appeared in Ḥasan Rumlu’s Aḥsan al-tavārīx (1347: 462). Rumlu reports Qâsemi’s death in the year 982/1574 and notes ‘that because [they] had not given him a prize for the Šāhnāme he wrote these bayts in grievance’. In this poem, inspired by the meanness of his patron, presumably Šāh Ṭahmāsp, Qâsemi draws a parallel between his own experience and that of his illustrious eleventh century predecessor Ferdowsi who experienced similar ingratitude at the court of Mahmud Gaznivi for his Šāhnāme. He writes ‘deprivation is a property of the Šāhnāme’. He then laments, and possibly consoles himself, that ‘the gift of a base and ignoble man is equal to death’ (ibid.).

We find that Rumlu’s tradition is followed by later chroniclers. Qâži Ahmad Qomi too reports this obituary verbatim in Xolāsāt al-tavārīx and also lists a number of Qâsemi’s works (Qâži Ahmad Qomi 1395: 590). We also find a reference to Rumlu’s obituary in secondary sources. Ṣafā relates it to explain the reason for the poet’s emigration to Bhakkar into self-imposed exile, which he has erroneously identified as Diyār Bakr (Ṣafā 1364: 718; see also Qazvini 1340: 170, n. 1). However Tazkere-yeye meynāine which is the main source on the life and works of Qâsemi does not offer any biographical information on the development of the poet’s career as do none of the other tazkeres. This is partly due to the fact that most of these authors used Tohfe-yey Sāmi by Prince Sâm Mirzâ, Šâh Ṭahmâsp’s brother, as their basic source. Sâm Mirzâ completed his tazkere of the poems by 957/1550, only seven years after Qâsemi had completed his Šāhnāme-yeye Nāvva-b-e ‘Alâ [‘Alî] for Šâh Ṭahmâsp and before future events in the life of the poet unfolded. Furthermore, because of his close relations with Ṭahmâsp and also his close proximity to the court it would have been politically inconceivable for Sâm Mirzâ to write on the subject of Ṭahmâsp’s alleged ingratitude towards Qâsemi. On the other hand, the farmân of investiture and also
the obituary of Qâsemi, found in Afzal al-tavârîx, offers new independent evidence and represents a break with this historiographical tradition.

The Farmân of Investiture

The text of this valuable farmân appears on folio 3 of Afzal al-tavârîx and is inserted immediately after the narrative of Šâh Ţahmâsp on 19 Rajab 930/23 May 1524. This arrangement of material is clearly intended to emphasise the timing of Qâsemi’s appointment which coincided with the Šâh Ţahmâsp’s accession or soon after. It is significant that Faţli begins Afzal al-tavârîx with the appointment of Qâsemi and devotes so much attention to the poet. He attaches greater importance to the appointment of the poet laureate than to any of the political appointments which were made at the same time. On his accession Šâh Ţahmâsp appointed Div Sulîtan Rumlu and Köpek Sulîtan Ustâjlu as co-Vicegerents (vakil). Amir Qavâm al-Din Hûsain was appointed to share the office of the Ṣadr with Amir Jalâl al-Din Muhammad Āstârabâdî and Qâzî Jahân Sayfî was appointed Vazir. We find Faţli makes only a passing reference to these appointments (Afzal II, f. 4r; see also Rumlu 1347: 185; Qâzî Ahmad Qomi 1395: 156). We can not be certain of the motives of the historian but given that Hasan Rumlu’s Ahsan al-tavârîx served as a basic source for Afzal, we can assume that Faţli was aware of the historiographical tradition in regard to the controversy surrounding Qâsemi’s relationship with Šâh Ţahmâsp and possibly endeavoured to counter it. The significance of Faţli’s inclusion of this farmân at the start of his history may also be sought in the use which the historian has made of Qâsemi’s poems which are liberally interspersed in the narrative. The use of these panegyrics, which are carefully woven into the prose, was clearly a historiographical device which Faţli utilised in order to glorify the reign of Šâh Ţahmâsp and produced the official document of Qâsemi’s laureatship at the beginning of his history in order to validate his use of this literary source. Faţli was not alone in his appreciation of the power of poetry in perpetuating the kingly authority. If authentic, the farmân of investiture of Qâsemi as poet laureate, and more importantly its timing, would signify the importance the ruling elite at the court of Šâh Ţahmâsp attached to poetry in the exercise of sovereignty. Qâsemi was entrusted with the task of providing a testimony to Šâh Ţahmâsp’s greatness. This was however premature as it would take the young Šâh at least a decade to attain a degree of power. It also ran counter to the wisdom of an earlier age until a reign attains stability and its connections are firm, poets do

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14 In volume 1 of Afzal al-tavârîx, Eaton Collection (MS Eaton/Pote, 172), Cambridge University, f. 2, Faţli notes that most of the verses found in the first and second volumes of his history are by Mirzâ Qâsemi Jonâbâdî.
not begin to praise it'.

Fažli first begins with the report that the Grand Vazir Xvâje Jalâl al-Din Moḥammad Tabrizi presented Qâsemi, who had composed poems for Šâh Esmā‘il, at court to the young Šâh Ṭahmâsp. The poet recited a panegyric of the Šâh which he had composed for the occasion of his accession. The poem praised Ṭahmâsp as the world conqueror and the successor to Jamšid and Alexander. The eulogy also refers to Ṭahmâsp as a ‘sapling from the garden of the Prophet, a descendant of ‘Ali, and the guardian of the earth and the time’. Qâsemi further reiterated the Safavid Šâhs’ mahdistic claims by comparing Šâh Ṭahmâsp to the Mahdi who is ‘in command of the army of the End of Time’ (Afaq al II, f. 3r). Šâh Ṭahmâsp listened to the recitation of the poem, appointed Qâsemi as the poet laureate of the august dominions, and ordered the secretaries to register the farmân.

These official documents usually have a standard structure. They begin with the opening formula ‘The august command has been given’. This formula appears to be missing from the opening paragraph of this farmân. This may be due to clerical error at the time of transcription rather than a proof of its lack of authenticity. Instead it begins with a lengthy praise of Qâsemi’s literary attributes. The document however ends with the standard formula ‘The document (parvâncə) has received the royal seal, so let them honour it’.

After the initial praise of Qâsemi comes the confirmation of his appointment as the poet laureate (malek al-šo‘arâ). The appointment entrusted to him the task ‘of versifying the events of Ṭahmâsp’s reign day by day and thus immortalising his reign’. It also stipulates that the poet laureate be awarded the annual sum of sixteen tumans and 2,342 Khurasani dinars as soyurgâl and subsidies (madad-e ma‘ās). The sum of money was the revenue accruing from the ‘aforementioned districts as is registered in the book of standing enactments’. Unfortunately the farmân does not name the districts. This term of reference to the districts however suggests that the farmân was issued to confirm an existing grant of soyurgâl and subsidies rather than create a new one. In such cases it was customary to include the districts or the communities not in the main body of the text but list them on the back of the document.

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15 This is attributed to Muḥammad ‘Ali Râvandi, the author of the history of the Seljuqs Râhat al-Sodur wa-ayat al-sorur (Meisami 1994: 190).

16 Soon after his accession, Šâh Ṭahmâsp ordered Xvâje Jalâl al-Din to be punished by burning in his hometown of Tabriz. Fažli claims Xvâje Jalâl al-Din’s execution resulted from the long standing enmity which had developed between him and Div Solṭân Rumlû, Šâh Ṭahmâsp’s first Vicegerent. Thus it appears that Xvâje Jalâl al-Din was one of the first to fall victim to the power struggle which began with Ṭahmâsp’s accession (Afaq al II, f. 8v + 9v).

17 Instead of the customary phrase ‘mohr-e aṣraf’ (‘the royal seal’), Fažli has inserted ‘mohr-e mehrâbâd’.

18 The text of the farmân is damaged at this point and the reading of the figure 2,342 is uncertain.

19 A similar document, dated 1067/1656 which confirms and redistributes the existing grant.
farmān then goes on to emphasise that the ‘men of genius’ and ‘perceptive men’ should recognise Qāsemi’s ennoblement (mirzā’ī) and also declares him the Šāh’s special companion at the royal assemblies. It concludes with a command to the political dignitaries to pay the poet laureate utmost respect and to the landlords and the subjects of the ‘aforementioned districts’ to honour their fiscal obligations to Qāsemi and pay him the requisite taxes (māl-o jihāt va vojuhāt) without delay.

Unfortunately the text of this farmān is badly damaged in parts, particularly in the opening paragraph, which makes a critical assessment of the authenticity of the document rather difficult. Determining the authenticity of this document is further complicated by the errors which may have resulted from the clerical procedures at the chancery where such farmāns of investiture would have been transcribed. Although standard formats and formulas were employed in composition of such official documents, the scribes at the chancery were often guilty of transcribing a text incorrectly or leaving out critical introductory sections (Mitchell 1997: 183, 193). This problem could have been further exacerbated by Fażli himself who may have left sections out or even paraphrased the text as he copied it from its original. Furthermore, since we do not have access to the original farmān we can not determine the authenticity with the aid of certain features such as the use of different inks or corroborating seals (ibid.: 193). Afzal offers the only surviving copy of this farmān and until and if the original comes to light we cannot ascertain its authenticity. However, it serves to question certain historical views of modern scholarship and also opens up fresh avenues for future research.

The discovery of this farmān of investiture casts doubt on the conventional wisdom based on the notion that although poets and poetry were an essential and prized component of Safavid court culture, unlike the practice at the Ottoman court, no salaried and official poet laureates were appointed at the Safavid court. At the Ottoman court, the office of Şehnâmeci was first inaugurated in the 1550s by Sulṭān Suleymān and is believed to have functioned until the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Şehnâmeci’s chief function was to compose a literary account of the contemporary events of the Sultan’s reign, taking Ferdowski’s Şâhnâme as his model (Woodhead 1983: 160). At the Ottoman court the Şehnâmcis were therefore the early court historiographers. The farmān of investiture also outlines a similar function for Qāsemi as a historian of Šahmâsp’s reign. Viewed in this light, Qāsemi’s lit-

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20 At the Safavid Round Table at Edinburgh in 1998, Michele Bernardini and Jean Calmard suggested that although the Şâhnâme of Ferdowski was very popular at the courts of Šāh Esmâ’īl and Šāh Šahmâsp and also served as a model for composing the contemporary Şâhnâme-ye Ḥaẓrat-e Šâh Esmâ’īl but unlike the practice at the Ottoman court, the Safavid Šâhs did not appoint an official Şehnâmeci.
tery output deserves to be studied for its value as a historical source as it does for its literary merits.

In the absence of sufficient documentary evidence, at present it is not possible to obtain a comprehensive picture of the career of a poet laureate at the court of Šâh Ṭahmāsp or establish any precedent for it at the court of Šâh Esma‘il. There is however uncorroborated evidence that Qâsemi may not have been the first poet laureate at the Safavid court during the first half of the sixteenth century. Both Pârsâdust and Aubin identify an obscure poet by the name of Ḥabibi Bargšâdi (or Baragšâdi) as Šâh Esma‘il’s poet laureate. Pârsâdust also claims that the brutality of Šâh Esma‘il’s religious policy forced Bargšâdi to emigrate to the Ottoman empire and seek refuge at the court of Bâyazid II (r. 886/918-1512; see Pârsâdust 1375: 787; Aubin 1988: 37, n. 151). It has not been possible to compile a biography of Bargšâdi as his name does not appear in any of the Safavid court chronicles or the biographies of poets. Nor can we establish whether he too was commissioned to write a Šâhnâme. However, Ferdowsi’s Šâhnâme was very popular both at the court of Šâh Esma‘il and also in the Šarbatxâne, which later became the coffee house, where reciters would sing the heroic exploits of Rostam to the public. Šâh Esma‘il was so fond of Ferdowsi’s Šâhnâme that he named three of his sons after Ferdowsi’s heros: Ṭahmâsp, Bahram, Sâm (Pârsâdust 1375: 754). In 917/1511-12 Šâh Esma‘il also commissioned Mowlânâ ‘Abd-Allâh Hâtefî, who was the tutor and mentor of Qâsemi, to write a history of his achievements in verse and in the style and metre of the Šâhnâme of Ferdowsi. Hâtefî entitled this history Šâhnâme-yé Ḥaẓrat-e Šâh Esma‘il or Šâhnâme-yé Šâh-e Mâzî but could not complete it before he died in 927/1520-1 (Browne 1924: 227-29). There is no evidence that Šâh Esma‘il appointed Hâtefî the poet laureate. This would have been unlikely since Hâtefî was very old by this time and lived the life of a recluse at Xargird near Jâm in Khorasan and occupied himself with farming. The task of finishing Šâhnâme-yé Ḥaẓrat-e Šâh Esma‘il was left to Hâtefî’s pupil and friend Qâsemi who completed it in 940/1533. It is possible that Hâtefî’s attempt to chronicle the victories and achievements of Šâh Esma‘il in verse inspired Šâh Ṭahmâsp to commission Qâsemi to compose a similar work of his reign and to reward him with the office of poet laureate.

Further research and documentary evidence are required to establish a similar pattern of appointing poet laureates for the later periods of Safavid history. Šâh ‘Abbâs was a great lover of poetry and a generous patron of poets. One of his favourite cultural activities was listening to the recitation of the Šâhnâme by his favourite poets. Several prominent poets were, from time to time, present at his court, among whom we can name Šaraf-al-Dîn Ḥasän

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21 Pârsâdust does not identify his source; Aubin gives Tohfe-yé Sâmî (ed. Homâyunfarrokh, Tebrân n.d., p. 357) as his source. Dastgerdî’s edition of Tohfe-yé Sâmî, however, offers no information.
Šafā‘i, ‘Abd al-Razzāq Xošnevis Qazvini and Mollā Bixodi Gonābādī (Falsafī 1370: 342-43). Šāh ‘Abbās rewarded Qazvini with an annual salary of three hundred tumans and Gonābādī, who was a famous Šāhnāme-x̒ān [reciter of Šāhnāme], with an annual salary of forty tumans (ibid.: 343). However, there is no indication that Šāh ‘Abbās ever awarded either poet with the title of malek al-šo‘ārā. Among the poets associated with Šāh ‘Abbās the position of the physician Šaraf al-Dīn Ḥasan Šafā‘i (d. 1037/1628) remains uncertain. Roemer (1986: 275) claims that he was appointed the poet laureate. The primary sources do not corroborate this and their evidence is contradictory. He enjoyed much respect and recognition at court and received many payments and gifts from the Šāh but according to Taẓkere-yé meyḵāne he was never enlisted in the rank of the Šāh’s close companions (Qazvini 1340: 524).22 It is possible that Šafā‘i’s excessive fondness for satire (hija or hajv) may have disqualified him as a candidate for the prized position of royal confidant or laureatship. Šāh ‘Abbās is reported to have disapproved of his satirical works and occasionally criticised him for it (Āzar 1336-40: III, 951, n. 2). Šāh ‘Abbās may not have had a poet laureate but he did commission another poet Kamālī (d. 1020/1611) to compose an account of his military exploits in verse in a compendium titled Šāhnāme or ‘Abbāsnāme. According to Āzar, the author of Ātaškade, Kamālī completed the Šāhnāme but because of some misfortune it was not presented to Šāh ‘Abbās (Āzar 1336-40: I, 406; see also Roemer 1986: 275).

Other famous poets associated with ‘Abbās’s court were Mowlânā Šāni Tekkelu and Taqī Auhādi.23 Mowlânâ Šāni Tekkelu always accompanied the Šāh who held him in such high esteem that he rewarded him by measuring his weight in gold in Qazvin in 1001/1592. However, Mowlânâ Šāni fell from favour and Taqī Auhādi, the author of Taẓkere-yé Auhādi, replaced him at court. Auhādi travelled extensively with Šāh ‘Abbās and because he was unmarried he even lived in the palace precincts in the care of the chief of the royal attendants (mehtar-e farrāšān) to be on call at all times.24 There is however no indication that either Mowlânâ Šāni or Auhādi were appointed poet laureate.

As this brief survey illustrates, there is actually no evidence against the view that the Safavid Šāhs appointed poet laureates. It is rather the absence of any categoric reference in the sources to this practice which prompts the speculation as to the status of prominent poets at the Safavid court. This ambiguity in the primary sources adds all the more value to the farman of appointment of Qâ‘esmi as Šāh Ṭahmāsp’s poet laureate.

22 Āzar (1336-40: III, 951) contradicts this evidence and reports that Šafā‘i was enlisted as the companion of Šāh ‘Abbās.


24 Taẓkere-yé Auhādi, f. 14v. See also Qazvini (1340: 137).
The Obituary of Qâsemi

In the obituary of Qâsemi, reported under the events of the year 982/1574, Faţîl again confirms and commemorates the poet’s life-long service to the Safavi Šâhs. Faţîl reports (Afżal II, f. 271v):

Mirzâ Qâsem Jonâbâdî Xorâsâni who has versified the victories of His Majesty the Warrior of the Faith Abu’l-Baqî Šâh Esma‘îl, whose abode is with ‘Ali, and of His Majesty Šâh Šâhmâsp Safavi, may he rest in paradise, has died. This author Faţîl Eşfâhâni has [included] in the first and second volumes of Afżal al-tavârîx his poems in testimony. After eighty two years of panegyrizing the dynasty of prophecy and authority (dudmân-e nobuvat va velâyat) [Mirzâ Qâsem] has met his Maker. He prayed for the benevolence of the rightful Imams for intercession for his sins. His Majesty bestowed great favours on his son and confirmed his soyurğâl and regular salary in the son’s name.

As this obituary states, Qâsemi spent his life at the service of the Safavi dynasty and Šâh Šâhmâsp not only rewarded him for his literary services but also confirmed the transfer of his soyurğâl to the poet’s son after his death. Together the farman of appointment and the above obituary support the idea that throughout his life Qâsemi enjoyed a high standing and a secure position at the courts of both Šâh Esma‘îl and Šâh Šâhmâsp. There is however a body of evidence to suggest that he may have in fact emigrated from Iran in the latter part of his life.

The Question of Qâsemi’s Emigration

Qâsemi himself offers the most reliable evidence in one of his poems which appears to be part of his history of Solţân Maḥmud (Qâzi Ahmad Qomi 1395: 443-46). The poem begins with a panegyric of Solţân Maḥmud which praises him as the ‘Xân of the age’. Qâsemi next praises his own talents as a poet and the power of poetry to perpetuate the name of kings. Next he gives the first clue as to his connection with Bhakkar and says: ‘The precious gems of Bhakkar came to the shore of my thought’ (Qâzi Ahmad Qomi 1395: 444).

The poet proceeds to list his previous works. He begins with the two Šâhnâmes (of Šâh Esma‘îl and Šâh Šâhmâsp). This is followed by the announcement that he at present is writing the Šâhnâme-ye xâni. Presumably this is the title Qâsemi gave to the magnâvi he dedicated to Solţân Maḥmud of

25 Qâzi Ahmad Qomi includes this poem under the events of the year 971/1563 and in connection with the arrival of Abu’l Makârim, the ambassador of Solţân Maḥmud Xân, to Šâhmâsp’s court in this year. He introduces the poem as part of a history of this dynasty which “the late Mirzâ Qâsem Jonâbâdî” wrote in verse. Širâzî (1369: 122, 126) also corroborates that Qâsemi went into the service of Solţân Maḥmud in India.
Bhakkur. Qâsemi also includes *Layla va Majnun, Guy va Čogân, Širin va Xosrow,* and *Šâhroxnâme* in this list.

Next comes an interesting revelation. He boasts to be ‘the master’ of Ferdowsi and asserts that if Ferdowsi, who complained of his misfortune, had been as treasure loving (*ganj sanj*) as he [Qâsemi], and wise enough to pane-gyrise a king who possessed both a crown and a treasure, he too would have been gratified. Qâsemi obviously believed that he was financially more astute than Ferdowsi. He falls in that category of poets who despite persistent profession of poverty and asceticism, sought the patronage of powerful rulers and went where he found the highest bidder. This evidence indirectly supports the notion that Qâsemi had not received the reward he had hoped for from Šâh Ṭâhmasp. Possibly the initial grant of *soyurgâl* had been insufficient and he expected a greater reward.

He next states that he went to India. The reason the poet states for his travel to India varies according to different copies of the *Xolâšât al-tavârîx* in which we find this poem. It could be ‘in search of a story’ (Qâzi Ahmad Qomi 1395: 445, n. 7) or ‘in search of friends’ (ibid.: 445). Both would have been crucial for the continued intellectual vitality of a distinguished poet in this period and Qâsemi appears to have found both. He clearly found a new patron in Solṭân Maḥmud, the influential and powerful governor of Bhakkur who provided him with rich material for his *Šâhnâme-ye xâni*. On the strength of this evidence we can now consider Şafâ’s assertion that Qâsemi went to the court of Sultân Mahmud, the *vâli* of Diyâr Bakr, as unreliable (Şafâ 1364: 718).

The precise date of Qâsemi’s trip to India is difficult to determine. Solṭân Maḥmud became governor of Bhakkur in 963/1555, a year before Homâyun’s death and Akbar’s accession, and continued to play an active role in the politics of the Sind region until his death in 982/1574 (ʻÂrâm and ʻAffârī-fârî)

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26 Solṭân Maḥmud of Bhakkur [or Bukkur] was a local ruler and the commander of the army of the last king of the Arghân dynasty Šâh Hoseyn. After the death of the latter the Sind region was gradually incorporated into the Delhi empire. Solṭân Maḥmud accepted Akbar’s claim to the Sind region and thus retained his power. To strengthen the political alliance with Akbar, Solṭân Maḥmud had his daughter admitted into the imperial harem. In return he obtained from Akbar, a title, a robe of honour befitting the kings, a jewelled sword, a caparisoned horse, and four elephants. Solṭân Maḥmud was renowned for his liberality, courage and wisdom (Aitken 1907: 100, 105).

27 Eskandar Beg Turkman [Monšî] clearly distinguishes those poets of Ṭâhmasp’s reign who solely relied on royal and aristocratic patronage from those poets who despite their poverty and deprivation remained independent of rich patrons and relied on their own crafts and trades for their livelihood. In this second category he names Mowlânâ Forûğî Atûr whose shop in Qazvin was a gathering place for poets or Mowlânâ Ţâbxi Qazvîni who made a living from cooking (Turkman 1334: 187-88).

28 The copy at the National Library of Malek.

29 The copy at Irâb-e Bâstân Museum.

30 It seems that Şafâ misread ‘Bakr’ and interpreted it as Diyâr Bakr.
1373: 88). It is therefore possible to date the beginning of Qäsemi’s association with the governor of Bhakkar to 963/1555. This date is significant since it coincided with Šāh Ţahmâsp’s edict of 963-4/1555-56 banning all forms of art. Although Šāh Ţahmâsp was an avid patron of all arts in the early part of his reign he is reputed to have gradually withdrawn from artistic patronage and his gradual disengagement from the arts and worldly pleasures culminated in the above edict (Simpson 1998: 12, 18).

As the dates of the completion of the magnâvis also show, Šāh Ţahmâsp did not sponsor any works of poetry by Qäsemi after 950/1543. Šāh Ţahmâsp had developed a disdain for poetry by the time he promulgated his edict, as his instructions on the subject of the education of his fourth son Prince Sultân Soleyman Mirzâ illustrate. In 964/1556 Ţahmâsp summoned the four year old Prince from Shiraz where he had been raised from birth under the supervision of Ebrâhim Xân Zu’l-qadr and sent him to Khorasan to continue his education under the guidance of Soltân Ebrâhim Mirzâ. Šāh Ţahmâsp specifically ordered that the young prince should abstain from all the reprehensible acts and refrain from wearing silk clothes. He also ordained that the young prince should first learn to read the word of God (kalâm-e malek-e ‘ālâm), or the Quran, and then read Persian treatises in the requisite subjects and strictly forbade the young Prince to read any books of poetry (Qâzi Aḥmad Qomi 1395: 391-92). Eskandar Beg Monši reports that Šāh Ţahmâsp’s aversion to secular poetry and poets arose from his belief that poets were broad and liberal in their religious belief and conduct and were not godly. This change of literary taste on the part of Šāh Ţahmâsp led many poets to compose poems in praise of the Imams or elegies commemorating their martyrdom. A most famous example is that of Moḥtašam Kâsâni who in the hope of a suitable reward, wrote two panegyrics, one for Šāh Ţahmâsp and another for Princess Pari Xân Xânom (Browne 1924: 172). Šāh Ţahmâsp did not reward Moḥtašam and remarked:

Poetry written in praise of kings and princes was sure to consist largely of lies and exaggerations, according to the well-known Arabic saying, ‘The best poetry is that which contains most falsehoods’, but that, since it was impossible to exaggerate the virtues of the Prophet and the Imams, the poet could safely exert his talents to the full, and in addition would have the satisfaction of looking for a heavenly reward.\footnote{This translation is taken from Browne (1924: 173). It also appears in Šafâ (1986: 954), and in its original source (Turkman 1334: 179).}

Moḥtašam promptly composed a hafì-band, or poem of seven-verse strophes, in praise of the Imams and was duly rewarded (Browne 1924: 173; Turkman 1334: 178).

With Šāh Ţahmâsp’s spiritual and psychological conversion the intellectual climate at court would have been unfavourable to Qäsemi and lucrative royal patronage would not be forthcoming.\footnote{Šāh Ţahmâsp’s aversion to all forms of art also affected the staff of his royal ketâbxâne. Many}
dence to support the notion that Šâh Ṭahmâsp’s aversion to the arts was short lived. We find that only six years after the date of the famous edict, in 968-69/1560-61, Šâh Ṭahmâsp commissioned his favourite poet Qâži ‘Aţâ Allâh Râzî to compose a poem to celebrate the completion of the new royal palace ‘Áli Qâpu and the gardens of Sa‘âdatâbâd in the new Safavid capital Qazvin.33 Râzî evoked the grandeur of the royal palace in four distiches which the master calligrapher Mowlânâ Malek Deylami inscribed on the portal of the palace. The poet and historian ‘Abdi Beg Navidi too was commissioned to praise the splendour of the garden of Sa‘âdatâbâd in a book of verse.34 Navidi accomplished this task in his book Jannat-e ‘Adn (Echraqi 1996: 110-11).

The Appraisal of Afżal al-tavârīx’s Evidence

The farmân of investiture appointing Qâsemi as the poet laureate at the court of Šâh Ṭahmâsp, found in Afżal, is a rare document. It extends our knowledge of Qâsemi’s life and also challenges the theory that the Safavid Shahs did not follow a tradition of fostering poet laureates. The farmân of investiture appointing Qâsemi the poet laureate may well be a document belonging to the early part of the reign of Šâh Ṭahmâsp when he was an enthusiastic patron of arts. In this period he would have keenly granted Qâsemi royal patronage and the farmân simply confirms this.

The argument for the authenticity of the farmân is strengthened by the fact that the second volume of Afżal al-tavârīx is a depository of official documents. This farmân is one of the 24 documents included in this chronicle, versions of some of which can be found in other sources. The author clearly had access to official archives and did not need to forge a document. Furthermore, given that the majority of the works produced by Qâsemi were carried out by royal commission it is plausible that he actually enjoyed an official position as the poet laureate at court, particularly in the early part of Šâh Ṭahmâsp’s reign when he was an avid patron of arts.

Fażlí’s obituary of Qâsemi too offers an independent view of the poet’s life and achievements. This, however, counters the historiographical traditions

33 Prince Šâm Mirzâ notes in his biography of poets that Qâži ‘Aţâ Allâh was a courageous, outspoken and honest young man and for this reason no one liked him. He also confirms that for a time he was a companion of Sâheb Qerân (Šâh Ṭahmâsp) but later moved to Varâmin where he was living at the time (Šâm Mirzâ Šafavi 1314: 32).

34 ‘Abdi Beg Navidi was from a noble family of Shiraz and had a reputation for honesty and piety. He was also employed in the Royal Secretariat (ibid.: 59).
pertaining to the latter part of Qâsemi’s life and is more difficult to corroborate. As we have seen, by the time Qâsemi had completed his three Šâhnâmes and as Šâh Ţahmâsp grew increasingly averse to secular arts, neither the artistic and intellectual climate nor the financial prospects at the Safavid court would have been favourable for him. Furthermore, Qâsemi’s own verse supports the notion that he left Iran for India. We cannot determine whether he remained in India until his death in 982/1574 or he returned to Iran sometime before that date. According to one tradition, in his old age Qâsemi donated his hereditary wealth to the sum of two thousand tumans as a religious endowment to the shrine of Imam Rezâ in Mashhad (Qazvini 1340: 170, n. 4). He may have indeed returned to Iran in later life but until fresh evidence comes to light we cannot accept Afzal’s evidence that Qâsemi enjoyed a life-long service at Ţahmâsp’s court as reliable. The view that Šâh Ţahmâsp and Qâsemi enjoyed an uninterrupted and fruitful patron-client relationship to the end is more consistent with Faţli Eşfâhâni’s tendency to rewrite history than it is with historical reality.

The evidence presented here is far from conclusive. It does, however, call for further research into the career of Mirzâ Qâsem Jonâbâdi’s literary career in particular and the political and cultural function of prominent poets at Safavid court in general.

APPENDIX

The Farmân of Appointment of Mirzâ Qâsem as the Poet Laureate

... we have appointed him as the poet laureate so that just as he versified the account of the battles and victories of my father, whose abode is with ’Ali, with divine favour [Mirzâ Qâsem] should turn into verse the events of our eternal reign from day to day, and thus leave a token of remembrance on the face of the world. And every year from the aforementioned districts (mahâl-e mażkure-ye zemn) the sum of sixteen tumans and 2342 Khorasani dinars, which is registered in the book of standing enactment (daftar-e xolud) should be granted to him as soyurğâl and subsidies (madad-e ma’âš) so that he may pray

35 Qazvini cites Amin Aḥmad Râzi the author of Haft Eqâlim.
36 For a discussion of this problem see Abrahams (1999: 45-105).
37 The short introductory section which seems to praise Qâsemi’s literary attributes is barely legible and has not been translated.
38 It appears that the districts are not listed in the main text of the farmân.
39 The reading of ‘thousand’ is uncertain.
for the continuity of [our] eternal reign. The men of genius and perceptive men should obey the said Mirzâ and should consider their obedience of him a requisite of orderly affairs and the good of the country. They should not neglect to pay respect to that exalted and enchanting orator who is universally praised for his eloquence and whose rules of poetry adorn every divân, ranging from the scholarly to the novice. The exalted vazirs, the grandees, the men of learning, the mayors (kalântarân), the landlords, the subjects, and the natives of the God-protected dominions should esteem him as the companion of the special assembly. They should show him the utmost respect and kindness.

The document (parvânca) has received the royal seal so let them honour it.

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40 This sentence is not fully legible. The translation is therefore an abridged version.

41 The next sentence is not fully legible but it is clearly a reference to the duties and obligations of the landlords and the subjects residing in the districts revenues of which had been granted to Qasemi as soyurgâl. It affirms the taxes (mâl va jihâl) payable to Qâsemi.
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