

THE TAZKIRA ARAFAT AL-'ASHIQIN BY TAQI AL-DIN MUHAMMAD IBN MUHAMMAD AVHADI: A SOURCE-CRITICAL, LITERARY, AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *This article examines the Persian biographical tazkira Arafat al-'Ashiqin, which holds a significant place in the history of Persian literature. The author, Taqi al-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad Avhadi, lived and worked in Agra, India, at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. The article discusses the structure of the work, the number and classification of poets, details about female poets, as well as the sources used by Avhadi in compiling the tazkira. The historical, literary, and scholarly value of Arafat al-'Ashiqin is explored in detail.*

Keywords: *Arafat al-'Ashiqin, tazkira, Bibi Otin, Oysha Samarqandiy, Robiya*

The Persian-language biographical work Arafat al-'Ashiqin by Taqi al-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad Avhadi, dating to the late 16th century (Hijri 1022–1024 / CE 1613–1615), belongs to the genre of comprehensive tazkiras that richly document numerous poets. According to Said Ali al-Dawud in his article “On the Structure and Author of Arafat al-'Ashiqin”, this tazkira remains insufficiently studied and unpublished. The only extant copy written in Nasta‘liq script is preserved in the Malik Library in Iran under inventory number 5324. Three other manuscript copies exist: in the Dewan Library of India (no. 313), the Asafiyah Library (no. 609), and the National Library of Bengal (no. 685).

This article is based on the research of Said Ali al-Dawud, Ahmad Gulchin Ma‘ani, and Said Ali Riza Naqavi. The tazkira describes 3,463 Persian-speaking poets from past generations up to the author’s time. The entries are organized alphabetically into 28 chapters, each referred to as a harf (letter). Each chapter has three sections: poets of the past, poets from the intermediate period (roughly contemporary to the author), and modern poets (contemporaries of the author). In the introduction, the author provides details about his own lineage.

In Tārikh-i Tazkirah-hā-yi Fārsi, Ahmad Gulchin Ma‘ani mentions 3,300 poets, while Said Ali Riza Naqavi in Tazkirah-Navisi-yi Fārsi dar Hind va Pakistan lists 3,190 names. However, Said Ali al-Dawud, working directly with the manuscript, confirms 3,463 poets. He speculates that due to missing portions in the library copy, the full work likely covered more than 3,500 poets.

Before writing this tazkira, Avhadi authored Jannat-i Khayāl-i Avhadi, which only included poets' verses. At the advice of an elder, he expanded this idea, enriching the content with poet biographies and anecdotes. In the introduction, Avhadi notes that he worked on Arafat al-'Ashiqin for two years and never gifted it to anyone. The work begins with a section on Rudaki, and since Avhadi lived in Agra, it also includes descriptions of Indian cities.

For the compilation of this work, Avhadi used a wide range of classical sources, including:

Lubāb al-Albāb

Alisher Navoi's Majālis al-Nafā'is

Davlatshah Samarqandi's Tazkirat al-Shu'arā'

Jami's Nafahāt al-Uns

Nizami 'Arudi's Chahār Maqāla

Fakhrī Hiravī's Jawāhir al-'Ajā'ib

Tazkirat al-Nisā'

He also included accounts of contemporary poets based on his experiences at poetry gatherings and personal meetings. In the preface, he recounts his journey to India and explains the reasons behind writing the tazkira. A special section is devoted to Rudaki's poetry.

As previously mentioned, the tazkira is divided into 28 chapters, each corresponding to a letter of the Persian alphabet. The first chapter, devoted to poets whose names start with alif, includes 274 ancient poets and 139 contemporary poets, totaling 423 entries. The subsequent chapters contain the following counts:

Bā' 245 : (ب) poets (37 in the first section, 51 in the second, 156 in the third)

Tā' 44 : (ت) poets

Thā' 9 : (ث) poets

Jīm 114 : (ج) poets

Hā' 170 : (ح) poets

Khā' 88 : (خ) poets

Dāl 52 : (د) poets

Dhāl 11 : (ذ) poets

Rā' 114 : (ر) poets

Zāy 40 : (ز) poets

Sīn 167 : (س) poets

Shīn 207 : (ش) poets

Sād 105 : (ص) poets

Dād 26 : (ض) poets

Tā' 62 : (ط) poets

Zā' 3 : (ظ) poets

'Ayn 411 : (ع) poets

Ghayn 57 : (غ) poets

Fā' 148 : (ف) poets

Qāf 21 : (ق) poets

Kāf 25 : (ك) poets

Mīm 435 : (م) poets

Nūn 206 : (ن) poets

Wāw 71 : (و) poets

Hā' 46 : (ه) poets

Yā' 53 : (ي) poets

The lām (ل) chapter is missing or contains no entries. In total, approximately 80,000 couplets are included, illustrating the work's rich poetic content and historical narratives. This tazkira became a valuable resource for later compilers such as Vali Daghistani, who extensively used Arafat al-'Ashiqin in his Riyāz al-Shu'arā'. Scholars categorize this work as a general, historical, or bayāz-style tazkira due to its comprehensive nature and wealth of historical material.

In the second manuscript (preserved in the Royal Library), 29 female poets are mentioned, while other versions list 22. According to Said Ali al-Dawud in his article "Female Poets in Arafat al-'Ashiqin", Avhadi reintroduced many forgotten women poets into historical memory.

Table 1. Women Mentioned in Arafat al-'Ashiqin (based on Said Ali al-Dawud's article)

Podshoh Xotun	Jahon Mulk
Jamil	Qoshg'ariy qizi Mutriba
Badriddin Hiloliy qizi	Robiya bint Ka'b
Saida binti Nosir	Oisha Samarqandiy
Fotima Xurosoniy	Mahastiy
Bibi Mehriy Jaloyir	Bibi Otun
Ofoq Jaloyir	Bibi
Turon Shoh	Bibi Hadiya
Bibi Orzu	Saida Begim
Mahastiy	Nihoniy Qoini
Nihoniy	Nihoniy Akbar Obodiy
Nihoniy (Hindistonda yashovchi)	Oysha Samarqandiy
Nisoiy	Co'roxi
Duxtari Solor	Xonzoda Tabriziy

Conclusion:

Arafat al-‘Ashiqin is a monumental tazkira in the history of Persian literature, offering biographical information on nearly 3,500 poets. Its special attention to female poets and the blending of verse and anecdote to illuminate the poets’ lives and cultural context makes this an invaluable resource for literary scholars. It also served as a primary source of inspiration for subsequent tazkira writers.

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