



Jami's Poetic Epistles to the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu Rulers*

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Abstract

This study examines the poetic epistles addressed by the eminent Persian poet Nur al-Din Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414-1492) to the rulers of the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu dynasties, with particular attention to their literary, historical, and epistolary significance. Although medieval Persian epistolography occupies an important place in the literary tradition, poetic letters have received comparatively limited scholarly attention, largely because of their occasional and highly personalized character. Jami's *Divān* contains several verse epistles dedicated to contemporary sovereigns, including Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahanshah, Aq Qoyunlu Sultan Ya'qub, Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (Mehmed the Conqueror), and Sultan Bayezid II. These compositions transcend conventional courtly panegyric by combining refined poetic expression with historically grounded observations on political authority and rulership.

The article demonstrates that Jami's correspondence – both prose and verse – is distinguished by its predominant orientation toward contemporary rulers, its encomiastic function, and its frequent composition as responses to previously received letters. By situating these texts within the broader tradition of Persian epistolary literature, the study highlights their dual value as sophisticated literary works and as historical documents reflecting the political, cultural, and intellectual networks of the fifteenth-century Islamic world. Furthermore, it argues that Jami's poetic letters provide important evidence for studying diplomatic and literary relations between Timurid, Qara Qoyunlu, Aq Qoyunlu, and Ottoman courts. Through literary-historical analysis, the article underscores the significance of these verse epistles as unique sources for understanding both the literary value of medieval Persian poetry and the political culture of the medieval Middle East.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Epistolary literature occupies a distinctive place in the literary heritage of the medieval Islamic world, where correspondence functioned not only as a means of communication but also as an important vehicle for literary expression, political discourse, and intellectual exchange. Despite the richness of this tradition, poetic epistles have received relatively limited scholarly attention, largely because they were often composed for specific individuals. Their occasional nature, together with the dispersed preservation of these texts in individual authors' collections, has made systematic investigation particularly challenging. Nevertheless, several medieval Persian authors compiled their official and literary correspondence under the title *Munsha'āt* ("Collections of Letters"), preserving these works as valuable examples of artistic prose and poetic composition. Among the most significant examples are the bilingual (Arabic and Persian) correspondence of Khāqānī Shirvānī and the Persian *Munsha'āt* of Nur al-Din Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414-1492), both of which have long attracted the attention of scholars of Persian literature¹.

Recognized as one of the greatest representatives of classical Persian literature and frequently described as the last great master (*khātām al-shu'arā*) of the classical poetic tradition, Jami left behind an extensive corpus of both prose and verse correspondence. His letters can generally be divided into prose (*mansūr*) and poetic (*manẓūm*) forms, while some combine prose and poetry in accordance with established conventions of Persian epistolography. Unlike the prose letters collected in his *Munsha'āt*, Jami's poetic epistles are preserved within his *Divān*, where they appear among the sections devoted to qasīdas and mathnawīs rather than as an independent literary category. Their original headings frequently identify the recipient and, in some cases, the reasons for their composition, thereby providing valuable historical context for interpreting these works².

Jami's poetic correspondence possesses significance that extends beyond its literary artistry. These texts constitute important historical documents reflecting the political and cultural landscape of the fifteenth century. Addressed to prominent rulers – including the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahanshah, the Aq Qoyunlu Sultan Yā'qub, the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (Mehmed the Conqueror), and Sultan Bayezid II – they provide valuable insights into Jami's relations with these political circles. Although these poems are conventionally regarded as panegyrics, they frequently contain subtle historical observations, political allusions, and carefully embedded personal evaluations that transcend the conventions of courtly praise.

The historical value of medieval poetry has increasingly attracted scholarly interest, as many poetic works preserve information absent from contemporary chronicles and historical narratives. Through metaphor, allusion, symbolism, and rhetorical ambiguity, poets were often able to express political opinions that could not be articulated directly. Consequently, literary texts should be examined not merely as aesthetic productions but also as historical sources that reveal contemporary perceptions of rulers, political events, religious affiliations, and cultural interactions. Jami's poetic epistles exemplify this dual function, where literary sophistication coexists with historical testimony.

Although Jami's life and literary legacy have been extensively studied, his poetic letters have not been examined separately and in detail. Existing scholarship generally discusses these texts only within broader studies devoted to Jami himself or to the rulers to whom the poems were addressed. Their literary structure, epistolary characteristics, historical implications, and literary purpose therefore remain insufficiently explored. This gap is particularly evident in relation to Jami's correspondence with the rulers of the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu dynasties, whose political significance makes these texts especially valuable for understanding the interaction between literature and power in the medieval world.

Against this background, the present study investigates Jami's poetic epistles addressed to the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu rulers from both literary and historical perspectives. By situating these poems within the broader context of fifteenth-century literary culture, the article seeks to demonstrate that Jami's poetic correspondence constitutes not only an important contribution to classical Persian literature but also a valuable source for understanding the political, cultural, and ideological dynamics of the medieval Islamic world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literary and historical legacy of Nur al-Din Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414-1492) has attracted sustained scholarly attention for more than a century. Existing research has primarily focused on his mystical thought, lyric poetry, narrative works, and his position as one of the last great representatives of classical Persian literature. However, Jami's poetic correspondence has received comparatively limited academic consideration, and the literary as well as historical significance of his verse epistles addressed to contemporary rulers remains insufficiently explored.

One of the earliest comprehensive studies of Jami's life and works was produced by Ali Asghar Hikmat (1320, 1963), who examined the poet's biography, intellectual environment, literary achievements, and influence on Persian literature. Hikmat's work

established an important foundation for subsequent Jami studies by documenting the poet's relationships with major political figures of the Timurid period and emphasizing his exceptional position within the Persian literary (Hikmat, 1320, 1963).

A significant contribution to the study of Jami's poetry was made by A. Afshakhzod (1988), whose monograph explores the poetic and stylistic features of Jami's lyric works and his creative engagement with his predecessors. Although Afshakhzod occasionally refers to Jami's correspondence with rulers, his analysis primarily concentrates on textual criticism and poetics rather than on the epistolary features or historical implications of the poet's verse letters. Likewise, E. Bertels (1965) discusses Jami principally within the broader context of Persian literary history and his literary relations with Alisher Navā'i, without undertaking a systematic analysis of his poetic correspondence.

Studies conducted in Azerbaijan have substantially contributed to understanding Jami's literary works and manuscript tradition. Nağıyeva (2007) examined the circulation of Jami's manuscripts in Azerbaijan and assessed the extent of his works' influence on the country's literary heritage. Nevertheless, this research is devoted primarily to manuscript studies and does not specifically investigate the literary characteristics of Jami's poetic epistles.

Research concerning the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahanshah (Ḥaḳīqī) has also provided valuable context for interpreting Jami's correspondence. Değirmançay (2004) produced the most comprehensive study of Jahanshah's Persian poetry and critically edited his *Divān*, thereby facilitating a better understanding of the literary dialogue between the ruler and Jami. Similarly, Macit (2012) examined Jahanshah's Turkish poetry, while Atıcı Arayancan (2010) analyzed his political career, administrative organization, religious policy, and cultural patronage. These studies illuminate the historical environment in which Jami composed his verse letters but devote little attention to Jami's own literary or the poetics and construction of his correspondence.

Primary historical sources likewise contribute essential information regarding the political context of Jami's letters. Works such as Abu Bakr-i Tihriani's *Kitab-i Diyarbakriyya*, Faḍlullāh ibn Rūzbihān Khunji's *Tārīkh-i Ālam-ārāy-i Amīnī*, and collections of Timurid and Safavid diplomatic correspondence preserve valuable evidence concerning the political relations among the Timurid, Qara Qoyunlu, Aq Qoyunlu, and Ottoman dynasties. Although these chronicles occasionally mention rulers who appear in Jami's correspondence, they do not analyze the literary dimension or ideological nuances of his poetic epistles.

Recent studies by Shikhiyeva (2012, 2013, 2016) have advanced scholarship by exploring the relationship between poetry, political authority, and religious identity in the works of Jami and his contemporaries. These studies argue that medieval panegyric poetry often contained subtle political criticism concealed through metaphor, symbolism, and rhetorical ambiguity. In particular, the analysis of Jami's correspondence with Jahanshah demonstrates that beneath the conventional language of praise the poet expressed a more complex position shaped by religious affiliation and political circumstances. Nevertheless, these publications examine specific aspects of individual poems rather than providing a comprehensive investigation of Jami's poetic correspondence with the rulers of the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu dynasties.

Overall, the existing scholarship has significantly advanced our understanding of Jami's literary legacy and the historical context of the fifteenth-century Persianate epistolography. However, no previous study has systematically examined Jami's poetic letters to the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu rulers from the perspectives of literary analysis and historical context. The analysis of the issue from this perspective is particularly significant because these poems function simultaneously as historical testimonies. The present study addresses this lacuna by offering a comprehensive analysis of Jami's verse epistles, demonstrating their significance not only within the tradition of classical Persian literature but also as valuable sources for the study the political, and literary interactions of the medieval Islamic world.

3.METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative literary-historical research methodology based on close textual analysis, comparative literary analysis, and historical-contextual interpretation. The primary objective is to examine Jami's poetic epistles addressed to the rulers of the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu dynasties by investigating their literary characteristics, epistolary structure, and historical significance.

The principal sources for the analysis are Jami's *Divān*, *Munsha'āt*, and other relevant works, particularly the poems dedicated to Jahanshah, Sultan Ya'qub, Sultan Mehmed II, and Sultan Bayezid II. These texts are examined in their original Persian language on the basis of critical editions. In addition, contemporary historical chronicles – including *Kitāb-i Diyarbakriyya*, *Tārīkh-i Ālam-ārāy-i Amīnī*, and collections of Timurid and Aq Qoyunlu correspondence – are consulted to establish the historical circumstances surrounding the composition of the poems and to verify references to political events and historical personalities.

The analysis adopts the principles of close reading in order to identify the multilayered meanings embedded within the poems. Particular attention is devoted to rhetorical devices characteristic of classical literature, including *ihām* (double entendre), *talmīḥ*

(allusion), metaphor, symbolism, lexical ambiguity, and intertextual references. These literary devices are examined not merely as aesthetic ornaments but also as mechanisms through which Jami conveys political opinions, religious attitudes, and personal evaluations while formally adhering to the conventions of panegyric.

A comparative approach is further employed to examine similarities and differences among Jami's poetic letters addressed to various rulers. The study compares their structural organization, stylistic features, and thematic content in order to determine how the poet adapted his literary expression according to the political status, intellectual background, and personal characteristics of each recipient. Particular emphasis is placed on comparing the correspondence addressed to Jahanshah and Sultan Ya'qub, since these poems provide the richest evidence for understanding Jami's literary relationships with the Turkman dynasties.

The study also integrates a historical-hermeneutic approach, interpreting the poems within their broader political and cultural contexts. Rather than treating panegyric poetry as purely conventional praise, the research investigates how historical realities, sectarian affiliations, diplomatic relations, and contemporary literary relations are reflected through symbolic and often deliberately ambiguous poetic language. This contextual reading makes it possible to distinguish between conventional encomiastic discourse and the poet's implicit ideological or personal positions.

Finally, the article adopts an interdisciplinary perspective combining literary, and historical analysis. By examining Jami's poetic correspondence simultaneously as literary compositions, and historical testimonies, the study seeks to demonstrate that these verse epistles constitute valuable sources for the examination of political, and literary interactions among the Timurid, Qara Qoyunlu, Aq Qoyunlu, and Ottoman courts during the second half of the fifteenth century.

Jami's Poetic Epistle to Jahanshah of the Qara Qoyunlu: Literary Evaluation and the Epistolary Genre Features

One of the enduring characteristics of medieval *divān* poetry is its dual significance as both a literary achievement and a reflection of historical reality. Beyond their aesthetic value, many poetic compositions preserve historical information that is absent from contemporary chronicles, thereby functioning as important supplementary historical sources. From this perspective, the *Dīvān* of Nur al-Din Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414-1492) deserves particular scholarly attention. In addition to lyrical and didactic poetry, Jami's *Dīvān* contains a number of poetic letters and panegyrics addressed to representatives of the major ruling dynasties of the fifteenth century, including the Timurids, the Qara Qoyunlu, the Aq Qoyunlu, and the Ottomans. Among these texts is a poetic epistle composed in response to a letter sent by the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahanshah (Ḥaḳīqī).

Although Jami's poetic reply to Jahanshah has been mentioned in several previous studies (Değirmançay, 2004, pp. 62–64; Macit, 2012, pp. 52–53; Ḥaḳīqī, 2001, p. 16), it has not yet been subjected to a comprehensive literary analysis. More broadly, the collection of poetic epistles contained in Jami's *Dīvān* demonstrates that the poet enjoyed considerable prestige not only among the Timurid court, where he spent most of his life, but also among the rulers of the Qara Qoyunlu, Aq Qoyunlu, and Ottoman states. His correspondence reflects the broad geographical and political influence of his literary authority throughout the Persianate world.

Ali Asghar Hikmet, citing the Turkish researcher M. Nuri Gencosman, observes that:

"The rulers of India, Iran, and Azerbaijan – among them the Timurids, the Aq Qoyunlu, and the Qara Qoyunlu, despite belonging to different religious sects and political traditions – competed with one another to attract Jami's attention. Yet Jami responded to all of them with humility, living a simple life devoted to mystical contemplation and dervish ideals." (Hikmet, 1963, p. V)

An important feature of Jami's correspondence should also be emphasized. Unlike the lengthy panegyrics traditionally composed by court poets, Jami consistently addressed contemporary rulers – including Jahanshah, Sultan Ya'qub, Sultan Mehmed II (Mehmed the Conqueror), and Sultan Bayezid II – with comparatively brief poems. His encomium dedicated to Sultan Mehmed II, whom he refers to as *Muḥammad-i Rūmī*, is strikingly concise. Similar brevity characterizes his poems addressed to Jahanshah, Sultan Ya'qub, and Bayezid II.

At first glance, this unusual brevity raises an obvious question: did Jami refrain from composing extended *qaṣīdas* because of limited poetic inspiration, or was he somehow compelled to write only short compositions? The available evidence suggests neither explanation. Rather, the poet deliberately adapted the length and structure of each poem to its subject, recipient, and intended rhetorical effect. Indeed, in his letter to Sultan Ya'qub, Jami explicitly remarks that excessively long panegyrics might fail to please their recipient, a point that will be discussed in a subsequent section of this article. More generally, the internal evidence of Jami's panegyrics indicates that their poetic architecture, language, imagery, and rhetorical organization reflect not only the author's intellectual disposition but also the psychological character and spiritual temperament of the addressee.

It is well known that medieval poets frequently alluded to contemporary political realities even when apparently describing historical events. Throughout *dīvān* poetry and narrative *mathnawīs*, historical personalities and political developments are often represented through indirect allusion, metaphor, and symbolic language. Consequently, historical reality appears in medieval literature at multiple interpretive levels—sometimes explicitly, but more often through carefully constructed rhetorical devices. Although political events are most commonly reflected in *qaṣīdas* and *mathnawīs*, even shorter poetic genres frequently contain subtle references to contemporary circumstances.

Classical poets generally expressed their opinions concerning rulers, military conflicts, and political developments through literary devices such as allusion (*talmiḥ*), innuendo (*ihām*), simile (*tashbīḥ*), and hyperbole (Shikhiyeva, 2012, p. 176). Likewise, medieval historiography itself often adopted poetic language and rhetorical ornamentation as accepted stylistic conventions. Yet behind this elaborate imagery and ceremonial rhetoric lies another dimension that has rarely attracted scholarly attention: the inner spiritual struggle of the author. Beneath the surface of conventional praise, the poet's hidden voice frequently reveals personal doubts, ideological reservations, or subtle criticism.

This concealed discourse is discernible in the works of many classical poets and is equally evident in Jami's poetic correspondence. Our close textual analysis of his panegyric addressed to Jahanshah (Afṣakhzod, 1988, p. 252; *Asnād va Mukātabāt-i Tārikhī-yi Īrān*, 2001, pp. 442–445; Jāmī, *Dīvān*, 2001, pp. 745–746) demonstrates that the poem contains a carefully constructed dual discourse. While outwardly fulfilling the conventions of courtly praise, the text simultaneously employs metaphor, ambiguity, and symbolic language to communicate meanings that extend beyond its apparent encomiastic purpose. Thus, Jami's poetic epistle should not be understood merely as a conventional panegyric but also as a sophisticated literary critique in which rhetorical ambiguity serves as the principal means of expressing the poet's genuine intellectual position.

From this perspective, the poem represents a remarkable synthesis of epistolary literature, literary criticism, and historical testimony. Its significance therefore extends far beyond its immediate function as a reply to Jahanshah's correspondence. Instead, it constitutes a multidimensional text that illuminates the complex interaction between literature, politics, religion, and personal conviction in the Persianate world of the fifteenth century.

Literary Ambiguity in Jami's Poetic Epistle to Jahanshah

The title of Jami's *mathnawī* itself deserves careful attention, as it reveals an important rhetorical strategy employed by the poet. Rather than referring to the Qara Qoyunlu ruler simply by his personal name, Jami deliberately constructs a mirrored expression—"Shāh-i Jahān Jahānshāh" ("Jahanshah, the King of the World")—thereby creating a subtle semantic duality that extends beyond the title itself. The poem bears the heading:

ساقی نامه در مدح شاه جهان، جهان شاه

Sāqī-nāmah dar madḥ-i Shāh-i Jahān, Jahānshāh

("The Sāqī-nāmah in Praise of Jahanshah, King of the World") (Jāmī, 2001, p. 745).

This duality is reflected not only in the title but also in Jami's overall attitude toward the Qara Qoyunlu ruler. Although the poem is formally structured as a panegyric, a close reading suggests that beneath its conventional language of praise the poet discreetly communicates a more critical evaluation of Jahanshah.

At the beginning of the epistolary *mathnawī*, Jami compares Jahanshah with the great mystical authorities Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, and Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistārī, praising the ruler's *Dīvān* within the framework of Sufi thought. Employing the highly ornate imagery characteristic of classical Persian court poetry, the poet initially elevates his patron through elaborate rhetorical praise. However, this favorable impression is unexpectedly undermined by two subsequent couplets, which introduce a striking shift in tone and create the impression that the encomium was composed under obligation rather than sincere admiration. These verses may therefore be interpreted as Jami's implicit retraction of his preceding praise:

چو خفاش را نیست نور بصر
که ببند به روی زمین عکس خور
کجا آورد هرگز ش دیده تاب
که ببند بر اوج فلک آفتاب
(Jāmī, 2001, p. 746)

Translation

Since the bat possesses no light of sight (in its eyes)³,

*It cannot perceive the reflection of the sun upon the earth.
How could its eyes ever endure the radiance
To behold the sun at the summit of the heavens?*

In our view, these two couplets disclose Jami's genuine attitude toward his patron, Jahanshah. Although the poem outwardly functions as a continuous panegyric, the poet succeeds in concealing his reservations regarding the ruler's mystical understanding beneath a carefully ornamented rhetorical surface. Initially, Jami humbly declares himself incapable of adequately praising Jahanshah's literary accomplishments and compares the ruler to the sun. Yet it is precisely at this point that the metaphor of the bat (*khuffāsh*) becomes significant.

At first glance, the function of this metaphor appears ambiguous. The juxtaposition of *khurshīd* ("sun") and *khuffāsh* ("bat") creates a deliberate rhetorical contrast. Their phonetic similarity conceals an underlying semantic opposition, enabling Jami to encode his criticism through literary ambiguity. The metaphor acquires greater significance when viewed in its historical context. According to historical sources, "*Khuffāsh*" (Bat) was an ironic epithet occasionally applied to Jahanshah because he reportedly spent his nights in banquets and festivities and slept throughout the day (Değirmançay, 2004, pp. 23–24). Consequently, Jami's use of this image cannot be regarded as accidental⁴.

We therefore argue that the metaphor possesses a deliberate double meaning. On the surface it functions within the conventional imagery of Persian mystical poetry; at a deeper level it recalls Jahanshah's well-known epithet and subtly expresses the poet's skepticism toward the ruler's mystical pretensions. In this respect, metaphor functions simultaneously as a literary ornament and as a mechanism of concealment, allowing the poet to express his genuine opinion while formally adhering to the conventions of courtly panegyric.

Accordingly, Jami's employment of the epithet "bat" raises serious doubts about the sincerity of his apparent admiration for Jahanshah's mystical worldview. Without this seemingly insignificant metaphor, the poet's authentic intellectual position would likely have remained hidden behind centuries of conventional interpretation. The tension embedded within the poem may also be explained by the differing religious affiliations of the two figures. Jami was a committed Sunni scholar and an adherent of the Naqshbandī order, whereas historical research indicates that Jahanshah followed Shi'i beliefs (Atıcı Arayancan, 2010, p. 215; Değirmançay, 2004, pp. 19–20) and demonstrated considerable sympathy toward Hurūfism (Shikhiyeva, 2013, pp. 435–439; Değirmançay, 2004, pp. 27–62). Indeed, Jahanshah's Turkish *Dīvān* contains Hurufi themes to such an extent that certain passages closely resemble the poetry of Nasīmī. Jami's unfavorable opinion of the Hurufi movement is likewise discernible, albeit indirectly, in his *Nafahāt al-Uns* (Jāmī, 1996, p. 593). These ideological differences provide an important context for interpreting the poem's concealed criticism.

Another noteworthy feature is Jami's choice of the term *Sāqī-nāmah* in the title. Historical evidence suggests that this designation was not selected arbitrarily. When examined alongside contemporary accounts of Jahanshah's life, the title may be understood as an allusion to the ruler's well-known inclination toward convivial drinking assemblies. At the same time, the symbolism operates on another literary level: just as the *sāqī* intoxicates his companions by distributing wine, the poet's beautifully ornamented verses were intended to captivate and intoxicate their royal recipient through rhetorical elegance. The fact that Jami's underlying intention remained concealed for centuries demonstrates the effectiveness of this literary strategy.

It is therefore highly probable that Jami deliberately entitled his poetic evaluation of Jahanshah's mystical *Dīvān* a *Sāqī-nāmah* as an artistic device. The title simultaneously evokes a familiar genre of Sufi literature while subtly appealing to the ruler's personal tastes and habits. This sophisticated interplay between genre, symbolism, and historical allusion illustrates Jami's exceptional mastery of rhetorical ambiguity.

From this perspective, Jami's poetic letter represents much more than a conventional panegyric. Because it offers a critical assessment of Jahanshah's literary work while assuming the formal structure of a letter, it simultaneously functions as literary criticism and epistolary literature. Moreover, its rich historical references, psychological depth, and multilayered symbolism considerably enhance its value as both a literary text and a historical document.

Despite the allusive expressions discussed above – particularly the title *Sāqī-nāmah*, the metaphor of the bat, and the deliberately ambiguous couplets – this poetic epistle remains one of the most important sources for reconstructing the literary relationship between Jami and Jahanshah. Nor was this Jami's only literary dedication to the Qara Qoyunlu ruler. He also dedicated his celebrated prose work *Lawā'ih*, consisting of thirty-four discourses, to Jahanshah. According to Ali Asghar Hikmat, "It appears that Jami presented this work to Jahanshah Turkman, the ruler of Iraq, Hamadan, and Azerbaijan. However, because the ruler enjoyed little popularity among the people of Herat, Jami deliberately refrained from mentioning his name explicitly" (Hikmat,

1941, p. 171). Hikmat further suggests that, although the work bears no explicit date, it was most probably composed around 870 A.H. (1465-1466 CE), during Jahanshah's reign (Hikmat, 1941, p. 172).

Jami's Poetic Epistles to the Aq Qoyunlu Sultan Ya'qub

Jami's literary relationship with the Aq Qoyunlu court is likewise evidenced by several poems preserved in his *Dīvān*. The poet composed separate poetic replies to two different letters received from Sultan Ya'qub and dedicated several panegyrics to the Aq Qoyunlu ruler. One poem bears the title *Jawāb-i Nāmāh-yi Sultān Ya'qūb* ("Reply to the Letter of Sultan Ya'qub"), while another is entitled *Dar Jawāb-i Nāmāh-yi Ya'qūb Sultān Wāq'ah Ast* ("Composed in Reply to Sultan Ya'qub's Letter"). These titles clearly demonstrate that Jami received correspondence from Sultan Ya'qub and composed poetic responses to them.

The internal structures of the two letters differ considerably. The first epistle is particularly remarkable from both literary and rhetorical perspectives. Its opening nine couplets are devoted entirely to describing the physical appearance and aesthetic beauty of the received letter⁵. The visual form of its script becomes the source of a rich network of poetic metaphors that elevate the poet's imagination beyond the material world and transform an ordinary letter into an object of mystical and artistic contemplation.

Jami writes:

تبارک الله ازین طایر همایون فال
خجسته نامه اقبال بسته بر پر و بال

نه نامه نافه ای از مشک خالص آمده پر
نه نامه طبله ای از عطر ناب ملامال

...نه شاهدیت که مشاطگان کلک و بنان
ز حرف و نقطه نهادند بر رخسار خط و خال
(Jāmī, 2001, p. 75)

Translation

*Blessed be this bird of auspicious fortune,
Whose wings and feathers bear the letter of good destiny.

It is no ordinary letter, but rather a musk pod filled with pure fragrance;
It is no ordinary letter, but a casket overflowing with the finest perfume.

...Nor is it merely a beautiful beloved adorned by skillful attendants;
Rather, its beauty marks have been fashioned from letters and dots by the pens and fingers of accomplished scribes.*

A comparable literary technique may also be observed in another of Jami's poetic epistles, namely his reply to the letter of Khwāja Jahān, the distinguished Indian scholar, philosopher, and mathematician. The poem bears the title *Īn nāmāh javāb-i Khwāja Jahān ast* ("This Letter Is a Reply to Khwāja Jahān"). From the text it becomes evident that Khwāja Jahān's original letter combined prose and verse in accordance with the conventions of Persian epistolography. Jami, however, deliberately chose to respond exclusively in verse, employing the *qaṣīda* form while simultaneously incorporating stylistic elements characteristic of other poetic genres.

One such feature is the use of alphabetical symbolism (*alif-nāmāh*), in which individual Arabic letters become the basis for elaborate metaphorical imagery. In the following passage, the visual forms of the letters are transformed into symbolic representations of spiritual and emotional experience:

سینش از دندانان پیوسته دندان کرده تیز
تا گشاید از رگ جان عقده رنج و عنا

لام او بار دل ما دیده و خم کرده پشت
تا به پشت خم کشد آن را به سرحد ادا

وان الف لام آمده در وی که پا ننهاد ایم
بی لوائ استقامت در ره عشق و ولا
حلقه میمیش بود شاهد بر آن معنی که کرد
سر اخلاص و محبت حلقه ای در گوش ما
(Jāmī, 2001, p. 12)

Translation

*The sīn of his writing has sharpened its teeth upon its serrated form,
So that it may loosen the knots of suffering and hardship from the thread of the soul⁶.*

*His lām, perceiving the burden borne by our heart, has bent its back,
That with its curved form it might carry that burden to the limits of graceful devotion.*

*The alif-lām appearing therein signifies that no step should be taken
Upon the path of love and spiritual allegiance without the banner of steadfastness⁷.*

*The ring of its mīm bears witness
That sincerity and love have become an earring adorning our ears.*

Compared with most of Jami's surviving poetic letters, this *qaṣīda* is considerably longer and reveals an imagination largely liberated from the political obligations characteristic of his correspondence with rulers. It may therefore be inferred that the greater emotional intensity and extended length of the poem were made possible precisely because its recipient was a learned intellectual rather than a sovereign. In this epistle, Jami's poetic imagination unfolds without the rhetorical constraints normally imposed by courtly panegyric.

A similarly rich display of poetic imagination appears in one of Jami's letters addressed to Sultan Ya'qub. Here the poet creatively reshapes traditional literary conventions into an innovative compositional structure. Following the second *matla'* (*matla'-i sānī*), Jami introduces an extended lyrical address occupying approximately eight to ten couplets. At first glance, it remains uncertain whether these verses are directed toward the patron himself or toward an idealized beloved, a deliberate ambiguity frequently encountered in classical poetry. Only after this introductory section does the poet explicitly mention both the name of the patron and that of his father, thereby initiating the principal panegyric section of the poem.

One characteristic deserves particular attention. Not only in his letters but throughout virtually all of his works dedicated to Sultan Ya'qub – including *qaṣīdas* and *mathnawīs* – Jami consistently mentions the ruler together with his father, Uzun Hasan. This recurring pattern appears in several poems:

شاه جم مرتبه یعقوب که از خلق حسن
قاف تا قاف جهان وارث ملک پدر است

(*Jāmī*, 2001, p. 114)

Translation

*Ya'qub, whose rank equals that of Jamshīd, through the excellence of his character⁸,
Is the heir to his father's dominion from one end of the world to the other (ez Qaf ta Qaf).*

شاه یعقوب بن حسن که گرفت
جود را طبع او چو عدل شعار

(*Jāmī*, 2001, p. 571)

Translation

*King Ya'qub, son of Hasan⁹,
Whose very nature has adopted generosity as justice itself.*

یعقوب بن حسن که به کنه امل رسید
هر کس که هم به جود وی آمد توسلش

(*Jāmī*, 2001, p. 621)

Translation

*Ya'qub, son of Hasan, who attained the essence of noble aspiration—
Whoever sought refuge in his generosity found its abundance.*

شد ز حسن خلق مشهور زمن
حسن ميراث وی اين خلق حسن

والدش مرکب بدارالخلد راند
از وی اين خلق حسن ميراث ماند
(*Hikmet*, 1941, p. 39)

Translation

*He became renowned throughout the world for the beauty of his character;
Such noble conduct was the inheritance left to him.*

*His father rode onward to the Abode of Paradise,
Leaving behind this virtuous character as his enduring legacy.*

The repeated association of Sultan Ya'qub with his father is unlikely to be coincidental. Rather, it appears to represent a conscious rhetorical strategy through which Jami simultaneously expressed his admiration for Uzun Hasan while legitimizing the political authority of his successor. The continuity of moral virtue and political legitimacy thus becomes a central motif in the poet's panegyrics to the Aq Qoyunlu dynasty.

Jami's close relationship with Uzun Hasan is further confirmed by his prose correspondence. His *Munsha'āt* preserves a letter addressed to the Aq Qoyunlu ruler that alternates between prose and verse. From this document it becomes clear that Uzun Hasan informed Jami that he had secured the Georgian route by expelling hostile forces (Hikmat, 1963, p. 35). It is highly probable that this military action was undertaken at Jami's request and that the ruler subsequently communicated the successful outcome to the poet. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain why the sovereign of an independent state would report the details of a military campaign to a person residing in another political realm who held no formal governmental office. The correspondence therefore suggests that Jami's moral and spiritual authority extended well beyond the Timurid court and was acknowledged by the dynasties of neighboring states

As noted earlier, Jami's poetic replies to Jahanshah and Sultan Ya'qub are noticeably shorter than many of his other panegyrics. The poet himself explains this stylistic preference in one of his letters to Sultan Ya'qub:

سخن گذاريم از حد گذشت از آن ترسم
که در جبین قبولت فتد شکنج ملال
(*Jāmī*, 2001, p. 76)

Translation

*My words have already exceeded their proper bounds; I fear
That their excessive length may furrow the brow of your (gracious) acceptance with weariness.*

Elsewhere he writes:

شاهی که حد من نبود مدحش آنچنان
کو خود به عدل وجود کند مدح خویشتن
(*Jāmī*, 2001, p. 94)

Translation

*He is a king whose praise lies beyond the limits of my ability,
For by his own justice and generosity he praises himself.*

The same idea is reinforced in the following couplet:

چون قاصر است کلک زبانم ز مدحتش
آن به که چون دوات نهم مهر بر دهن
(*Jāmī*, 2001, p. 94)

Translation

*Since the pen of my tongue is incapable of adequately praising him,
It is better that I seal my mouth like an inkpot.*

These verses reveal that the brevity of Jami's panegyrics should not be interpreted as evidence of diminished poetic inspiration. On the contrary, the poet deliberately presents conciseness as an aesthetic principle grounded in humility and rhetorical restraint. True praise, according to Jami, lies not in excessive verbal ornamentation but in allowing the ruler's virtues to speak for themselves. This conception distinguishes his epistolary poetry from conventional court panegyric and demonstrates a refined literary consciousness in which economy of expression itself becomes a mark of artistic excellence.

From our perspective, Jami's preference for concise panegyrics reflects not only a distinctive personal literary style but also the etiquette governing courtly correspondence in the fifteenth century. Lengthy letters were likely regarded as tedious and less effective, and the poet may have feared that excessive verbosity would diminish the impact of his message or fail to secure the recipient's attention. At the same time, this stylistic economy demonstrates Jami's confidence in both his poetic ability and the poetic value of his words. For Jami, literary excellence lay not in verbal abundance but in rhetorical precision and meaningful expression.

The epistle discussed above was not the only work in which Jami expressed his admiration for Sultan Ya'qub. Three additional panegyrics in his *Divān* are likewise dedicated to the Aq Qoyunlu ruler. In one of these poems, the poet merely contrasts his own old age with the ruler's youth. In the poetic letter entitled *Dar Jawāb-i Nāmāh-yi Ya'qūb Sultān Wāqī'ah Ast* ("Composed in Reply to Sultan Ya'qub's Letter"), however, this difference in age is transformed into a sophisticated literary metaphor. Jami compares Sultan Ya'qub with the Prophet Joseph (Yūsuf), while identifying himself with the Prophet Jacob (Ya'qūb).

The poet further compares his own epistle with Nizāmī Ganjavī's *Iqbāl-nāmāh*. This comparison appears to be deliberate and multilayered. The word *iqbāl*, meaning "good fortune," "prosperity," or "felicity," simultaneously evokes the promising future of the young ruler, recalls the didactic and philosophical nature of Nizāmī's work, and alludes to the fact that *Iqbāl-nāmāh* itself was composed during the mature period of the Azerbaijani poet's life. Thus, through a single literary reference Jami establishes parallels between literary maturity, philosophical reflection, and political hope. Commenting on this poem, Ali Asghar Hikmat observes that "the remarkable respect and devotion shown by the young sultan toward the master, as well as the master's unusually candid manner of addressing him in comparison with other contemporary rulers, are clearly evident throughout this *qaṣīda*" (Hikmat, 1963, p. 36).

Another poem entitled *Dar Madh-i Ya'qūb Sultān* contains two noteworthy autobiographical references. In the introductory section, Jami describes a gathering of holy men (*gurūh-i muqaddasān*) assembled in his courtyard, where approximately two hundred of his poems are performed by singers. He emphasizes that these compositions are not devoted to worldly subjects but rather to mystical and spiritual themes. This passage provides valuable insight into both the reception of Jami's poetry during his lifetime and the predominantly Sufi character of his literary production.

An equally significant autobiographical element is the poet's explicit acknowledgment that the panegyric was composed in his old age:

برفت قوت طبع جوانی ام امروز
ز عقل پیر به مداحی توام مامور

چو بر جواهر منظوم اقتدار نماند
فشاندم از خوی خجلت لالی منثور

بود وظیفه پیران دعای شاه جوان
پی مصالح ملک و منابع جمهور
(Jāmī, 2001, p. 53)

Translation

*Today the strength of my youthful inspiration has departed;
With the wisdom of old age I have been entrusted to praise you.*

*Since my mastery over the jewels of verse has diminished,
With a quiet sense of embarrassment I have scattered instead the pearls of prose.*

*It is the duty of the aged to pray for a youthful king,
For the welfare of the realm and the prosperity of its people.*

These verses reveal Jami's characteristic humility while simultaneously emphasizing the moral responsibility that accompanies old age. Rather than lamenting the loss of youthful poetic inspiration, the poet presents spiritual wisdom and sincere counsel as more valuable gifts to a ruler than elaborate rhetorical ornamentation.

Another noteworthy aspect of the panegyric is Jami's use of the word *kūch* ("migration") together with his prediction that Sultan Ya'qub would establish a "new state" (*dawlat-i tāzah*):

همیشه تا که درین کوچ گه نیار امند
وفود غیب ز آمد شد و دود و صدور

مقر عز تو بخت جلالتی بادا
که دم به دم رسدش تازه دولتی به ظهور
(Jāmī, 2001, p. 53)

Translation

So long as this nomadic encampment remains filled with constant arrivals and departures, with smoke and ceaseless activity,

Even the messengers of the unseen (angels) cannot find repose.

May the seat of your glory remain forever secure,

For at every moment a new dawlat shall arise in its manifestation.

The final couplet is particularly significant because the Persian word *dawlat* simultaneously denotes political sovereignty and good fortune, allowing Jami to exploit deliberate semantic ambiguity. This double meaning invites multiple interpretations.

As is well known, Sultan Ya'qub was the son of Uzun Hasan, who expanded the borders of the Aq Qoyunlu beylik and transformed it into a powerful state. By that time, the state had already established itself firmly in the political sphere and had developed diplomatic relations with both Eastern and Western powers. Consequently, Jami's reference to the emergence of a "new state" cannot easily be understood. Elsewhere, the poet explicitly states that Ya'qub inherited his father's dominion extending "from Qāf to Qāf," while repeatedly expressing admiration for Uzun Hasan himself. These observations complicate the interpretation of the expression *dawlat-i tāzah*.

Several possibilities may therefore be considered. Jami may have hoped for a renewal of Aq Qoyunlu political ideology rather than the establishment of a new territorial state. Alternatively, he may have wished for closer political cooperation between the Aq Qoyunlu and the Timurid court under whose patronage he lived. Another possibility is that, despite his evident respect for the dynasty, Jami continued to regard the Aq Qoyunlu primarily as a confederation of nomadic Turkmen tribes rather than as a fully institutionalized imperial state. Although definitive conclusions remain impossible, the poem clearly demonstrates that Jami did not merely articulate what rulers wished to hear. Instead, he skillfully embedded his own political reflections and personal views within the conventional framework of courtly praise.

Jami's literary relationship with Sultan Ya'qub was not limited to the conventional interaction between patron and poet. It also developed within the framework of master-disciple literary succession (*salaf-khālaf*). In addition to receiving Jami's panegyrics, Sultan Ya'qub – who composed poetry in both Persian and Turkish – also wrote a *naẓīrah* (poetic imitation) to one of Jami's ghazals (Afshakhzod, 1988, p. 240). This reciprocal literary engagement reflects a relationship founded not only upon political patronage but also upon mutual poetic appreciation.

Significantly, Jami's admiration for Sultan Ya'qub continued even after the ruler's death. In his celebrated *mathnawī Silsilat al-Dhahab*, dedicated to the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II, Jami expresses profound sorrow over Sultan Ya'qub's untimely death and openly mourns the loss of the Aq Qoyunlu ruler.

Although both primary historical sources and later scholarship generally describe Sultan Ya'qub's death as sudden and mysterious, Jami characterizes it as a calamity inflicted by the vicissitudes of fate. It is possible that the poet possessed information suggesting that the ruler had fallen victim to political intrigue. While such a conclusion cannot be established with certainty, Jami's language conveys grief that appears unusually personal.

Jami's admiration for Sultan Ya'qub was not confined to his panegyrics and poetic correspondence. According to Ali Asghar Hikmat, the poet also composed an independent *mathnawī* in honor of the Aq Qoyunlu ruler, namely Salāmān va Absāl. Hikmat notes that "Jami composed an independent *mathnawī* specifically in the name of Sultan Ya'qub, namely *Salāmān va Absāl*, and mentioned the ruler's name with great respect both at the beginning and at the conclusion of the work" (Hikmat, 1963, p. 38).

This observation further demonstrates that Jami's relationship with Sultan Ya'qub extended well beyond the conventions of occasional courtly panegyric. The dedication of an independent narrative *mathnawī* – one of the most famous genres of classical literature – indicates the exceptional esteem in which the poet held the Aq Qoyunlu ruler. Unlike brief encomiastic poems composed in response to specific occasions, a dedicated *mathnawī* reflects a more enduring literary and intellectual association between author and patron. The repeated invocation of Sultan Ya'qub's name at both the opening and closing of the work further emphasizes the importance Jami attributed to the ruler and confirms that the Aq Qoyunlu court occupied a distinguished place within the poet's network of literary and cultural relationships.

4. CONCLUSION

Particularly noteworthy among Jami's poetic letters is the fact that, as a rule, the poet did not address rulers directly, but rather responded to letters addressed to him. In this respect, his letters differ from the poems of other authors writing within the panegyric tradition: they are based not so much on requests or expectations of reciprocal favors as on expressions of gratitude for the gifts he received. This constitutes one of the distinctive features of Jami's poetic correspondence.

Another notable feature of these works is their relatively short length. Most of Jami's poetic letters are characterized by considerable brevity. Overall, his poetic correspondence is of considerable interest from historical, literary, and psychological perspectives, as it allows us not only to trace the specific features of the panegyric tradition but also to identify characteristic aspects of the poet's worldview and his relationships with his addressees.

Notes

* The principal findings of this article were presented at the First International Abd al-Rahman Jami Conference, held in Torbat-e Jām (Iran) on 17–18 August 2016 (see Reference 18).

1. The distinguished scholar Jannat Naḡiyeva notes that Jami's collection of letters and correspondence circulated primarily under the titles *Munsha'āt*, *Inshā'*, and *Ruq'āt*. The letters composed entirely in verse are designated by the poet in the *Munsha'āt* as *ruq'a-yi manzūmah* ("poetic epistle") (Naḡhiyeva, 2007, p. 49).
2. The practice of assigning individual titles to the letters recalls the conventions of the *mathnawī* genre and certain forms of the classical *qaṣīda*.
3. Similar terminology appears in Abu Bakr Tihriani's *Kitāb-i Diyārbakriyya*, written at the Aq Qoyunlu court, where Uzun Hasan's attitude toward Jahanshah is described as follows: "*The Sultan of Anatolia (i.e., Mehmed the Conqueror) aptly compared him to a bat. A ruler ought to concern himself with the welfare of his people during the day. He derives no benefit from the light, nor do the people find justice in him.*" (Tihriani, 1993, pp. 414-415).
4. Jami also alludes to Jahanshah's poetic pen name, Ḥaḡiqī, through the rhetorical device of *ihām* (double entendre):

به صورت پرستان کوی مجاز
ز شاه حقیقی نشان داده باز
(*Jāmī*, 2001, p. 746)

Translation

To the idolaters dwelling in the alley of metaphor,
Once again a sign has been shown from the True King (Ḥaḡiqī).

The poet's literary device attracted the attention of both E. E. Bertels (1965, p. 219) and Muhsin Macit (2012, p. 53). The contrasting terms *majāz* ("metaphor") and *ḥaḡiqī* ("true") are also established concepts within Sufi terminology.

5. A comparable stylistic technique may be observed in Fuzulī's celebrated letter to Nişancı Paşa, commonly known as the *Shikāyatnāmah* (The Complaint Letter).
6. Literally: "vein" or "blood vessel."
7. Literally: "that which came in it."
8. The word Ḥasan is employed simultaneously in its lexical sense ("beautiful," "good") and as the proper name of Uzun Hasan, thereby creating a deliberate wordplay.
9. Here the term denotes style, manner, or literary mode.

10. This poetic passage appears at the beginning of Jami's *Salāmān va Absāl*, dedicated to Sultan Yā'qub.

11. Literally: "house."

12. These verses also clarify Jami's own understanding of the relationship between poetry and prose, indicating that he regarded the composition of poetry as requiring a considerably greater degree of inspiration than prose writing.

13. While some historians maintain that Sultan Yā'qub was poisoned by his wife Gawhar Sultan (Khunjī, 1987, p. 156), others mistakenly attribute his death to poisoning by his mother (Bakikhanov, 1951, p. 99; Khunjī, 1987, pp. 155–156). Certain medieval chronicles even suggest that he was poisoned by his sister in collaboration with Shaykh Haydar as part of an attempt to seize political power (Khunjī, 1987, p. 156). Chronologically, however, this account is problematic, since Shaykh Haydar died in 1488, whereas Sultan Yā'qub died in 1490. According to the eminent orientalist V. F. Minorsky, Sultan Yā'qub most probably died during the plague epidemic that struck Tabriz (Khunjī, 1987, p. 156).

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