

## THE CAT AND THE MOUSE: A KURDISH MANUSCRIPT ATTRIBUTED TO ALMĀS KHĀN

In southern Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan several *dīwans*, religious *mathnawīs*, and treatises attributed to Almās Khān [1], a well known Kurdish poet from Kenūle, in Kırmaşan [2], are in circulation, which do not appear in the corpus of his writings. Such attributions are to be found not only in the writings of later authors, but also in the oral tradition of Kurdish community. Of the latter perhaps the best known is that preserved under the title of *Kitāb-i Gurba [wa] Mūsh* (“The Book of Cat and Mouse”). As far as I know, our present knowledge of the text of Almās Khān's *Gurba [wa] Mūsh* depends upon two manuscripts, both of them catalogued previously and kept at Berlin [3]. In the article presented here some elementary facts about a newly-found manuscript of *Gurba [wa] Mūsh* are given.

Like many such manuscripts, the one under consideration is undated. The *Kitāb-i Gurba [wa] Mūsh* is a “Kurdish MS” (call No. 9788, 5 fols., 17.0×10.5 cm) which is kept at the Islamic Consultative Assembly Library I and is not mentioned in the catalogues of the Library [4]. The verse story of *Gurba [wa] Mūsh*, including fols. 1r—4v, line 8 (totally 104 lines), describes an author's struggle with the mouse(s) of his library who chew his drafts and books. The cat, on the other hand, plays as guarding the library of the author against the mouse, and finally defeats him. In the later folios (i. e. fol. 4v, line 9 — fol. 5v) a Gōranī unimportant *tarjī'band* (totally 40 lines), including descriptions of many Persian heroes of *Shāh-nāma*, is presented. It is possible that the *tarjī'band* was already in the Persian original followed by the translators. By analogy one could suppose that the *tarjī'band* presented here was an afterthought. If this is the case, it is likely that Almās

Khān's *Gurba [wa] Mūsh* belong to a tradition different from-and presumably older than-that of the *tarjī'band*.

The manuscript is written in the Arabic script in the Gōranī dialect which is not linguistically Kurdish, but known as “Kurdish” in the different parts of Kurdistan. There is no *basmala* and the text is written with 11—17 long lines to the folio. The text is written in the type of *nasta'liq*, and there are two librarian seals on the folios 1v and 5r. The writing is semi-cursive, without any red ink letter or sentences. The paper, which is of poor quality, as well as the pagination is Oriental, and the text takes up both sides of the folio. Since the lines on either side of the folio do not match, it seems that the folio (and hence the manuscript) was not ruled. It passed through the hands of a Kurdish family from southern Kurdistan (possibly Gōran district), but its exact depository is unknown.

The text must be assumed to have been intended as a satirical fragment rather than an ordinary story. Satirical disputes took place between cat and mouse as well as between the author and mouse. A few hemistiches of *hajwīya* genre and insults have been included. Although these hemistiches, as far as the outcome of the disputes is concerned, were adapted to literary standards, or are even simply fictitious, they nevertheless provide an insight in the way the *hajwīya* genre actually took place. Besides *hajwīya* disputes, the text indicates also another type of hemistiches in which cat and mouse appear talking and competing for the honour which of them possesses the power. Almost always the discussion was held in the presence of author, who probably could have the function of arbitrator.

### Notes

1. There is no scientific biography on Almās Khān. For a journalistic account on the life and religious works of Almās Khān, see Ş. Şafizāda, *Dānişnāma-yi Nāmāwarān-i Yārisān* (The Encyclopaedia of Yarisan Well-Known Personalities) (Tehrān, 1997), pp. 324—31.

2. On the Kenūle and its Kurdish community, see *Farhang-i Ābādī-hā-yi Kīshwar, Kirmānshāh* (Dictionary of the Iranian Villages, Kirmānshāh) (Tehrān, 1981).

3. See MS.or.oct.1156.SB Marburg / Berlin and MS.or.oct.1190.SB Marburg / Berlin. For more information, see K. Fuad, *Kurdische Handschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1970).

4. See, for example, ‘A. Şadrī Khu’ī, *Fihrist-i Nuskhā-hā-yi Khaṭṭī-yi Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Şhurā-yi Islāmī* (The Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Islamic Consultative Assembly) (Qum, 1997).

### **I l l u s t r a t i o n s**

**Fig. 1.** *Kitāb Gurba [wa] Mūsh* (“The Book of Cat and Mouse”). 17.0×10.5 cm, Oriental paper. Islamic Consultative Assembly Library I, call No. 9788, fol. 1r. Courtesy of the Library.

**Fig. 2.** The same MS, fol. 5v.

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