
TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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THE LIFE OF THE TEXT AND THE FATE OF TRADITION. VII/2 CLASSICAL PERSIAN LYRICS: TO THE PROBLEM OF GENESIS

Zoroastrism, being a religion of the agricultural peoples, was based on the cult of the Sun and the cult of fire closely connected with it. The Sun was viewed as the “governor of the God” Ahura, and the day of the vernal equinox when the Sun entered the constellation of Aries — Nawrūz (lit. the new day) — was the most important festival. The fullest extant description of the court ceremonial connected with the New Year's celebrations is ‘Umar Khayyām's tractate *Nawrūz-nāma* (11th century) [1].

In his tractate “the philosopher of the century”, the “head of researchers” and the “king of scientists”, as the celebrated author of *rubāʿī* ‘Umar Khayyām introduces himself in the introduction to his work, tells the “truth about Nawrūz” and about the king Jamshīd who established it and about the reasons why this great holiday is celebrated and the traditions connected with it. It begins with the definition of the role of the Sun in the establishment of the world order:

“They say that when the highest and the saint Īzad ordered the sun to move from its position so that its rays and benefits would spread everywhere, the sun came out from the Aries's head, darkness separated from light and day and night were born. This is how the history of this world began” [2].

Thus, Nawrūz becomes the central cosmogonical event, and the rituals connected with its celebration include the symbolical reproduction of the creation of the world through its annual renewal. As in a number of other Indo-European mythological systems, the myth about creation is inseparably linked with the central calendar agrarian myth. Khayyām does not mention this, while his older contemporary al-Bīrūnī directly associates Jamshīd with the cycles of dying and revival of vegetation and gives an account of a mythological episode which tells about the establishment of the Nawrūz:

“The thing is that damned Iblīs eliminated all beneficial properties [of food and drinks], and people began to eat and drink at all times, [but could not be sated], and stopped the wind from blowing, so that all trees dried out and the world nearly stopped existing. Then Jam, at the god's order and instruction, went southwards to the abode of the devil and his accomplices. He spent some time there before he was able to put an end to this misfortune, and people won back moderation, benefits [from food] and fertility, and freed themselves from this trouble. Then Jam returned to the world and rose on that day like the Sun, and shed light, as he was radiant like the sun, and the people were amazed at the rise of the two suns. And everything that had dried out turned green, and the people said: ‘Rūz-i naw’ — which means ‘the new day’, and everyone planted barley in troughs or other [ware], thinking that this would bring good” [3].

Thus, the Nawrūz is inseparably linked with the idea of renewal:

“When four parts of the big year pass, the big Nawrūz occurs and the world is renewed” [4].

It is the “renewal” that became the semantic basis of the central block of motives in the lyrical introductions to the New Persian *qaṣīdas*. The “spring” *qaṣīdas*, as a rule, began with a mention of youth taking over old age [5]:

“The blooming spring came, full of colours and scents,
Of hundreds thousands pleasures and wonderful decorations.

At such time an old man becomes a youth,
And the world, having outlived old age, becomes young again”.

Rūdakī