

Dr. Christine Kämpfer - Monograph Synopsis and Research Interests

The premodern Persian epic tradition flourished for over 600 years, from the first works written in New Persian until the rise of the Safavids in the 16th century. However, literary research has mostly focused on the major poets, and the role of minor poets and literary forms in maintaining and safeguarding this tradition has largely been overlooked. My dissertation examines the role of Khvājū Kirmānī's (ca. 1290-1350) epic *Humāy-u Humāyūn* (1332) in reviving and innovating the epic tradition in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion. The epic is about the Syrian prince Humāy, who falls in love with the painting of the daughter of the Chinese emperor and sets out on an adventurous journey to find her. The story contains a mystical reading, interpreting Humāy as a mystic traveler on his way to God. The author was both court poetry and a student of Islamic mysticism, traveling to the countries of the Near and Middle East for both courtly patronage and mystic guidance.

Humāy-u Humāyūn has largely been regarded as an imitation of the epics of Niẓāmī (ca. 1209) echoing the epigonic outlook on premodern literary production after the latter's famous *khamṣa* (pentology). To challenge this perception, the dissertation's preface outlines the dynamics of the practice of *khamṣa* poetry and how the balance between tradition and innovation contributed to the transmission of the Persian epic tradition and identity. The first chapter of the dissertation's main part comprises a close reading of the epic complemented by narratological analysis combined with comparative approaches from premodern European, Greek, and Arabic literature. The analysis revealed that the epic comprises, in fact four narrative strands: heroic, romantic, mystic, and adventurous, exceeding the label of a mystic romance. The second chapter focuses on the question of genres. The foundational definition of a romance by Northrop Frye serves as the first framework; however, the labels of Frye and Julie Scott Meisami's definition of a *Persian romance* are not applicable for *Humāy-u Humāyūn*. Instead, Khvājū's epic belongs to a category recently outlined by Paola Orsatti as "tales of love and adventure" with strong ties to the Hellenistic novel. Orsatti's concept proves the existence of an indigenous Iranian romance concept, and Khvājū actively integrates strategies for its innovation. The third chapter outlines four of Khvājū's main strategies with the aim of defining the post-Mongol Persian romance. First, Khvājū innovates the form by changing the meter and integrating several subgenres. Second, he strategically included elements of wonder and marvel from popular literature to create gateways for the mystic component. Mystical teaching and concepts are revealed in the epic's marvelous episodes. In this way, the mystic reading does not run parallel to the adventurous love story but becomes an integral part of it. Third, Khvājū frequently uses *talmīḥ* (allusion) to traditional Iranian history (*talmīḥ-i īrānī*), famous literary love couples (*talmīḥ-i qīṣṣa-pardāz*), and the Islamic mystical tradition (*talmīḥ-i islāmī*). By including these allusions, Khvājū builds intertextual references and includes contemporary discourses that make the epic's content relevant to his audience. Fourth, at the content level, Khvājū introduces not only a new love couple to the corpus of epic poetry, including contemporary discourses such as Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and his spiritual guide 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 1336). The interplay between nostalgic allusions to the past and contemporary discourses raises the question concerning the past Khvājū depicts in *Humāy-u Humāyūn*. The story is set in a fictional Kayanid past colored in a Sasanid light by the *talmīḥ* and by some of the story's characters with ties to Sasanid history. With this backward temporal shift, Humāy is depicted as the second Kay-Khusraw, who, in Suhrawardī's illumination theology, is the

exemplum of the wise king who traveled from darkness to light. It is this equation of the two kings that reveals the essential message Khvājū wants to convey to his audience, Like Humāy, that the reader should embark on a journey to overcome the darkness of the world and reach the light of the World of Souls. In conclusion, Khvājū's *Humāy-u Humāyūn* is the first representative of a phase in Persianate literary history, which can be marked as post-Mongol literature. The epic displays not only the growing influence of Islamic mysticism in Persianate literature, but also shows an abandonment from the literary universalism by integrating elements from popular literature and legends. My dissertation is not only the first concise study of *Humāy-u Humāyūn*, but it also challenges the paradigm of decline after the Mongol invasion. In fact, Khvājū demonstrates that post-Mongol literature is distinguished by its highly experimental features, enhancing its relevance for a new generation of audiences. Authors such as Khvājū participated in literary trends and intertextual practices, never leaving the path but innovating it respectfully throughout the centuries. Hopefully, my research will contribute to a new understanding of premodern Persian epic poetry, its innovative character, and intrinsic dynamics.

My next project is still in its preliminary stages, but it will explore Indo-Persian literature and the role of the *sāqī-nāma* ("Song of the Cupbearer") as an imported literary genre. The *sāqī-nāma* has its roots in early Persian wine poetry and was imported to the Mughal courts by Persian émigré poets in the 16th century, where its composition became a major literary trend. My research aims to trace the development of the form in Indo-Persian poetry and the process of how it was indigenized. The main source here are *tazkiras* (biographical compendiums), which engaged in a dialogue between the past and the present. In fact, they created this past by selecting specific authors and works, establishing a literary tradition and canon. Furthermore, special attention will be paid to the question of whether the development of *sāqī-nāma* foreshadows a Persianate literary modernity. The study will combine approaches from literary history, intellectual history, and manuscript studies, and will contribute to closing a gap in Persianate literary history.