



The Composition Of The “Tazkirat Al-Khawatin” And The Order Of Presentation Of Women Poets

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Abstract: This article analyzes the Tazkirat al-Khawatin, a biographical anthology written by Muhammad Rafi' Malik al-Kutub Shirazi and dedicated to Shah Jahan Begum. It explores the names of female poets mentioned in the work, as well as information about prominent women from the Arab, Persian, Indian, and Turkic worlds. The social roles and positions of women from different professions and backgrounds—depicted in the anthology—are presented in a clear and accessible language for readers. In addition, the article examines the order in which these women are presented, their creative legacy, and their individual contributions. Special attention is paid to the literary, historical, and cultural significance of the source.

Keywords: Tazkirat al-Khawatin”, Muhammad Rafi' Shirazi, tazkira, women poets, source criticism.

Introduction: Another tazkira dedicated to women is Tazkirat al-Khawātīn (“Memoir of Women”) by Muhammad bin Rafi' al-Kutub Shirazi, which was published in a lithographed edition by Mirzo Ahmadi in 1306 AH (1888–1889) in a 17x20 cm format consisting of 178 pages. After the preface, a six-page annotated table of contents listing 293 women is provided; however, the work in fact contains references to 337 poetesses in total. In order to gain a deeper perspective on the world of women, Shirazi refers to Muhammad Zehni's Mashāhir al-Nisā' fī al-Islām (“Famous Women in Islam”) as his principal source. In this tazkira, the names of women are arranged in alphabetical order: -108, “ب-” 1, “د-” 6, “29b, ” 15, “ث-” 3, “ج-” 18, “ح-” 36, “خ-” 26, “د-” 1

ر-30, ز-4, س-3, ش-4, ص-2, ض-2, ط-1, ع-4, ف-3, ق-2, ك-6, ل-5, م-8, ن-2, و-1, ی-1, amounting to a total of 300 women.

In the concluding section, the author offers praise to God, emphasizing that nothing in the world is more delightful than the study of poetry and history. At the end of the tazkira, he composes five poems dedicated to Shāh Jahān Begum, the ruler of the Bhopal Sultanate. The work provides information on Arabic-speaking women, 73 Persian-speaking women, 18 Turkic-speaking women, as well as women of Indian, English, and Roman origin. Several lithographed copies of *Tazkirat al-Khawātīn* are preserved in the collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies named after Abu Rayhan Beruni, Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan.

Muhammad Rafi' Malik al-Kutub Shirazi's *Tazkirat al-Khawātīn*, dedicated to women, as well as the author's literary biography, have attracted the attention of many scholars. According to the information provided by researchers such as Charles Storey, Ahmad Gulchini Ma'ani, Sayyid Ali Rizawi, and Shcheglov, Shirazi was born in 1852. In 1870, he moved to Bombay, where he lived and pursued his literary activities. In Bombay, he was engaged in publishing and the book trade. In 1882, he was invited to Iran by Muhammad Hasan Khan, the chief editor of the publishing house, and through his efforts Shirazi was awarded the honorific title Malik al-Kutub ("King of Books"). Before receiving this title, the British government had conferred upon Muhammad Rafi' Shirazi the designation Khan Sahib in recognition of his compilation of the tazkira *Tazkirat al-Khawātīn*, dedicated to Shāh Jahān Begum.

The notes on women contained in *Tazkirat al-Khawātīn* were drawn from Zehni Afandi's *Mashāhir al-Nisā' fī al-Islām* and Abulqasim Shirvani's *Akhtār-i Tābān*. The extant copy of the tazkira in our possession was published in Bombay in 1889. Within the history of Persian literature, *Tazkirat al-Khawātīn* stands out as one of the major anthologies devoted to creative women and has served as a reliable source for subsequent compilations of this kind.

In the tazkira, the names of 237 women are arranged in alphabetical order, beginning with Omina and concluding with mention of the works of Yasman. The work opens with a couplet cited in the preface of Muhammad Hasan Khan's *Khairāt-i Hasan*. In addition, it includes an eight-page commentary on queens drawn from *Khairāt-i Hasan*, as well as references to Shāh Jahān Begum and her poems (خ-2, ص-4). From the section of *Khairāt-i Hasan* beginning with the letter "م", 58 entries are translated, along with eight translations from *Tazkirat al-Khawātīn* itself; from the "ن" section of *Khairāt-i Hasan*, 25 women are included,

supplemented by two translations from *Tazkirat al-Khawātīn*. The three volumes of *Khairāt-i Hasan* were condensed into a single volume. For this reason, the authors of both *Tazkirat al-Khawātīn* and *Khairāt-i Hasan* acknowledge their reliance on Zehni's *Mashāhir al-Nisā' fī al-Islām*.

Muhammad Zehni Afandi's *Mashāhir al-Nisā' fī al-Islām* ("Famous Women in Islam") is a two-volume tazkira preserved in the collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies named after Abu Rayhan Beruni of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, under inventory numbers №9307 and №9308. The tazkira, copied in Istanbul in 1878, comprises 371 and 439 pages respectively, with a size of 24 × 17 cm. It is written in Turkish and Arabic, and the names are arranged in alphabetical order. The lithographed copy under no. №9307 constitutes the first volume, which contains entries for women whose names begin with the letter "ا" up to "ظ". The second volume, under no. №9308, includes the accounts of women whose names begin with "ع" through "ی". In contrast to the aforementioned works, this tazkira devotes greater attention to the creative output of Turkic women. In the "ا" section, the activities of 117 women are described. The volume concludes with accounts ranging from Ozor Khumoyun to the Israelite woman Isayag (№ 9307, pp. 1–117). The "ب" section begins with Padshah Khātun and ends with Bibek, comprising information on 35 women (№ 9307, pp. 111–133). The "ت" section starts with Taji and ends with Tanusa, listing 10 women in total (№ 9307, pp. 133–141). The "ث" section includes two names—Sadiya bint Yor and Suiba (№ 9307, pp. 141–142). The "ج" section, beginning with Jonfido Qadin and ending with Jahiza, lists 22 women (№ 9307, pp. 142–152). The "ح" section begins with Khoji Qadin and ends with Hayot, mentioning 40 poetesses in total (№ 9307, pp. 142–187). The "خ" section contains 26 names, beginning with Khatun and ending with Khayrzon (№ 9307, pp. 187–208). The "د" section begins with Dukhtnus and ends with Dahno, comprising 15 women (№ 9307, pp. 209–219). The "ذ" section honors 8 women (№ 9307, pp. 219–226). The "ر" section begins with Rabi'a and concludes with Rita bint Ajalon, listing 31 women (№ 9307, pp. 226–254). The "ز" section begins with Zabu' and ends with Zaynab, comprising 41 women (№ 9307, pp. 254–288). The "س" section discusses the activities of 48 women, beginning with Sora and ending with Sirin (№ 9307, pp. 288–328). The "ش" section ranges from Shodon to Shimo, mentioning 25 women (№ 9307, pp. 329–346). The "ص" section, beginning with Sohiba and ending with Sahbo, includes 25 women (№ 9307, pp. 347–363). The "ض" section contains 4 names (no. 9307, pp. 363–365). The "ط" section records 6 women, while the "ظ" section lists 2 women (№ 9307, pp. 366–370).

Thus, the first volume records a total of 450 women of letters.

The second volume of the work, catalogued under no. 9308, begins with the letter “ع”. This section includes accounts of 71 women, starting with ‘Ā’isha and ending with ‘Avro’ (№ 9308, pp. 2–98). The “غ” section begins with Ghodar and concludes with Ghayso, describing 12 women (№ 9308, pp. 99–105). The “ف” section begins with Fohta and ends with Fuz, comprising 54 women in total (№ 9308, pp. 105–148). The “ق” section lists 20 women (№ 9308, pp. 148–167). The “ك” section begins with Koib and ends with Gawhar Khān Sulton, with 18 women recorded (№ 9308, pp. 168–175). The “ل” section starts with Lola Khātun and ends with Laylā, including 17 women (№ 9308, pp. 175–197). The “م” section describes 57 women, beginning with Mu’ssamo and concluding with Mayita bint Telloiy (№ 9308, pp. 197–246). The “ن” section begins with Noila and ends with Nilufar Khātun, comprising 27 women (№ 9308, pp. 247–279). The “و” section begins with Vasila and ends with Wahaba, mentioning 10 women (№ 9308, pp. 280–286). The section beginning with the letter “ز” includes 24 women, ranging from Hojira to Hilaliy (№ 9308, pp. 286–320). The “س” section highlights the works of 9 poetesses (№ 9308, pp. 331–341). From page 342 to 349, a special chapter appears, offering poems, stories, and commentary on women’s lives. In this section, a total of 319 women are honored. Altogether, the tazkira records the names of 769 women.

Muhammad Rafi’ Shirazi set himself the goal of compiling information on Arab, Roman, Persian, and Indian women of letters from the earliest centuries up to his own time. Alongside poetesses, he included accounts of learned women, maidservants of the court, hadith scholars, female saints, singers, calligraphers, astrologers, and patrons. In addition to poetry written in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, the tazkira also contains poems in Hindi and Urdu. From Jawāhir al-‘Ajā’ib, Shirazi incorporated information on fourteen women—Mahastī, Padshah Khātun, Jahan Khātun, Ufaq Bega Jalāyir, Nihānī, Dukhtar-i Qazvīnī, Samarqandī, Khānum Khānzāda, Bībī Ārzū’ī, Zaifī, Bībī Atun, Hijābī, and others—into Tazkirat al-Khawātīn.

Shirazi made use of five tazkiras: the anonymously authored Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’ (1174/1761), Akhtār-i Tābān (1298/1881), Mashāhir al-Nisā’ fī al-Islām, and Tazkirat al-Nisā’. From Zehni’s Mashāhir al-Nisā’ fī al-Islām, Shirazi incorporated 33 out of 259 women authors. However, this does not mean that he merely copied them. Additional annotations were included only after Shirazi had verified their authenticity. Moreover, Shirazi independently added 60 women authors not found in Mashāhir al-Nisā’ fī al-Islām.

Through the creative works of women included in the tazkira, it is also possible to discern their ethno-geographical origins. A large portion of the queens mentioned in the tazkira are Persian-speaking Indian women and émigré poets who had settled in India due to migration. Tazkirat al-Khawātīn contains 769 poetic pieces, including qasīdas, rubā’īs, poems, mukhammases, bayts, and ghazals. Among the women poets represented, 138 belonged to the group of Persian-speaking authors.

The tazkira offers particular details about the Timurid queen Zeb-un-Nisā’. Notably, it clarifies that the pen name Mahfī does not pertain to Zeb-un-Nisā’ but rather to Mahfī Rushtī or to Imam Quli Khan, governor of Persia. The work cites five rubā’īs, four ghazals, and several poems attributed to Zeb-un-Nisā’.

In its concluding section, the tazkira praises God and emphasizes that nothing in the world surpasses the delight of studying poetry and history. The poems included in Tazkirat al-Khawātīn are significant in two respects: first, they reflect the poetic mastery of the women authors; second, they allude to the personal circumstances of the individuals mentioned. In certain cases, women’s names appear more than once—for instance, the description of Ogho Begim is repeated under the form Oqa Bega.

The information presented in the tazkiras, along with the analyses conducted, indicates that the vast literary heritage created by women has not yet been fully studied from a scholarly perspective. Their lives and works remain under-researched, and incorporating them into academic discourse holds an important place in enriching the history of literature with new material.

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