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## Recensione

**Nahid Norozi, *Esordi del romanzo persiano. Dal Vis e Rāmin di Gorgāni (XI sec.) al ciclo di Tristano*, with a preface by Francesco Benozzo ("Il Cavaliere del Leone" series, directed by Andrea Fassò), Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2022, 2nd edition, pp. 319**

The essay we are about to present constitutes a turning point in the history of studies on the Persian poet Gorgāni (11th cent.) and on the alleged relationship of his verse romance *Vis o Rāmin* with the Tristan cycle. It shows a remarkable critical and philological maturity as well as an uncommon ability to present a medieval poem with an adequate commentary and a penetrating comparative approach. Written by an Italian-Iranian scholar, Dr. Nahid Norozi, currently a researcher and assistant professor at the Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne of the University of Bologna, this work, in its twelve chapters, partly takes up some contributions published in "Quaderni di Meykhane", a bilingual (Italian-Persian) journal of Iranian studies, accessible online, and also presents a considerable amount of new material and research.

The essay is divided into three parts. The first one (p. 27-90) examines the biography of "Gorgāni and his work", the "linguistic and narrative-stylistic aspects of the *Vis and Rāmin*" and the history of the text "in anthologies, manuscript tradition, editions and translations". The author

offers us here a careful documentation, reconstructing also through the secondary literature in Persian and European languages the studies on Gorgāni in Europe and Iran.

The second part (p. 91-230) consists of three studies devoted respectively to “Dynamics of female desire and strategies of legitimation of sin”; then to “The garden of love encounter in the *Vis and Rāmin*”; and finally to “Magic, women and demons in the *Vis and Rāmin*”. In other words, the author, with a thematic approach, probes three key themes of the poem, giving us convincing proof of her analytical skills and her talent for commenting on the text, a skill that is increasingly rare today in times of over-specialisation in which we often tend to forget that philology runs on two legs, ecdotic or textual criticism and commentary on the text. In this, we believe, this work shows a decidedly humanistic slant, in the sign of the best iranological tradition that goes from Alessandro Bausani to Johann Christoph Bürgel.

But the heart of the essay presented here is certainly the third part, dedicated to comparative studies, appropriately divided into two sections, namely section A: “In the context of Persian literature” (p. 231-372); and section B: “The *Vis o Rāmin* in relation to the Tristan cycle” (p. 373-486).

In section A the following chapters are to be found: “*Vis and Rāmin* as exemplum of sublime lovers”; “The reading of *Vis and Rāmin* in some Persian mystic poets” (from ‘Attār to Rumi, up to Amir Khosrow and Faqih Kermāni); “The reception of *Vis and Rāmin* in Khwāju Kermāni (14th century)”, about whom Dr. Norozi proposed years ago the first translation in a European language (*Homāy e Homāyun. Un romanzo d’amore e avventura dalla Persia medievale*, with an introduction by J. C. Bürgel, Mimesis, Rome 2011). This section A continues with a stimulating chapter on “The tradition opposed to Gorgāni: from Irānshāh (11th-12th cent.) to Nezāmi of Ganjé (12th-13th cent.)”. In this section Dr. Norozi, again starting from the *Vis o Rāmin*, ranges diachronically from Ferdowsi to Khwāju Kermāni, passing through Nezāmi, but also through other lesser-known authors such as Irānshāh (who lived a generation after Gorgāni) and Faqih Kermāni (a contemporary of Hāfez), who nevertheless present remarkable points of comparative interest. The author later returned to the particularly close relationship between Gorgān’s *Vis o Rāmin* and Irānshāh’s *Bahman-nāme* in a brilliant presentation at the 5th Bolognese Congress of Iranistics (22-23 October 2020), recently published in the volume of the Proceedings (*Come la freccia di Ārash. Illungo viaggio della narrazione in Iran*, edited by N. Norozi, “Indo-Iranica et Orientalia” series, Mimesis, Rome 2021, pp. 197-219). This section A includes also a remarkable chapter on the “meeting of lovers on the balcony”: it is an *ante litteram* Shakespearian theme that has a very wide development also in Iranian lands, and where the motif of the beautiful woman peeking at her lover from a balcony or from a window is particularly focused on. Finally, a chapter on misogyny offers an extensive exploration of the theme in Gorgāni’s *Vis o Rāmin* and other Persian verse romances, starting with an original analytical grid that accurately (and appropriately) distinguishes between misogynistic and gynophobic attitudes.

But it is certainly section B of this third part of Dr. Norozi’s work that constitutes, we believe, the most intriguing and innovative part. Not since 1974 - when Pierre Gallais published his famous essay with the eloquent title (*Genèse du roman occidental. Essai sur Tristan et Iseut et son modèle persan*) - has there been such a detailed analysis of the alleged influence of the ‘Persian model’ on the most famous novel in the Western European tradition. Pierre Gallais had

conducted his investigation from the perspective of a romance philologist who was extremely curious and open to all hypotheses, using the excellent French translation of *Vis o Rāmin* by Henry Massé (*Le roman de Wis et Rāmin*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1959). Gallais's essay, as is easy to imagine, had provoked numerous and varied reactions, especially among fellow romance philologists, but beyond the reviews, an articulate and well-argued response from the side of the Iranists was lacking until now. Dr. Norozi, with tact and rare balance, takes up the issue, naturally making use of her first-hand knowledge of the Persian poem and making careful and critically informed use of the various texts in the Tristan tradition (including Thomas, Béroul, Marie de France, Eilhart, Gottfried von Strassburg), often cited not only in Italian translation but also in the original language. This section is divided into three chapters. The first presents the characters and the "Parallel Episodes in *Tristan* and *Vis and Rāmin*" in which the Author presents us with a synoptic picture of the convergences and parallels, showing us a number of comparatively remarkable aspects that greatly enriches the picture presented by Pierre Gallais now almost fifty years ago. In the second chapter, Dr. Norozi addresses a topic that is entirely new to us and has been completely neglected by comparative research: the "Letters of Vis and Isolde and other notable parallels between *Vis and Rāmin* and *Tristan*", arriving at some original acquisitions, which I believe will not fail to arouse the interest of fellow romance philologists (a new study, accompanied by the Italian translation of the epistolary between Vis and Rāmin, is being published by Edizioni Carocci); in the third chapter, the author changes perspective and focuses on "Authorial attitudes in *Vis and Rāmin* and in *Tristan*" with regard to various types of characters in these medieval novels. Through their careful analysis, she comes to define the framework of "Strategies of justification and mitigation of lovers' guilt" implemented by Gorgāni and the various authors of Tristan's novel and especially by Béroul.

The volume is enriched by numerous quotations in the original Persian language from the *Vis o Rāmin* (almost 1300 verses accompanied by an Italian translation), an extensive bibliography and an index of names (pp. 487-516). Meanwhile Nahid Norozi has also published in 2022 a valuable Italian translation of the letters of the two lovers (Gorgāni, *Dieci lettere sulla crudeltà di Vis a Rāmin*, with a presentation by Mario Mancini, Carocci, Rome 2022). In conclusion, an essay of great critical and comparative depth, the fruit of years and years of research, a useful read for Iranists and Romance (and Germanic) philologists and which indicates, may I add with a touch of pride, how the Italian Iranological school can nourish, thanks also to the innovative research of this young Italian-Iranian scholar, its best hopes.

*Carlo Saccone*