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**A key to the treasure of the Hakīm : artistic and humanistic aspects of Nizāmī Ganjavī’s Khamsa**

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# **A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm**

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# **A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm**

Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of  
Nizāmī Ganjavī's *Khamsa*

*Edited by Johann-Christoph Bürgel and  
Christine van Ruymbeke*

Leiden University Press

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I take pleasure in expressing my sincere and deep-felt thanks to my dear colleague Dr. Christine van Ruymbeke, without whose ever ready and competent help neither the Nizāmī symposium held in 2004 at the University of Cambridge, nor this volume, containing the papers of that symposium, would have happened. When I suggested to her that we organize such a meeting at her university, she immediately agreed, even though she could anticipate she would have on her shoulders the burden of the administrative work, because I, already retired since a number of years, had no infrastructure at my disposal. She wrote to the people we had agreed to invite, she made the hotel reservations, organized the rooms, the programme, the meals, and saw to it that everybody got her or his travel expenses refunded. She led the correspondence afterwards, found out a good place where to publish the papers and revised those papers which, even though written in English, needed some linguistic polishing. All this, in order to promote the study of one of the greatest poets of Iran, yes I dare say, of medieval literature in general. A poet, high-ranking by dint of his engagement not only for royal justice, as was custom in this kind of literature, intended to furnish a mirror for princes, but also for non-violence, the dignity of women, the importance of personal development and self-knowledge, of true love, and, in general, humane behaviour, inspired not by a legal code, but by reason and wisdom. A poet, who, notwithstanding his ever conscious responsibility, remains poetic throughout his work, by dint of his imagery, his rhetoric, his narrative and dramatist skill, his boundless, but ever reason-controlled fantasy, his capacity to merge and model former motifs and subjects according to his world-view and humanistic message. This great poet, who promised to bless even anybody coming to his grave, will bestow his blessings on Dr. Christine, as he will bless all those who partook and contributed to the success of our Nizāmī meeting.

J.C. Bürgel



## Introduction

### “A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm”

*Christine van Ruymbeke*

The essays collected in the present volume are the proceedings of the Workshop *Nizāmī Ganjavī. Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of the Khamsa*, which was convened and organised at the University of Cambridge (U.K.) in September 2004 by Johann Christoph Bürgel and myself, with the help of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge and with generous funding by the Iran Heritage Foundation and the Rowshan Institute. A special “thank you” also goes to Asghar Seyed-Gohrab who has immediately accepted to publish these proceedings in the Iranian Studies Series. Nizāmī’s importance in the realm of Classical Persian literature and the richness of his work are insufficiently reflected in the too-discreet flow of specialised scholarly studies they have inspired over the last two or three decades. There are still many aspects of this author’s work that cry out for further analysis or surely even for discovery! It is sobering to reflect that this should still be so, eight hundred years after the poet’s demise, which some place exactly in 1209! And yet, to study Nizāmī is a reward in itself and, as is the case with true geniuses, the fascination he wields for the cognoscenti knows no boundaries.

The study of Nizāmī’s work, due to its influence and resonance, also represents an unavoidable step for the knowledge and understanding of the literary production in the lands under Persian cultural influence, ranging from the remotest corners of the Ottoman empire to the Central Asian regions and to Mughal India. But, in addition, as the present collection shows in abundance, the study of Nizāmī’s work increasingly points to the extent of his debt towards a civilisation stretching far beyond the geographical limits of the Persian cultural world, spanning the Chinese and the Mediterranean worlds, and which incorporates a wealth of knowledge and science predating the Islamic era.

With such a multi-faceted author, one cannot help but wonder: will we ever reach an all-round knowledge of Nizāmī? Not aiming at such a sensational and comprehensive unveiling of the author under scrutiny, the present collection of essays only modestly hopes to present *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm*, paraphrasing the first *bayt* of the *Khamsa*. The volume contains a wide spectrum of literary criticism, which echoes the depth

and variety of the poet's thoughts. As such, I believe it is, by the relative rarity of studies focussing on this poet, a major event for Persian Studies in general. I wish to thank the colleagues of international renown, many of whom have a long-standing relationship with the poet, through translations of his poems or through monographs dedicated to him, for their generosity in providing the essays contained here. The quality of their contributions ensures that *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm* presents the cutting-edge of Nizāmī-studies to date in the Western world. The facets it illuminates, the tantalising mentions of yet other ways of approaching the poet, will surely rekindle interest in his oeuvre by opening up new avenues of study. This volume follows and builds upon the publication in 2000 of *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi. Knowledge, Love and Rhetoric*, the proceedings of the symposium organised at Princeton University by Jerry Clinton and Kamran Talattof in February 1998. This latter volume contains both a summary of Nizāmī-scholarship and a bibliography of international publications on the poet. It was not necessary to repeat either of these and I gratefully refer interested readers to the above work. The few publications that appeared since, during the last decade, are mentioned in the present volume's bibliography.

Let us now glance at the contributions which form this "key to the treasure of the Hakīm"! Three essays treat Nizāmī's work globally: Christoph Bürgel develops for us what might well have been the poet's world-view; Priscilla Soucek looks at a particularly fine manuscript containing the five parts of the *Khamsa*, and Kamran Talattof analyses Nizāmī's global understanding of the concept of "speech". Using her unique knowledge of the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, Renate Würsch too strides across Nizāmī's whole oeuvre, analysing his references to men and animals. The four other *mathnavīs* are the subject of one or several further contributions in this volume. My own contribution focuses on a passage in *Khusraw u Shīrīn* and *Laylī u Majnūn* is the object of Leili Anvar's research. *Haft Paykar* is puzzled over by Patrick Franke, Angelo Piemontese, Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Ziva Vesel. Correcting the lack of interest long displayed for Nizāmī's last work, several authors in the present volume are looking at either one or the other of the *Iskandar Nāma* parts: Gabrielle van den Berg, Mario Casari, Patrick Franke again, and Carlo Saccone. Both Christoph Bürgel and Kamran Talattof also refer to Nizāmī's *Dīvān*, not as well known as the famous *mathnavīs*!

In "Nizāmī's World Order", the Introductory Essay to this collection, Christoph Bürgel shares with us the results of a life-time of research on and around Nizāmī. His familiarity with the poet and with about a century of Nizāmī-studies in the West make his contribution a unique and fitting beginning to the volume. He goes through the various strata of being, from mineral to vegetal to animal to man, angels and God. We discover how Nizāmī sees these, how he characterizes them and installs them in a

comprehensive universal order. They are used by the poet to serve his aim, of which the following three are fundamental: self-knowledge (*Selbsterkenntnis*), the dignity of women (against a social order where woman were described by Ghazali “the slaves of man”) and non-violence. The article gives numerous citations taken from the five *mathnavīs* and also from the lesser-known *Dīvān*. Bürgel shows how animals may function as medium for self-knowledge, though this role is mostly played by woman, “the psychagogue par excellence” in the *Khamsa*!

The bulk of present-day studies on Classical Persian literature focuses on mysticism. It might be correct to say that for the last two decades, the majority of scholars in the field have concentrated on the analysis of mystical Persian poets. Fascinating though this approach might be it regretfully pushes the study of non-mystical authors somewhat in the shadow. Opinions vary on whether Nizāmī belongs to this latter group. It is generally accepted that several of his works display a tendency towards mysticism, while others seem rather to refer to philosophy or morality. It is thus particularly rewarding to look at the contributions by Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Leili Anvar, who approach Nizāmī from a mystical point of view, with the analytical tools and scholarly technique and discourse used to interpret sufi-authors. Nizāmī rises to the occasion and yields interesting points for this interpretative research. In “A Mystical Reading of Nizāmī’s Use of Nature in the *Haft Paykar*”, Seyed-Gohrab convincingly argues that the poet sees nature as an object of reflection that reveals the divine rational order by which man can achieve sublimation, but also as a crypt from which man is supposed to escape. The Brethren of Purity are shown to have had an influence on Nizāmī. Interestingly, Seyed-Gohrab also shows how Sanā’ī’s *Sayr al-‘ibad* is the model which Nizāmī has closely followed in the *Haft Paykar*. “The Hidden Pearls of Wisdom: Desire and Initiation in *Laylī u Majnūn*” contains Leili Anvar’s analysis of the story of Majnūn and Laylī, which Nizāmī has contributed to spiritualize as a “romance of desire” and shows its close links with Ahmad Ghazālī’s *Sawānih*. Desire is a passion that never reaches satisfaction in this world, and is expressed in the theme of hollowness, of movement towards nothingness. Anvar also studies the imagery of Laylī and of the pearl, which is also a metaphor for Nizāmī’s own poetry.

But what about analysing Nizāmī’s words with a view to gauge his attitude to and familiarity with Islamic tenets? This is what underlies the researches of both Patrick Franke and Carlo Saccone. In “Drinking from the Water of Life. Nizāmī, Khizr and the symbolism of Poetical Inspiration in Later Persianate Literature”, Franke studies Nizāmī’s references to the mysterious figure of Khizr. He focuses on this amongst Nizāmī’s abundant imagery drawn from Islamic lore and shows how the poet significantly transforms the theme. Khizr occurs both in the *Haft Paykar*, in his role as rescuer of a hero in times of need, and in the *Sharaf Nāma* in connection

with Iskandar's search for the Water of Life. But Nizāmī is innovative as, in the Prologue to the *Sharaf Nāma*, he also asks Khizr to inspire him with poetic originality. This latter role of Khizr survives in later poetry and will even appear in Goethe's and Iqbāl's verses. In "The 'Wasteland' and Alexander the Righteous King in Nizāmī's *Iqbāl Nāma*", Carlo Saccone discovers the symmetrical composition of four *Iqbāl Nāma* episodes: the building of the wall against Gog and Magog and the Wasteland episode; the meeting of the community of Perfect Men and the meeting of the young Peasant. In the former two episodes, Alexander acts as legislator and protector. But when meeting the Perfect Men and the young Peasant, he reaches the limits of sovereignty and cannot add anything or act in a beneficial way. Saccone thus analyses Nizāmī's view on righteous kingship that goes beyond the accepted Muslim approach. A view which is central in the last *mathnavī*, but which also pervades other works such as *Khusraw u Shīrīn* and *Haft Paykar*.

One of the fields in which Nizāmī is recognized as a master, is that of scientific allusions. Both Ziva Vesel and Mario Casari chose this angle to approach the poet. Triggered by the mention of a scientific author as a reference for the decoration of Bahrām Gūr's palace, or by the details of a trip made by Iskandar to the Pole, these two scholars open up for us vistas on the scientific background Nizāmī could build upon. They also look at Nizāmī's close links with Classical Antiquity, whether through direct perusal of Greek and Latin authors, or through translations available in the Medieval Persian era. In "Nizāmī's Cosmographic Vision and Alexander in Search of the Fountain of Life", Casari reveals how aware Nizāmī is of his classical authors. A close analysis of the numerous naturalistic details in the episode of Iskandar's Search for the Fountain of Life and trip into the Land of Darkness reveals Nizāmī's serious labour of research to include scientific information into his poetical composition. Casari goes beyond Nizāmī's texts and, through a comparative analysis of several sources, proposes an identification of the mysterious "Caspian Straits". Ziva Vesel's essay "Teucros in Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar*" focuses on astronomy. Vesel's familiarity with the scientific works that influenced the Medieval Persian thinkers reveals both the difficulties we experience in correctly understanding Nizāmī's seemingly accidental scientific references and the interest of such an understanding for the wider picture of culture and knowledge in the era. In this case, Vesel asks, does Nizāmī's mention of Tangalūshā refer to decans, to degrees of the ecliptic or are they a reminiscence of an archaic and lost pictorial tradition?

Another moment of stunned discovery occurs for the reader of this volume when tackling "The Enigma of Turandot in Nizāmī's Pentad. Azāda and Bahrām between Esther and Sindbād." Angelo Piemontese's synthetic knowledge delves deep into Nizāmī's sources and through his own wide-ranging study of the Bahrām Gūr romance, detects layers going back not

only to the *Shāh Nāma* but also to Biblical references, to Latin sources and to works circulating in the Muslim world, such as the *Book of Sindbād*. This reveals the *Haft Paykar* as a veritable palimpsest, built of layer upon layer of varied sources. Piemontese's essay that uncovers some of the mystery of the *Haft Paykar*, prompts questions on the aims of this cryptic work, which to my mind still remains unexplained, despite generations of scholars attempting to interpret it.

As Piemontese shows, this technique of building new works upon older ones also illuminates the re-writing of Nizāmī's works, done by Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī. Another illustration of the way in which Nizāmī reworks existing stories is my own study "What is it that Khusraw learns from the Kalīla-Dimna stories?" revolving around the teasing forty Kalīla-Dimna verses occurring at the end of the *Khusraw u Shīrīn* story. Rather than giving essential advice for Khusraw's future career as rightful ruler of Iran, they seem to point to Nizāmī's delight in parody, a hitherto rather neglected aspect of the author. The conclusions reached in this essay also open up a new understanding of the poet's attitude towards his source-texts and his rewriting of episodes taken from famous works such as the *Shāh Nāma*.

In "‘Let even a cat win your heart!’ Nizāmī on Animal and Man", Renate Würsch takes a look at the references to animals in literature. She uses her unique familiarity with the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, Nizāmī's difficult first *mathnavī*, to propose a deep-going study of the philosophical and religious currents, of the sub-texts one ought to be aware of, when encountering a misleadingly simple mention of cats in the *Khusraw u Shīrīn mathnavī*. She also analyses the role of animals in other Nizāmī *mathnavīs*, concluding that only in *Laylī u Majnūn* does the poet give animals an active participation in the plot.

Another aspect which has focussed scholarly attention in the last decade and helped to better understand the production of manuscripts, is the relation between text and image. Nizāmī's *Khamsa* is one of those popular works which have been copied and illustrated numerous times through the medieval period, both in Iran, Central Asia, Ottoman Turkey and India. Gabrielle van den Berg compares Firdawsī's, Nizāmī's and Amīr Khusraw's descriptions of how Iskandar builds a wall to restrict the invasion by the redoubtable nightmarish tribes Gog and Magog. She analyses the information given by these authors on the appearance of these monsters and gives us a comprehensive list of Nizāmī manuscripts containing illustrations of the episode, in order to discuss the way the painters used these descriptions in their own depictions of the episode.

Priscilla Soucek and Muhammad Isa Waley in "The Nizāmī Manuscript of Shāh Tahmāsp. A Reconstructed History" take us through an in-depth study of the pages of one of the treasure manuscripts of the British Library, Ms OR 2265. It contains seventeen illustrations, of which the fourteen dating from the sixteenth century are amongst the most famous, best

studied and most admired of Persian paintings. But the study of the text folios, hitherto not attempted, gives a detailed explanation of the way this manuscript was put together. The authors sensationally conclude from their study of the historical, literary and artistic issues of the manuscript, that this volume is the result of a combination of different manuscripts that were salvaged to form this particular volume, usually considered a complete creation made for that great patron of manuscripts, the second Safavid Shāh, Tahmāsp I.

Nizāmī is wont to refer to his own art as a poet. Leili Anvar talks about Nizāmī's use of the metaphor of the pearl to refer to his poetry. Patrick Franke has analysed the reference to Khizr as an inspirer on whom Nizāmī calls before starting his work. Christoph Bürgel also mentions Nizāmī's interesting shifts between pride and extreme modesty towards his art as a poet. In "Nizāmī Ganjavī, the Wordsmith: The Concept of *sakhun* in Classical Persian Poetry", Kamran Talattof compares Nizāmī's references to "speech" (*sukhan/sakhun*) with those found in verses by Sa'dī, Rūmī and Hāfiz. This research is a study on Nizāmī's understanding of the term, showing that he ranks his verses with the *Qur'an*. For Talattof, Nizāmī is a philologist rather than a philosopher or a theologian and he concludes that no other Persian poet has engaged so extensively in explaining the concept of the word "speech".

To conclude, as I reflect on the direction into which the present collection of essays seems to be taking Nizāmī-studies, I detect several patterns. It is manifest that Nizāmī's width and depth of knowledge is the most fascinating element for present-day research. He is a reference for those who look for links between the knowledge prevalent in Classical Antiquity and in Medieval Islam. He is also a witness to the refinement of the audience he was writing for, in Western Iran, a region that probably played an especially active role between the Mediterranean and the Central Asian and Eastern worlds. We are also beginning to discover how the author's thoughts, philosophy, aims and interests vary in his five *mathnavīs*, presumably maturing but also catering for the specific tastes of his patrons and target audience and reacting to the events of the times. If we may agree that Nizāmī is not only a poet, but also a thinker, a Hakīm in every sense of the word, then we still need more refined insights into the evolution of key-themes within his oeuvre. Another aspect of importance is Nizāmī's relation to previous authors and his influence on later literature. Several studies in the present volume highlight the references he makes to older literary and philosophical works which were shaping the thoughts of the society he was living in. Further studies into Nizāmī's game of rewriting will doubtless yield interesting insights into the society for which the poet was composing his *Khamsa*. We also see how he has given his personal interpretation of several concepts, influencing later authors who in turn based their works on – or chose to rewrite – his *Khamsa*.



And finally, a word on the transliteration and reference systems used in this volume. The citations from the *Khamsa* are all given in Persian script. Within the text of the contributions, the first appearance of specific Persian words is also in Persian script, with a simplified transliteration (giving only the diacriticals that mark long vowels), which is then used for later mentions of the terms. The edition of the *Khamsa* that has been used throughout this volume is the 1372 Tehran *Kulliyat* edition by Vahid Dastgirdi. The *masnavī* initials are first given (MA for *Makhzan al-Asrār*; KS for *Khusraw u Shīrīn*; LM for *Laylī u Majnūn*; HP for *Haft Paykar*; SN for *Sharaf Nāma* and IN for *Iqbāl Nāma*). These initials are followed by the chapter number given in Dastgirdi's edition, followed after the comma by the lines of the relevant *bayt*(s). Where the contributors have specifically used another edition, then these references are given in the footnotes.



# 1 Nizāmī's World Order

*J.-Christoph Bürgel*

My friend and mentor, Prof. Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003), always wanted me to write a book on Nizāmī, giving it the title *Nizami und die Ordnung der Welt (Nizāmī and the Order of the World)*, because the name Nizāmī is derived from *نظام (nizām)* which means “order”. This is what I propose to do: to wander with Nizāmī through the various ontological layers of the world, starting with the sphere of stone and metal, passing through the realms of plants and animals onto the human kingdom, giving special attention to women, poor people, kings, poets (rather, the poet Nizāmī himself) and finally, prophets (especially Muhammad). After a brief look at demons, fairies, and angels, ultimately, we will reach the throne of God. Often more than one of these issues is involved, making it difficult to follow a strict and exclusive order. On the way, we will glance here and there at problems solved and unsolved.

## ■ Stones

Nizāmī's stones are usually precious, appearing in metaphors and comparisons to describe beauty. There is also a scientific aspect attached to the topic of stones, which could interest a mineralogist. I will give only one example of the occurrence of precious stones: an incident in Nizāmī's last and longest *mathnavī*, the *Iskandar Nāma*, involving a ruler and a young girl (IN26,17-61). Iskandar, portrayed as a strict monotheist who systematically destroys pagan (especially Zoroastrian) shrines and temples during his conquest of Persia, is about to destroy a golden statue of the Buddha in a temple of the old residence of Qandahar. The Buddha's eyes are made of two precious jewels. Yet, a girl suddenly appears and tells him the jewels' story. Two birds had brought the jewels from the desert and they aroused the cupidity of the mighty. After internal struggles they finally saw reason (*خرد کردشان عاقبت یآوری khirad kardishān 'āqabat yāvarī*) and agreed to make a golden statue of Buddha and use the two jewels for the eyes. The girl closes her address with a hyperbolic compliment, praising Iskandar implicitly as sky and sun, and appealing to his generosity:

گرش آسمان برنگیرد رواست  
 ز ما کی کند دیده خورشید دور  
 دراو روشنان باد کمتر دمند  
 شب بیوگان را مکن بی چراغ

دری کان ره آورد مرغ هواست  
 ز خورشید گیرد همه دیده نور  
 چراغی که کوران بدان خرمنند  
 مکن بیوه ای چند را گرم داغ

(IN 26, 53-56)

*A jewel that was brought by the birds of the air / the sky will not  
 want to take it back!*

*Every eye receives its light from the sun / How should the sun rob  
 eyes?*

*A lamp that rejoices the blind / should not be extinguished by the  
 seeing.*

*Don't torment the hearts of a few women / don't bereave them of  
 the lamp of their nights!*

Touched, Iskandar has the statue engraved with his name, putting it under his personal protection. More important than the flattery and the appeal to generosity is probably the allusion to the powerful people who overcame their cupidity and abstained from violence, because they were led by reason.

## Plants

The same is true for Nizāmī's mention of plants and trees. It usually implies a botanic dimension. As van Ruymbeke has shown,<sup>1</sup> poetry and science are often intertwined in Nizāmī's botanic verses, although his mentions remain overwhelmingly those of a poet rather than a scientist. Let me just mention one incident in the *Khusraw u Shīrīn mathnavī*: The stone-cutter and sculptor Farhād has fallen in love with Shīrīn, but she is beyond his reach due to the difference in social position. However, his love kindles Khusraw's jealousy and the king, though married himself, wants to eliminate him. So, he sends the false news that Shīrīn has died, whereupon Farhād who was carving a pass through the mountain, throws his axe away and precipitates himself to death. The axe however, whose handle was made of pomegranate wood, falls in the ground and turns into a pomegranate tree with curative powers.<sup>2</sup>

Another aspect of this ontological layer is the description of landscapes. Apart from verses describing sunrise, nightfall or moon- and starlit nights, to which I shall return towards the end of my paper, there are also some longer and independent descriptions of landscapes and of gardens. The *Makhzan al-Asrār* has one of the longest and finest of these, describing a gorgeous garden with flowers, trees and rivulets, which is a projection of the human heart.<sup>3</sup> Nizāmī's approach to nature makes it likely that the later *paysages*, e.g. the two famous descriptions of winter and spring-time in the

*Haft Paykar* which open and end the seven inserted tales, also possess a similar double meaning: a concrete visible and an inner symbolic meaning.<sup>4</sup> We should also mention in passing Nizāmī's masterful descriptions of fire, in which the changing play of flames is rendered by ever new dynamic metaphors.

## ■ Animals

Nizāmī's tenderness towards animals derives from his love and respect for every created being. He does not appear to have been a vegetarian like Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, the famous tenth-century Arabic poet, who condemned even the consumption of honey as robbery of the bees' crop. His descriptions of sumptuous meals include fowl, game and, of course, wine. But he would probably have subscribed to the eleventh-century Andalusian philosopher Ibn Tufayl's view that man should not kill animals beyond the necessities of self-preservation. He further attributes special mythic or magic qualities to certain animals and gives a supra-natural dimension to man-animal relations. The modern critic might well consider here that the otherwise so realistic poet crosses the line into the realm of magic and fairy-tales.

As a testimony to his compassion for animals, we find in the introduction to *Laylī u Majnūn* his claim (perhaps influenced by al-Ma'arrī, who, in turn may have been influenced by Indian thought) that:

نازده زمن جناح موری

تا من منم از طریق زوری

(LM8,56)

*For as long as I have been a human being/ not even the foot of an ant has suffered injury from me.*<sup>5</sup>

Nizāmī's interest in animals is already evident in his first work. Animals appear in one out of four of the twenty parables illustrating moral points: parable 2 (two speaking owls), parable 6 (a hunter with his dog and a fox), parable 7 (Farīdūn spares a gazelle), parable 8 (a fruitseller and a fox), parable 10 (Jesus and a dead dog) and parable 20 (a nightingale and a falcon).<sup>6</sup> Except for the dead dog in parable 10, all these animals have the gift of speech, talking amongst themselves or with men.<sup>7</sup> Parable 2 is the most famous of all: the Sasanian emperor Anūshīrvān and his vizier ride into a village, where, on top of a ruined *aywān*, they spot a couple of owls apparently talking to each other. The emperor asks his vizier, who understands the language of animals, what they are saying. The vizier first begs and receives the emperor's promise of pardon before explaining that these are two male owls. One is the father, bargaining with his future son-in-law about the dowry. The father demands a ruined village, such as the one in which they are at present. The future son-in-law's answer is that, provided

the king does not change his rule, he will be able to give not just one, but a thousand ruined villages! Anūshīrvān understands the lesson and thereupon begins to rule with that sense of justice that earned him his fame.<sup>8</sup>

Some of the animal motifs of the *Makhsan* reappear in the later *mathnavīs*.<sup>9</sup> The motif of sparing animals (parable 7: Farīdūn spares a gazelle) returns in *Laylī u Majnūn*. Majnūn interferes twice: when a hunter is about to kill a gazelle, and in the second case, a stag. These incidents show Nizāmī's desire to fashion Majnūn's character as a model of non-violence.<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, the motif itself first appears in a *hadīth* about Muhammad interceding for a gazelle, and then again, long before Nizāmī, in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. Majnūn also spares a gazelle because she reminds him of his beloved Laylī. The motif of non-violence in this *mathnavī* becomes bipolar (working in both directions) when Majnūn starts to live with the wild animals who love and spare him as they spare their other preys. This is a well-known motif, ultimately going back to the saga of Orpheus, but also to an *Old-Testament* prophecy about the future kingdom of peace.<sup>11</sup> Many of the greatest Muslim painters have illustrated it. In Islam, it was also linked with Solomon, because of his sway over the animals.<sup>12</sup> The motif re-appears in illustrations of Moghul emperors to depict their love of peace, as shown in an enlightening article by Koch.<sup>13</sup>

The second important motif belonging in this chapter is that of animals directly or indirectly giving warning by their peculiar appearance or, in the course of a hunt, leading the hunter to an unsought-for place, a mysterious cave, etc. A parallel to the talking owls and their warning effect on Anūshīrvān occurs in the *Haft Paykar*. Here, it is the hero King Bahrām (nick-named Bahrām-i Gūr ("Bahrām of the Onagers")) because of his fondness for that quarry) who is taught a lesson by a dog, though not a speaking one. Deeply depressed by the deplorable state of his kingdom, the king visits a shepherd in the countryside. He notices a dog hanging from a tree. The shepherd explains that he totally trusted his dog to guard the sheep. When the flock began to shrink daily, he did not at first suspect the dog, until it turned out that he had a liaison with a she-wolf who demanded one sheep for every mating. So, the shepherd hanged him from that tree (HP34). Engrossed in his wedding festivities with the seven princesses of the seven climes or world regions, the king had neglected his government (not, as the story first suggests, for just one week but for a full seven years!), entrusting a vizier with the regency. Growing suspicious, the king orders an investigation: the vizier's treachery and his tyrannical rule come to light and are duly punished. Both stories, that of Anūshīrvān and of Bahrām, also relate to two other major concerns of our poet; the issues of just rule and of self-awareness (*Selbsterkenntnis*), two topics, to which we shall return.

Two other remarkable incidents deserve mention as variants of the archetypal motif of the Animal-Guide, tackled by Donà in his magisterial

*Per le vie dell'altro mondo. L'animale guida e il mito del viaggio.*<sup>14</sup> The double appearance of this motif in *Haft Paykar* (other examples occurring in *Khusraw u Shīrīn* and in *Iskandar Nāma*) reveals Nizāmī as a narrative architect, a master of far-spanning structures: in his youth, Bahrām hunts a female onager, who leads him to the entrance of a cave guarded by a huge dragon. He realizes that the dragon has devoured the foal of the onager and that she has led him there to save her child. He kills the dragon and releases the colt still alive in the monster's belly. The onager now ushers him into the cave, where he finds a large treasure in numerous jars, which he then orders to be loaded on camels and uses as gifts. Nizāmī summarizes the moral as in a fairy-tale:

و ازدها را اسیر گور کند هم سلامت دهند و هم گنجش	شه که با خود حساب گور کند لاجرم عاقبت به پارنجش
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(HP12, 66-67)

*A king who to a wild ass gave / justice; imprisoned in a grave  
A dragon, finally, for his pains /salvation and a treasure gains.*<sup>15</sup>

This fabulous event foreshadows the later one, where Bahrām is again led by an onager to a cave, in which, however, he mysteriously disappears, a fate reminiscent of that of Kay-Khusraw as told by Firdawsī. Bahrām is aware that he is no longer hunting an ass but himself. He realizes for a last time the ambivalence of this world, symbolized in the double meaning of the two words گور (*gūr* “wild ass” and “grave”) and آهو (*āhū* “gazelle” and “defect” or “vice”). He realizes that the onager is guiding him فرشته پناه (*firishta panāh* “angel-protected”) towards Heaven. The constant punning on the double meaning of *gūr* in this passage and the symbolism of this pun is representative of Nizāmī's style. Illusion is one of the dominant motifs of this *mathnavī*. It is apparent also in the name of the bad vizier, which is راست روشن (*rāst rawshān* “Upright-Fair”) and reaches its peak in the Wednesday story, whose hero Māhān is haunted a whole night by one ghastly illusion after the other.<sup>16</sup>

## ■ Man and Woman

We now reach the anthropological dimension of Nizāmī's work. How does he depict man? In the last narrative chapter of *Haft Paykar*, the poet addresses man:

و آفریننده را دلیل شناس با ددانی نگر که دد نشوی و آنچه خواهی ولایت خردست	آفرین را توئی فرشته پاس نیک مردی ببین که بد نشوی آنچه داری حساب نیک و بدست
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(HP37, 95-7)

*You are the angel, who defends / God's praise; knows the Creator's signs.  
Contemplate goodness; be not bad / observe the beast; be not a beast.  
Both good and evil you can weigh / aspire to Reason's sovereignty.<sup>17</sup>*

These few lines provide an example of Nizāmī's enlightened monotheistic piety. He wants man to be pious, good, aware of God's grace as visible in his creation, but at the same time, guided by reason. The image of man is central in his poetry. Let us examine only a few dominant aspects of this very complex topic. His image of man is neither flat nor idealized (except for his praise of princes, which consists of the usual superhuman panegyrics). In general, his image is dynamic and full of tension, displaying a thorough knowledge of man's psyche. His heroes are not static types; they are human beings, who undergo a development, driven by their particular dispositions and emotions. They have to struggle against temptations that come from within, they have to purify themselves in order to become what the poet (here as it were in the place of God) wants them to become. Nizāmī is not blind to the reality of evil, particularly within the ruling classes. As mentioned above, there is the character of the tyrannical vizier in *Haft Paykar* who incarcerates thousands of innocent persons in the absence of the king. Seven released prisoners tell their deplorable fate, giving the reasons for their incarceration. Their reports on human injustice and cruelty<sup>18</sup> are a sobering counterpart to the seven enchanting love-stories. They show Nizāmī's awareness of the grievances of bad government, which were no less real during his time than for Nizām al-Mulk, a century earlier, from whose *Siyāsat Nāma* these reports are taken.

Nizāmī's picture of human society is nuanced and in a certain sense, egalitarian, in that it includes the various strata of society, the poor as well as the rich, the rulers as well as the subjects (preferably shepherds). There is also his attitude towards the tender sex: his female protagonists are as endowed with noble features and dignified character traits as men.<sup>19</sup> They are often even more virtuous than their masculine counterparts, which incidentally, applies also to many a tale in the *Thousand and One Nights*. Be it mentioned in passing that Nizāmī more than once compares his own poems to a bride.<sup>20</sup> It is particularly in the process of the self-awareness of male's own limits, defects, vices, etc. that women play a decisive role. The women filling this psychological office come from all social strata, though the most impressive is the Armenian princess Shīrīn.<sup>21</sup> For the development of her beloved Khusraw, she functions as the *anima rationale*, the uppermost part of the Platonic soul. This indicates that the *mathnavī* might function as Ibn Sina's allegories (or, to use Henri Corbin's expression, *récits visionnaires*), where the philosopher describes the drama of the human soul in



the shape of brief stories with characters representing the various psychic forces.

We encounter in the very first *mathnavī* the old woman who reproaches the Seljuk ruler Sanjar for his tyranny and warns him of the destructive consequences. In *Haft Paykar* we admire the slave-girl Fitna, who by dint of a courageous and shrewd plot, manages to teach her lord Bahrām a lesson about self-control and moderation in moments of wrath.<sup>22</sup> There are two powerful ladies in the *Iskandar Nāma*, one again a slave-girl, the other a queen (a late echo of queen Kandake in Pseudo-Callisthenes's *Iskandar* novel). The slave-girl appears in male guise and fights in a number of battles against the Rūs or Varangians who lived in the Caucasus. As she is finally defeated by a giant serving the Rūs, her helmet falls off and her long fair hair betrays her true sex. The end of this story again proves Nizāmī's conciliatory spirit. Having personally and bravely defeated the giant, and thereby the Rūs, Iskandar decides to celebrate this victory:

به زندانیان بر دلش گشت نرم بیاید به رامشگه مرزبان به رامشگه آمد چو کوه بلند فرو پڑمریده دران بزمگاه شفییعی نه بیش از زبان بستگی ببخشود بر وی دل شهریار بفرمود تا برگرفتند بند بر آزاد مردی زیان کس نکرد نوازش گری کرد با او تمام	چو شد مغزش از خوردن باده گرم بفرمود کان بندی بی زبان به فرمان شاه آن گرفتار بند همه تن شکسته ز نیروی شاه به زاری بنالید از آن خستگی چو مرد زبان بسته نالید زار ازان زور دیده تن زورمند رها کردش آن شاه آزاد مرد نشاندهش به آزر و دادش طعام
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(SN55,97-104)

*When the wine had warmed his marrow, his heart felt mercy for the prisoners and he ordered to bring the speechless Russian from his gaol into the festival hall. So he came and entered the hall tottering and quite broken by the king's majesty, moaning with exhaustion, his dumbness his only intercessor. However, when the king beheld him in so miserable a state and heard him moaning, he pardoned him from all his heart, ordered the defeated brute to be released from his chains, gave him freedom, persuaded that with the experience of such generosity, he would not act badly again.*

However, the monster steals away to fetch the slave-girl, laying her down tenderly at Iskandar's feet. The great victor is deeply moved and asks her who she is and why she has done what she did, risking her life in the battle. She discloses her identity, confessing that she is that neglected and forgotten slave-girl whom Iskandar had received from the Chinese emperor. She wanted to show him her value, whereupon he deigns to spend a few

nights with her enjoying her beauty and her music (like Fitna, she is a harpist).<sup>23</sup>

Queen Nūshāba was visited by Iskandar in disguise, masquerading as his own ambassador and demanding the queen's submission. She recognizes him from his royal behaviour, and exposes him by showing him his portrait on a scroll with the portraits of all the living rulers. She shows him a table covered with bowls full of jewels and invites him to help himself. On his angry objection that these things are not edible, she admonishes him to be aware of the limited value of all the riches he has amassed by violence throughout his life. He profits from this lesson and revises his prejudices against the female sex.<sup>24</sup> At the end of his visit, he makes a pact with her, binding himself not to use any violence against her.<sup>25</sup> The scene belongs to a long line of episodes in the course of which Iskandar meets his limits, recognizing the dubious value of his conquests. It is, to use the expression of the French scholar de Polignac, a scene of *non-achèvement*. Another instance is the episode where Iskandar's army fails to conquer a stronghold in the mountains used by a squad of robbers for their way-laying. Iskandar turns to a Dervish living in a nearby forest, who, by a mere sigh, induces the robbers to surrender. Nizāmī's hero acts atypically, showing the poet's preference for mildness over violence: instead of hanging or crucifying the defeated robbers, Iskandar after taking the stronghold and transforming it into a *khān* for travellers, gives them an indemnity for the loss of their castle with new property in that mountain.<sup>26</sup>

Two other episodes illustrate similar non-achievements: Iskandar's unsuccessful attempt to find the Water of Life<sup>27</sup> and his resignation from his prophetic mission, under the impact of a perfect community, whose people lead a pious life without ever having been instructed by any prophet, simply on the grounds of their inborn insight and reason:

حسابی کزین مردم آموختم ...  
وگر مردم اینند پس ما که ایم  
بدان بود تا باید اینجا گذشت  
درآموزم آیین این بخردان

مرا بس شد از هر چه اندوختم  
اگر سیرت اینست ما بر چه ایم  
فرستادن ما به دریا و دشت  
مگر سیر کردم ز خوی ددان

(EN27, 162 and 165-7)

*Of all that I gathered together, nothing but what I learnt from this people counts (...)*

*If this means just behaviour, then what is our fundament? / If this means being human, who then are we?*

*This is why I was sent through sea and steppe: / In order to attain this goal!*

*In order to become weary of the nature of beasts / and to learn the manners of a people guided by their reason!*

The verses are reminiscent of the beginning of *Khusraw u Shīrīn*: telling how king Hurmūz (Hormizd IV, r. 579-590) punished his own son, the future Khusraw Parvīz, for trespassing against the public order in a night of carousal, Nizāmī exclaims:

<p>نه با بیگانه با دردانه خویش ...          که با فرزند از اینسان رفت بازی          که بادا زین مسلمانی ترا شرم          گر این گیری مسلمانی کدام است</p>	<p>سیاست بین که میکردند ازین پیش          کجا آن عدل و آن انصاف سازی          جهان ز آتش پرستی شد چنان گرم          مسلمانیم ما او گیر نام است</p>
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(KS15, 29 and 31-33)

*Look at the jurisdiction they were practising in those days / not just  
 with foreigners, but with one's own child! (...)  
 Where is that justice now and that just rule / that was employed  
 even against an heir apparent?  
 The Zoroastrian religion made the world so warm / that you should  
 be ashamed of this kind of Islam (ruling to-day).  
 We are Muslims, gabr is just a name for us/ But if this is Gabri,  
 what than is Musalmani?*

Some of Nizāmī's wise characters possess that self-awareness from the moment they appear on the narrative stage. Thus, the vizier Buzurg-Umīd, who was in service of the Sasanian king Hormizd and later of his son Khusraw Parvīz: *دل از غفلت به آگاهی رسیدش* (*dil az quflat bi āgāhī rasīdash*) "his heart/mind, once careless, had become alert/conscious" KS14,44). Towards the end of this *mathnavī*, Buzurg-Umīd, requested by Shīrīn, gives an ingenious shortened version of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. Khusraw is so impressed that he repents of all his deviations from justice and erects a new building of rightful ruling.<sup>28</sup> In the following chapter, the wise Nizāmī, *hakīm-i Nizāmī*, gives wise advice to the reader and again emphasizes the role of self-awareness:

<p>خدا را دانی ار خود را بدانی</p>	<p>بدان خودرا که از راه معانی</p>
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(KS93, 17)

*Know yourself, for according to old wisdom (lit. meanings) you will  
 know God if you know yourself.*

This is but a Persian version of the famous *hadīth* "He who knows himself, knows his Lord" (*man 'arafa nafsahu 'arafa rabbahu*). But knowledge of God in Nizāmī's view has nothing to do with a legalist attitude. As far as I can see, he never even touches upon the fulfilment of the Five Pillars of Islam. Rather, it means, as we shall presently see, to use one's intellect,

one's God-given reason, in order to behold God in the signs of His creation.

The notion of reason is central in Nizāmī's thought. This is most evident in the *Iskandar Nāma*, which, as I have shown elsewhere, may be read as a defence of Greek philosophy. Iskandar's evolution is conceived of as an ascent, but not from ordinary man to perfect man, which would mean that he gradually becomes invested with cosmic power, just as Prophet Muhammad and the Islamic rulers are presented in panegyrics in Nizāmī's and other comparable poets' works. In this respect, Nizāmī's Iskandar novel may even be read as a correction of those boundless hyperbolic hymns. Nevertheless, his hero does develop unto a level high above that of the ordinary man. But Iskandar's development is based on Fārābī's concept of the qualities of the ideal leader of a perfect town, the *madīna fādila*, behind which Plato's *Republic* is looming.<sup>29</sup> A vision which requires of that leader that he be not just a governor and a warrior, but a philosopher and, finally, a prophet. Nizāmī does not mention Fārābī, but then he hardly ever mentions his sources.<sup>30</sup> At the beginning of the *mathnavī*, the poet announces:

<p>زدم قرعه بر نام نام آوران خیال سکندر درو یافتم که هم تیغ زن بود و هم تاجدار ولایت ستان بلکه آفاق گیر به حکمت نبشتند منشور او پذیرا شدندش به پیغمبری درختی برومند خواهم نشانند دم از کار کشورگشائی زخم کنم تازه با رنجهای کهن که خواند خدا نیز پیغمبرش</p>	<p>در آن حیرت آباد بی یاوران هر آیینه کز خاطرش تافتم مبین سرسری سوی آن شهریار گروهش خوانند صاحب سریر گروهی ز دیوان دستور او گروهی ز پاکی و دین پروری من از هر سه دانه که دانا فشانند نخستین در پادشائی زخم ز حکمت بر آرایم آنگه سخن به پیغمبری کوبم آنگه درش</p>
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(SN8,40-9)

*When, in the maze of history, I looked for a fitting hero for this book, the image of Iskandar rose before my eyes and it did not let itself be discarded. Do not take offence in this ruler. Some call him emperor, conqueror of kingdoms, even of the horizons, others, in view of his just government, attribute to him the glory of wisdom, still others consider him to be a prophet because of his purity and piety. From these three seeds that he has sown, I shall grow a tree with many fruits. First I shall speak of kingdom and conquest, then adorn my words with wisdom, renewing the old strife; finally, I shall knock at the doors of prophethood, because God gave him the title of a prophet.*

As is so often the case with Nizāmī, Greek and Islamic elements are intertwined. Wisdom (*hikmat*) is for Nizāmī a Greek legacy as well as a

Qur'anic imposition: "renewing the old strife" refers, I think, to the increasing religious opposition against philosophy. More than a century earlier, in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and other works, al-Ghazālī had condemned as heretic some tenets of the Aristotelian school.<sup>31</sup> Partly as a consequence of that verdict, two events in the last decade of the twelfth century, when Nizāmī must have been in his fifties or sixties, marked the history of Islamic thought like beacons. In 1191, the thirty-five-year old Suhrawardī, the founder of the *hikmat al-ishrāq* or "Wisdom of Illumination", was accused of heresy and sentenced to death by the *fatwa* of a religious tribunal in Aleppo. In 1195, Ibn Rushd, then almost in his seventies, was banned from his home-town Cordoba and his books were burnt. Nizāmī must have been aware of these events when, by the turn of the twelfth or in the first years of the thirteenth century, he started work on his *Iskandar Nāma*, which he completed about 1204. His message, especially at the moment when Iskandar receives the call to prophethood, is crystal-clear: philosophy is God-given and thus compatible with religion. For this new journey, Iskandar equips himself with the holy scriptures (Nizāmī does not mention any book in particular) and also with three philosophical anthologies containing apophthegms by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (IN20,83-6).

Less obvious, but perhaps more revealing of Nizāmī's philosophical orientation is the already-mentioned incident towards the end of the epos: Iskandar reaches a town whose inhabitants behave like pious people. Their community functions even better than any real Persian, Byzantine or Islamic town. They leave their doors open, feel safe, fear no theft, trust in God concerning their crops, etc. All this however, without any official religion, without any prophet having instructed them, but just thanks to their reason (IN27).<sup>32</sup> This is again in congruence with Fārābī's views shared also by the later Arabic Aristotelians: man can be in contact with the Universal Intellect, and therewith ultimately with God himself, through philosophical training. Thus, by his inborn reason man can learn what revelation teaches. This kind of self-reliance could not fail to appear arrogant or heretic to religious factions who therefore looked with suspicion upon the adherents of Greek philosophy.<sup>33</sup> Nizāmī was not a philosopher (if I am not mistaken, he uses only once the term فيلسوف *filsūf*).<sup>34</sup> Nizāmī was a *hakīm*. His philosophy was less Aristotelian than Platonic. Nor was he a mystic,<sup>35</sup> and he was less impressed by Neo-Platonism than were Sanā'ī, Rūmī, Jāmī and others.

His philosophical tenets are those of his time, syncretic. He believed in occult sciences, as the inserted tales in the second part of the *Iskandar Nāma* show. In fact, these occult sciences, (astrology, alchemy, magic) were rated above philosophy in Late Antiquity and according to the Brethren of Purity. One could and should only study them after attaining complete mastery in philosophy. They were, according to the title of the best-known Arabic manual on magic, "The Philosopher's Goal" (غاية الحكيم)

*Ghāyat al-hakīm*). What interested Nizāmī was how, as a Muslim or a pious monotheist, to correctly deal with their power (*Mächtigkeit*), which could be autonomous, therefore dangerous and ultimately pernicious, or legitimate, i.e. subjected to the Will of God and serving good tenets. This is what the brief stories on astrology, alchemy, and magic in the Iskandar novel illustrate.<sup>36</sup>

Nizāmī's Platonism is also manifest in the story about the magic power of music, the contest between Aristotle and Plato. Plato has full command of this power after exploring the music of the celestial spheres, while Aristotle fails when he wants to demonstrate that he is equal or even superior to Plato. In other words, this is not just a story on how to handle this power correctly, it is ultimately a parable about the victory of Platonism over Aristotelianism; a victory proven by Suhrawardī and ibn 'Arabī, whose work was still in progress at the time of Nizāmī's death.<sup>37</sup> This story of the contest between Aristotle and Plato functions as a correction of that first competition, told in the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, which resulted in the death of the defeated sage. It is part of a collection of other competitive encounters: that of the Chinese and the Byzantine painters,<sup>38</sup> and the dispute about love between Khusraw and Farhād.<sup>39</sup> All these competitions show how our poet prefers peaceful encounters to deadly duels and wars.

A final example: In a fictional but meaningful assembly, Iskandar gathers seven sages of different epochs ranging from Thales (seventh/sixth c. BC) to Porphyry (third c. AD) to debate about the beginning of the world. One of the Aristotelian tenets anathematised by al-Ghazālī was the eternity of the world, i.e. the world had no beginning, it was never created. What does Nizāmī's Aristotle say about the beginning of the world? Does he deny the creation? No, Nizāmī skilfully circumvents the problem, thus amending the condemnation in al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* and saving Aristotle from being a heretic for the post-Ghazalian Muslim reader!

The identification of the sources used by Nizāmī, here as well as in the other poems, is still unsolved, a complex and intricate issue.<sup>40</sup> Nizāmī himself is very uncommunicative. He emphasizes that he read many books and chronicles in various languages, but he hardly mentions any author or title of books. When he does, they are unexpected. Thus, for *Haft Paykar* he mentions Firdawsī, Bukhārī, the author of the famous *hadīth* collection and Tabarī, the great historian. Even stranger are his indications in the *Iskandar Nāma*. He mentions the famous *Istamakhis* (a work of dubious origin on magic and other occult sciences, which passed for a work by Hermes Trismegistos)<sup>41</sup> and the *Kitāb al-ulūf* by Abū Ma'shar (a famous book on astrology by an outstanding early Arabic authority)<sup>42</sup> along with a transparent allusion to Ptolemy's cosmology. I further identified a number of travelogues he used for the description of Iskandar's travels. The gruesome custom of the "head-adorers" (*sar-parastān*),<sup>43</sup> who used a severed, but still living human skull, as soothsayer is probably gleaned from the *Istamakhis*

(though it also occurs in the above-mentioned *Ghāyat al-hakīm*). The story on black magic is obviously taken from the *Epistles* of the Brethren of Purity, who in turn found it in Plato's *Republic*. This is the story of the Ring of Gyges, that could make its wearer invisible and was found and then misused by a shepherd who overturned the king of the country. It is likely that the tale about the musical contest between Plato and Aristotle is also inspired by a passage in the *Epistles* about the magic power of music.

## ■ Nizāmī

We now switch from the chapter “mankind” to the study of one particular man, the poet Nizāmī. We have seen his high opinion of the female sex, which according to Bertels, the great pioneer of Nizāmī studies, is so opposed to the attitude of his time, that it can only be explained by the influence of his first wife Apak, who was a Kipchak and thus a Christian.<sup>44</sup> Influenced by the ruling ideology of his time, Bertels also emphasized Nizāmī's favourable attitude towards what he called the “working class”. But the eminent Russian scholar was not mistaken in his perception. Nizāmī does in fact introduce representatives of the lower classes, shepherds, slave-girls, and, most prominent of all, the sculptor Farhād, confronting them with members of the ruling class.

But what about his self-view as a poet? This image is remarkably high-flown, fully developed already in the introduction to his first epos, the *Makhzan al-Asrār*.<sup>45</sup> He describes the nature of true poets, ranking them very high, second only to the prophets, and as to their power, more mighty than magicians. The true poet is, to use the Latin terms, *vates et pontifex*, soothsayer and priest, invested with sacred or demonic power; these connotations are also present in our Western culture. Nizāmī is aware of the dangers involved when power is at stake. He uses a simple pun, already introduced by Islamic poets such as Sanā'ī, who felt the tension between piety and poetry resulting from the Qur'anic verdict on poets at the end of *Surah* 26. De Bruijn thoroughly analysed this conflict of “Piety and Poetry” in his study on Sanā'ī. Nizāmī also emphasises that:

نامزد شعر مشو زینهار	تا نکند شرع تو را نامدار
سلطنت ملک معانی دهد	شعر تو را سدره نشانی دهد
کز کمرت سایه به جوزا رسد	شعر تو از شرع بدانجا رسد
کالشعراء امراء الکلام	شعر برآرد بامیریت نام

(MA14, 40-43)

*As long as the law (shar')<sup>46</sup> did not give you a name/ Do not strive to become famous in poetry (shi'r).*

*Poetry will give you a place in Paradise (on the Sidra tree)/ Sovereignty in the kingdom of ideas (or poetic concetti).*

*Through piety, poetry will let you reach a place/ where Orion will  
be outshone by your girdle.  
Poetry will make you as famous as a prince/ For “The poets are  
the princes of speech.”<sup>47</sup>*

Elsewhere Nizāmī describes the poet’s power in terms of his miraculous or even magic faculty to transform reality, to make a hundred things out of one, etc. All this is in the vein of Jurjānī’s description of poetry as a branch of magic (سحر *sīhr*) in his eleventh-century *Asrār al-balāgha* (*Secrets of Rhetoric*). But it appears in a new – Islamicised – light, presenting the principle that legitimate power can only be reached through submission to the law, deriving from God’s power, or be illicit and thus pernicious, satanic.<sup>48</sup> Nizāmī’s work functions as an illustration of this fundamental Islamic rule based on the saying *Lā haula wa-lā quwwata illā billāh*. He is careful to insist that his magic is licit (سحر حلال *sīhr-i halāl*).

In a more secular sense, our poet never forgets to underline his superiority over his predecessors, particularly the great Firdawsī. Apart from his self-praise in his *mathnavīs*, he also proposes a self-portrait in a remarkable *qasīda* which presents opposing points of view. The *qasīda* starts with pompous self-glorification; the second part expresses contrition and self-humiliation:

*I am the King of kings of virtue by dint of the excellence of my poetic ideas (concetti) (maliku l-mulūk-i fazlam be-fazīlat-i ma’ ānī).  
Space and time I have seized through (my) celestial vision/manner (mithāl).*

*I am a breath/song/prayer of a far-reaching sound/ I am a bell of far-reaching fame.*

*I am a pen that traverses the world /I am a banner that conquers the world.*

*In the realm of speech, where my word enjoys perpetuation/ nobody has knocked at the door of astral bliss except me. [...]*

*Poetry has been created by me as virtue by nobility/ Art has become conspicuous in me as freshness in youth.*

*My ghazals sound in the ears like organ music/ My wit delights the taste like purple red wine.*

*Of the movement of the stars, I am the origin, they the beneficiaries /  
For the layers of the sky, I am the water and they the vessels.*

Some verses in the second part of the *qasīda* expressly revoke the pretensions made in the first part:

*How can I pretend to be the leader of the poets?/ This is all vain brag like that of a caravan’s bell.*



*The brocade into which my saliva clotted, is but a cobweb/ The ornaments that I pretended to exemplify are but a cage of bones.*<sup>49</sup>

A similar opposition is also traceable at the end of *Khusraw u Shīrīn*. On the one hand, he ascertains that his works will be there in a hundred years, he will live on in his verses. On the other, he asks God's forgiveness for the mistakes he might have made in them. Here are the last words of the poem:

ورق کابنجا رساندم در نوردم	سخن را بر سعادت ختم کردم
بیامرز از کرم کامرنگاری	خدایا هر چه رفت از سهوکاری
که گوید باد رحمت بر نظامی	روانش باد جفت شاد کامی

(KS104, 25-27)

*I ended my poem in felicity / Folded the paper which I filled to this point.*

*O Lord, whatever mistake crept into it / Pardon it gracefully, you are the pardoner.*

*Happy be the souls of those / Who say: God's mercy be on Nizāmī!*

Nizāmī's piety has, I believe, more to do with *nizām* (order, i.e. divine order on all levels, the individual being, the family, the state, the world, the cosmos), than with any detail of the Islamic *sharī'a*. He uses the word *shar'* for the sake of the pun, but reflections on the Islamic *sharī'a* are absent from his work. His piety is in fact monotheistic rather than specifically Islamic. His world-view is not so much influenced by a Qur'anic outlook, as shaped and structured by the philosophy of the Brethren of Purity. This influence is particularly conspicuous in the *Haft Paykar*. (It is present also in the *Iskandar Nāma* where however, other sources are more important, as I already pointed out above.) The overarching structure of *Haft Paykar* (consisting in correspondences between the seven planets and their respective domains: the seven days of the week, the seven climes, seven colours etc.) is based on the world-view of the Brethren, which in its turn, is a continuation of Ptolemy's cosmography, merged with Islamic, Persian and other elements.

Nizāmī's rationalism deserves attention. Despite his adherence to reason, he is in no doubt that human reason is unable to disclose the secrets of the creation. He applies both the Ash'arite *bi-lā kayf* (God's image in the Qur'an must be accepted "without how") and the verdict Ghazālī expressed in the *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*: Man must not ask what causes the movement of the waves, he must not attribute it to the wind, nor the movement of a ship to the waves. Such attributions are a subtle form of *shirk* (associating secondary causes to the Prime Cause i.e. God) or of polytheism, God being the only true cause of everything. The correct and the wrong attitudes are

expounded in the Monday story of *Haft Paykar*, where Nizāmī confronts a pious man, Bishr, with an arrogant know-all (نکته گیر *nukta-gir*), whose name, Malīkhā, points to his non-Muslim affiliation, and who calls himself (امام عالمیان *imām-i ‘alāmiyān* “the Leader of the secularists” i.e. adherent of secularism). On the way, Malīkhā asks Bishr about the causes of natural phenomena, such as a rising black cloud, and then gives his own rationalistic explanation. Bishr’s answers are those of a Muslim believer:

گفت با حکم کردگار مکوش  
در همه علمی از تو بیشترم  
ره بیندار خود نباید رفت

...  
من نه کز سر کار بی خبرم  
لیک علت به خود نشاید گفت

(HP28,85b-87)

*.../ Do not interfere with God’s wisdom !  
Not that I am an ignoramus in these things / In all these sciences, I  
am more learned than you are.  
But man himself is not entitled to reason about the causes / nor to  
proceed according to his own fancy.<sup>50</sup>*

A similar form of religious agnosticism is present in the hymns on God. The same Ash‘arite attitude is also palpable in Nizāmī’s emphasis that Muhammad did see God at the summit of his ascension, clarifying his opinion in the unending debate on the *visio beatifica*.

At the end of the *Iskandar Nāma*, Nizāmī expresses wonderful thoughts about his own death,<sup>51</sup> which I would like to quote here. After speaking about the passing-away of the great philosophers whom Iskandar had gathered at his court, he adds:

به عزم شدن نیز برداشت گام  
که تاریخ عمرش ورق درنوشت  
که بر عزم ره بر دهل زد دوال  
حکیمان بختند و او نیز خفت  
گه از ره خبرداد و گاه از دلیل  
به آمرزشم کرد امیدوار  
شما وین سرا ما و دارالسور  
تو گفتی که بیداریش خود نبود

نظامی چو این داستان شد تمام  
نه بس روزگاری برین برگذشت  
فزون بود شش مه ز شصت و سه سال  
چو حال حکیمان پیشینه گفت  
رفیقان خود را به گاه رحیل  
بخندید و گفتا که آمرزگار  
زما زحمت خویش دارید دور  
درین گفتگو بد که خوابش ربود

(IN40, 3-10)

*Having finished this tale, Nizāmī too, set out./  
And it was not long before history shut the book of his life.  
Three months and sixty-three years was he, when he started beating  
the drum, in order to announce that he was on the point of departing.  
Having told how the former sages had passed away, he himself did  
so as well.*

*Bidding fare-well to the friends, he gave them advice and guidance.  
Smilingly, he said to them: 'The Merciful makes me trust in his pardon.*

*Keep your worries afar from me! Yours is this caravanserai, mine is that house of joys!*

*He was still in this talk, when sleep overwhelmed him and it was as if he had never been awake...*

Let us close the chapter with the admonition to his son, in the introduction to *Laylī u Majnūn*:

<p>چون اکذب اوست احسن او کان ختم شد است بر نظامی آن علم طلب که سودمند است میکوش به خویشتن شناسی کاین معرفتی است خاطر افروز علم الادیان و علم الابدان وان هر دو فقیه یا طبیب است اما نه طبیب آدمی کش اما نه فقیه حیلت آموز پیش همه ارجمند گردی صاحب طرف دو مهد باشی کان دانش را تمام دانی</p>	<p>در شعر میبچ و در فن او زین فن مطلب بلند نامی نظم ارچه به مرتبت بلند است در جدول این خط قیاسی تشریح نهاد خود درآموز پیغمبر گفت علم علمان در ناف دو علم بوی طیب است می باش طبیب عیسوی هش می باش فقیه طاعت اندوز گر هر دو شوی بلند گردی صاحب طرفین عهد باشی می کوش به هر ورق که خوانی</p>
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(LM9, 14-25)

*Do not corrupt yourself with poetry / for the best of it is the most untruthful!*<sup>52</sup>

*Do not seek fame from this art / because it has been sealed (i.e. perfected) by Nizāmī.*

*(In short) even though poetry is of a high rank / aspire after a science that is useful.*

*In this register of curved lines (the Ptolemaic universe) / try to know yourself (strive for self-knowledge) !*

*Learn the anatomy of your body / for this knowledge enlightens the mind.*

*The Prophet said: "Science is twofold / Science about religions, and science about bodies."<sup>53</sup>*

*From the navel of both comes a good scent / They mean (the professions of) jurist or physician.*

*Be a physician of Jesus' mind / not one who kills human beings!*

*Be a jurist, who amasses works of piety / not one who teaches ruses!*

*If you achieve both, you will be high-placed / well-appreciated by everyone.*

*You will be lord of the two poles of being (life and death) /  
Informed about the two litters (this world and yonder world).  
Take pains with every leaf you read / in order to fully comprehend  
each science.*

### ■ Artists, Sages and Saints, Princes and Prophets

Certain groups among the human species are endowed with particular metaphysical qualities: the prophets and the princes (caliphs etc.), but also, for those who venerate wisdom, the sages, for those who venerate the fine arts, poets, painters, musicians, architects, and especially for adherents of the mystical world-view, the saints (mostly the leaders of mystical orders). They represent, in different degrees, the “cosmic” or “perfect man”.<sup>54</sup>

Nizāmī’s self-portrait as a poet is also the portrait of the real, great poet with his magical power, wielded by him through the power of his speech. He paints similarly powerful pictures of masters of other arts. There are the two court musicians in *Khusraw u Shīrīn*, Bārbad and Nakīsā, whose power verges on the magic:

<p>جهان را چون فلک در خط گرفته به زخمه زخم دلها را شفا ساز که عودش بانگ بر داود می زد که موسیقار عیسی در نفس داشت به وقت عود سازی عود سوزی به خواب اندر شدی مرغ شب آویز کز آن مالش دل بربط بنالید در آورد آفرینش را به آواز</p>	<p>نشسته بارید بربط گرفته به دستان دوستان را کیسه پرداز ز دود دل گره بر عود می زد همان نغمه دماغش در جرس داشت ز دلها کرده در مجمر فروزی چو بر دستان زدی دست شکرریز بدانسان گوش بربط را بمالید چو بر زخمه فکند ابریشم ساز</p>
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(KS78, 90-97)

*Bārbad took place, the barbyton<sup>55</sup> in hand / encompassing the  
world like a spherical globe,  
Giving a rub-down to the friends with his song / Healing heart’s  
wounds with his plectrum.  
His heart’s smoke (i.e. sigh) surpassed that of the aloe / So much  
so, that his lute struck a blow on the song of Dāviḍ.<sup>56</sup>  
He had the same tune resounding within his brain / Which the musi-  
cian Jesus had in his heart.  
He changed the hearts into a fumigating pan / So that they burnt  
aloe, while he struck his lute.  
When he played those sweet melodies / The night-swarming birds  
would fall into sleep.  
So fiercely would he pluck the barbyton’s ear / That it started to  
sigh from all its heart.*

*When he struck the silk of the lute with his plectrum / He would  
make the whole creation resound.*

Nakīsā the harpist is praised in a similarly hymn-like tone, the apex of which is the following:

چنان بر ساختی الحان موزون      که زهره چرخ میزد گرد گردون  
(KS78, 102)

*He invented such harmonious melodies, that Venus started to dance  
around the spheres*

Nizāmī also praises the painters. Their paintings cannot be distinguished from reality, as in the anecdote about Mānī who is not only a prophet but also the paragon of a great painter in the Islamic tradition. On his way to China, thirsty after a long journey through the desert, Mānī approaches a lake. As he wants to scoop up water, the jug breaks. Chinese people, who did not want Mānī to convert them, had made this lake of crystal, with waves engraved on it and painted grass surrounding it. Angrily, Mānī paints on the crystal a dead dog, its carcass teeming with worms, so that nobody will ever again be deceived by the false lake.

The two architects who figure in the first part of *Haft Paykar*, also deserve a mention. The first is Simnār, the builder of the famous castle *Khavarnaq*.<sup>57</sup> The master is described to King Nu'mān as follows:

زیرکی کو ز سنگ سازد موم	هست نام آوری ز کشور روم
سام نسلی و نام او سمنار	چابکی چرب دست و شیرین کار
به همه دیده ای پسندیده	دستبردش همه جهان دیده
هر یکی در نهاد خویش تمام	کرده چندین بنا به مصر و به شام
چینیان ریزه چین تیشه او	رومیان هندوان پیشه او
او ستاد هزار نقاشست	گرچه بناست وین سخن فاشست
رصد انگیز و ارتفاع شناس	هست بیرون ازین به رأی و قیاس
از دم عنکیوت اصطرلاب	نظرش بر فلک تنیده لعاب
هم رصد بند و هم طلسم گشای	چون بلیناس روم صاحب رای
از شبیخون ماه و کینه مهر	آگه از روی بستگان سپهر
کاین چنین کسوت او تواند بافت	ساز این شغل ازو توانی یافت
کز ستاره چراغ بر باید	طاقی از گل چنان بر آراید

(HP9, 7-19)

*A famed man dwells in Grecian lands / clever? Stone is wax within  
his hands;  
Learned and skilled, of matchless art / of Sām's race<sup>58</sup>, and his  
name Simnār.<sup>59</sup>*

*The whole world has observed his skill / all praise him; he has built  
withal,  
In Syria and Egypt, some / fine buildings, perfect every one.  
The Greeks bow to his skill; in Chin / from his pick artists chips do  
glean.  
Although a builder, clearly he / a myriad artists holds in sway.  
And, of sound judgement, he can tell / the secrets of the stars as  
well.  
His gaze draws o'er the sphere a web / like the spider of the astro-  
labe.<sup>60</sup>  
Like Apollonius<sup>61</sup> wise, he can / devise and loose all talismans.  
He knows the veiled ones of the sky / The moon's raids, the sun's  
hostile eye;  
He'll solve this problem, only he / can such a precious fabric  
weave.  
He'll raise a vault from earth so high / that it will plunder from the  
sky  
The stars' bright lamps.<sup>62</sup>*

The second architect in this novel, Shīda, describes himself in a similar high-flown self-panegyric to Bahrām, who needs an architect to build the Castle of the Seven Pavilions, to shelter his seven brides. Shīda promises that his castle will be a talisman for the king, protecting him against the evils of the world:

نسبتی گیرم از سپهر بلند                      که نیارد به روی شاه گزند

(HP25,81)

*I'll form a likeness to the lofty spheres / by means of which they will  
not harm the king.<sup>63</sup>*

The character of the wise man, whose advice is sought for by the hero of the Tuesday Story, is interesting. The hero wants to win access to the castle of the proud “Lady of the Castle” (بانوی حصار) *bānū-yi hisār*, known as Turandot in later works.<sup>64</sup> He is aware that without magic he is unable to defeat the talismans by which she has protected her domicile and accordingly looks for the necessary instructions with a teacher described as:

تا خبر یافت از خردمندی                      دیو بندی فرشته پیوندی  
در همه توسنی کشیده لگام                      به همه دانشی رسیده تمام  
همه همدستی او افتاده او                      همه در بسته ای گشاده او ...  
پیش سیمرخ آفتاب شکوه                      شد چو مرغ پرنده کوه به کوه ...  
از سر فرخی و فیروزی                      کرد از آن خضر دانش آموزی

(HP29,147-154)

*A learned man, who bound / Foul demons, joined with fairies,  
tamed  
Each Science's rebellious steed / And mastered every art, out-  
stripped  
His fellows, opened every door / To others closed (...)  
He set out / Towards that glorious Simurgh ...  
His smiling fortune then ordained / that from that Khizr he ob-  
tained/ Much knowledge.<sup>65</sup>*

The man is thus called "Simurgh" and "Khizr", and a few lines later, philosopher.<sup>66</sup> It is difficult to decide whether this reflects Nizāmī's belief that magic is a branch of philosophy, or whether on the contrary, he pillories this kind of belief. The *Iskandar Nāma* throws light on Nizāmī's attitude towards the occult sciences: in line with the prevailing belief of his time, he seems convinced of the reality of magic.<sup>67</sup>

Excepting Ilyās, who accompanies Iskandar during his search of the Water of Life, one other real saint appears in Nizāmī's work: the ascetic to whose *himmat*, "psychic energy", Iskandar calls for help in order to take the fortress of Darband (see above).<sup>68</sup> This saint is not introduced with the usual panegyric. The only indication of his spiritual power, before he performs the miracle, is his remark:

گیا پوشم و قوت من هم گیا      کنم سنگرا زر بدین کیمیا  
(SN36,81)

*My clothes are of grass and my food is grass as well. / With this al-  
chemy I transmute stone into gold.*

Princes appear endowed with cosmic power in the panegyrics dedicated to them in the prologue of each of Nizāmī's *mathnavī*. He describes one of his patrons, Körp Arslan the ruler of Maragha, a prince of limited, local importance, as almost as powerful as the Prophet:

دخول دولت بدو کند تسلیم آیتی در خدا یگانی دهر بر سر تاج و تخت گنج فشان ... هم به تن شیر و هم به نام هژبر عالم از جوهری پدید آمد هردم آرد هزار جوهر بیش عرق دریا ز فیض او عرقی بری و بحری آفرین خوانش کز بلندی خرد گشت ضمیر وز بلندی برادر فلک است	پادشاهی که ملک هفت اقلیم حجت مملکت به قول و به قهر خسرو تاج بخش تخت نشان همسر آسمان و هم کف ابر قفل هستی چو در کلید آمد اوست آن عالمی که از کف خویش صحف گردون ز شرح او ورقی بحر و بر هر دو زیر فرمانش سر بلندی چنان بلند سریر در بزرگی برابر ملک است
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(HP5, 8-10 and 17-23)

*That king whose rule the Seven Climes,/ unto his fortune bound,  
proclaim.  
The kingdom's proof, in word and might; /his rule a wonder in  
time's sight.  
Crown-giver and king-maker he, /showering on all his treasury (...)  
The heavens' mate, the rain-cloud's palm,/ a lion in form as well as  
name,  
When Being's lock had found its key,/ one Essence caused this  
world to be.  
He is that world, from whose hand rain,/ each moment, pearls with-  
out end.  
His wisdom makes Heaven's book leaf out; / his bounty makes the  
shamed sea sweat.  
Both land and sea his rule commands,/ his praise sung by their de-  
izens.  
His noble nature soars to heights / unreachable by flagging  
thoughts.  
In greatness like an angel he, / he sphere's twin in nobility.<sup>69</sup>*

These utopian portraits are balanced by the realistic pictures of Nizāmī's royal heroes as human beings, liable to all kind of temptations and faults, but also by occasional general remarks about the vices of rulers, such as the following uttered in connection with the murder of the architect Simnār:

<p>ایمن آن شد که دید از دورش در برابر گل است و در بر خار در نیچد دران کز او دورست بیخ و بارش کند به صد خواری</p>	<p>پادشاه آتشی ست کز نورش واتش او گلی است گوهر بار پادشاه همچو تاک انگورست وانکه پیچد در او به صد یاری</p>
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(HP9,57-60)

*Kings are like fire, from whose light / those are safe who look at it  
from afar.  
And this fire is like a rose-bush, / Roses, if you look at it, but thorns  
at your breast.  
The king is like a vine, he does not twist / around those plants that  
grow but far from it.  
But that one which he entwines quite intensely, / will lose its root  
and fruit and end in misery.*



## The Prophet Muhammad

In the valuable notes to his translation of *Haft Paykar*, Wilson mentions that Nizāmī presents Muhammad as the universal soul and the *macanthropos*.<sup>70</sup> In his panegyric descriptions of the Prophet, even though the magnificence is less overwhelming than for the panegyrics of rulers, Nizāmī does not fall far behind poets like 'Attār. His image of the Prophet is almost divinisation, the Prophet appearing as a supernatural being, invested with cosmic power. Thus, in the prologue of *Haft Paykar*:

خاتم آخر آفرینش کار	نقطه خط اولین پرگار
درة التاج عقل و تاج سخن ...	نوبر باغ هفت چرخ کهن
او محمد رسالتش محمود	همه هستی طفیل و او مقصود
صافی او بود و دیگران همه درد ...	ز اولین گل که آدمش بفشرد
چه سخن سایه وانگهی خورشید؟	وانک ازو سایه گشت روز سپید
قایم انداز پادشاهی بود	ملک را قایم الهی بود
وانکه افتاد می گرفتش دست	هر که بر خاست می فکندش پست

(HP2, 1-2 and 7-8 and 12-14)

*The primal Circle's centre and / The Seal upon Creation's line;  
The ancient sphere's first fruit, the crown / of lofty discourse, rea-  
son's gem (...)  
He foremost goal, we all in need / Muhammad he, his mission  
praised.  
Of that first clay that Adam pressed, / he essence pure, all others  
dregs (...)  
He put day's brightness in the shade: / What talk of shade, with sun  
displayed!  
Of worldly rule the godly stay, / he worldly rulers mates and slays,  
Abasing all who would rebel, / grasping the hand of those who fell.*

In the *Sharaf Nāma*, the hymn on Muhammad begins as follows:

رساننده حجت استوار	فرستاده خاص پروردگار
گرامیتر از آدمیان	گرامیتر از تاج ازادگان
به آرایش نام او نقش بست	محمد کازل تا ابد هر چه هست
فروغ همه آفرینش بدوست	چراغی که پروانه بینش بدوست

(SN, 3,1-4)

*Special apostle of the creator, / Transmitter of the right argument,  
Most precious crown of the free (āzādīgān), / More valuable than  
the whole of Adam's progeny:  
Muhammad, by whose name is adorned / everything existing from  
eternity to eternity.*

*(He is) the lamp, whose moth is insight,/ and which bestows light  
on the whole of creation.*

In the following Description of the Ascension, we find:

معراج گران فلک را طراز	ز معراج او در شب ترکناز
وز آن نردبان آسمان پایه ای	شب از چتر معراج او سایه ای

(SN3, 24-5)

*Through His Ascension in that turbulent night / the ladder-makers  
of Heaven were donned in brocade.  
The night is a shadow of his ascension,/ the sky a rung of that ce-  
lestial ladder.*

The Qur'anic statement, put in the mouth of Muhammad: *ana basharun mithlukum* ("I am a man like you." *Surah* 18,110), had developed long before Nizāmī's time. A decisive step in this development was Hallāj's *Tawāsīn* containing the glorification of the Prophet.<sup>71</sup> From the very beginnings, the aim was probably to surpass the Christian image of Jesus as pantocrator. The issue of violence in the life of the Prophet must have been problematic for Nizāmī, who repeatedly pleads for non-violence. As I mentioned elsewhere,<sup>72</sup> the poet chose an ephemeral and little-known incident in the life of the Prophet to stress his mildness.<sup>73</sup> During the battle of Uhud, Muhammad's mouth was hit by a stone, which broke a few teeth. He did not react with wrath, leaving it to God to punish the culprit. In the later versions of the story, rather than breaking his teeth, the stone turns his teeth into jewels. A mention of the teeth alludes to this incident in the introduction to *Makhzan al-Asrār*. Nizāmī returns to it in later poems. In the hymn in the *Sharaf Nāma*, he claims that Muhammad never used his sword to kill, thus negating those episodes where enemies (e.g. Meccan poets, who had mocked the new religion) were executed at the Prophet's order.<sup>74</sup> Nizāmī also never specifically mentions battles, even though he does occasionally state that the prophet defeated infidels, such as the fire-worshippers. An important point is Nizāmī's request to the Prophet to participate in his spiritual power. This is reminiscent of the statement in *Laylī u Majnūn* that poetry is close to prophethood:

...	زان لوح که خواندی از بدایت
در دفتر ما نویس یک حرف ...	ای کار مرا تمامی از تو
نیروی دل نظامی از تو	زین دل به دعا قناعتی کن
وز بهر خدا شفاعتی کن	

(LM2 ,104, 105 and 107-8)

*From that tablet, which you read from the beginning,  
 ... / Write a few letters into my copy-book! (...)  
 O you, through whom my work finds fulfilment, / from whom the  
 power of Nizāmī's heart stems!  
 Content yourself with a prayer from this heart, /and intercede for  
 me, in the name of God!*

## ■ Angels and demons

The higher orders of demons, saints, prophets and angels appear in Nizāmī's work, though he does not give a description of the cosmos, as does Qazwīnī in his *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*.<sup>75</sup> In the Wednesday story of *Haft Paykar* (HP30), Māhān encounters various uncanny people, which turn out to be demons. Finally he meets, or rather is met, by Khizr, who has taken Māhān's shape, thus leading him to self-knowledge. Khizr is present at several crucial moments as an inspirer of Nizāmī.

Angels appear almost exclusively in the descriptions of Muhammad's ascension to Heaven. They are less important than the planets and the zodiacal signs, who serve the Prophet.<sup>76</sup> In the *mi'rāj* description in *Laylī u Majnūn* (LM20,70-77), the poet briefly mentions the archangels Gabriel, Michael and Israfil, surpassed by the Prophet's power and glory. A few verses later, the angels appear around the divine throne, engaged in their praise of God. Muhammad's light is so intense, that, even though they are immaterial beings, these angels throw a shadow on God's throne.

The only other angelic creatures in Nizāmī's work are of pre-Islamic origin: Sraosha (Surūsh in New-Persian), the Zoroastrian angel-messenger, and Khizr, the immortal wanderer, considered in Islamic mysticism as an initiator into gnostic and mystical knowledge. Khizr and Surūsh are both also inspirers of poets. Nizāmī tells how he was incited by Khizr to write a book about Alexander the Great, and then in the later course of events, reproaches him for letting dead philosophers speak.<sup>77</sup> He also tells how Iskandar was introduced to the office of prophethood by Surūsh.<sup>78</sup> Khizr also appears as companion of Iskandar during his search for the Water of Life. Khizr alone will find it and thereby achieve immortality. As mentioned above, Khizr also appears at the climax of the Wednesday Story in *Haft Paykar* in a wonderfully plastic allegory showing Māhān, at the end of his illusions, attaining self-knowledge (this is one of Nizāmī's major concerns throughout his whole oeuvre).<sup>79</sup>

## ■ The sky

I will examine two aspects of Nizāmī's cosmology: the spheres and the stars. In Nizāmī's world-order, the world is embedded or enshrouded in the nine spheres of the Ptolemaic universe (i.e. the seven planetary spheres,

the sphere of the fixed stars and the encircling sphere). These represent time and fate and are usually expressed by metaphors such as the “seven (or nine) snakes”. (It would be rewarding to compile these metaphors in order to study them closely.) Basing himself on a passage towards the end of *Haft Paykar*, Bausani argued that Nizāmī believed in the existence of more than one universe; an assumption seeming to derive from his concept of divine omnipotence.<sup>80</sup> This interpretation is perhaps too far-fetched, as the passage in question mentions this world and yonder world, and that God has created more than we are aware of.<sup>81</sup>

For Nizāmī, the sun and the moon counted as planets, together with the five remaining planets and the other nightly stars. As Ritter has shown in his ingenious study on Nizāmī’s *Bildersprache* (Ritter (1927)), his descriptions of morning and evening, of dark or starry nights, announce the next events. Long before Nizāmī, Firdawsī already used this poetical technique called *husn-i istihlāl* (good beginning) in his famous “sunrise verses.” The morning before Shīrīn’s bathing in the pond is described as follows:

سیاهی خواند حرف نا امیدی	سپیدی دم چو دم بر زد سپیدی
فرو شد تا بر آمد یک گل زرد	هزاران نرگس از چرخ جهانگرد
	شتابان کرد شیرین بارگی را

(KS24, 64-6)

*The dawn breathed whiteness, / while blackness uttered the sound of despair.*

*Thousands of narcissi sank/disappeared from the world-turning sphere / for the one yellow rose<sup>82</sup> to rise.*

*Shīrīn spurred her mount /*

Khusraw’s murder is announced in the following verses describing the night of the crime:

فلک را غول وار از راه برده	شبئی تاریک نور از ماه برده
فلک با صد هزاران دیده شبکور	زمانه با هزاران دست بی زور
نهاده بر دو سیمین ساق شیرین	شهنشه پای را با بند زرین

(KS95,1-3)

*It was a dark night that had robbed moon’s light / And, like a demon, had stolen the whole sphere.*

*Time had thousands of hands bereft of strength, / The sphere had thousands of eyes, which did not see (lit. night-blind).*

*The king laid his legs, bound in golden fetters, / on the two silver thighs of Shīrīn.*

The following verses introduce two sections of the battle between the Persian and the Chinese armies in *Haft Paykar*:

کرد با چشمها سیه ماری	در شبی تیره کز سیه کاری
کوه و صحرا سیه تر از پر زاغ	شبی از بیش برگرفته چراغ
سو به سو می دوید تیغ به دست	گفتی صد هزار زنگی مست
چشم بگشاد اگر چه هیچ ندید	مردم از بیم زنگی که دوید
چون خم زر سرش گرفته به قیر	چرخ روشن دل سیاه حریر
کرد بهرام جنگ بهرامی	در شبی عنبرین بدین خامی

(HP22, 55-60)

*In the deep blackness of a night /which, like a snake, devoured light;  
A night which quenched all lamps, when plain / and hill were black-  
er than crow's wing;  
As if a drunken Zangi horde / ran to and fro with brandished sword;  
And men in fear of that black foe / opened their eye, and nothing  
saw;  
And the bright sphere, in blackest silks, / was like a wine-jar  
smeared with pitch;  
On such a night of amber pure, / Bahrām waged his Bahramian  
war.<sup>83</sup>*

In another ominous image, the morning description imperceptibly takes us down from the blood-tinged crepuscular sky to the blood-flooded battlefield upon earth:

طشت خون آمد از سپهر پدید	صبح چون تیغ آفتاب کشید
هرکجا تیغ و طشت خون باشد	تیغ بی خون و طشت چون باشد؟
جوی خون رفت و گوی سر می برد	از بسی خون که خدایش مرد

(HP22, 70-2)

*When morning drew the sun's bright sword, / The sphere disclosed  
a bowl of blood.  
How should the sword lack bowl and blood? / With sword and ba-  
sin, blood abounds.  
From all that blood red rivers flowed, / and bore off heads like polo  
balls.<sup>84</sup>*

Here is the opening of the chapter on Iskandar's games with the Chinese slave-girl:

مهی ز آفتابی درخشنده تر	شبی روشن از روز رخشنده تر
ز مرد شده لوح طفلان خاک	ز سر سبزی گنبد تابناک
نوشته بسی حرف از امید و بیم	ستاره بران لوح زیبا ز سیم

درین غار بی غور منزل نساخت  
 که روزی به کوشش نشاید فزود  
 نه کز بهر غم کرده اند این سرای  
 نه از بهر بیداد و محنت کشیست ...  
 ز شادی نهاده به شادی دهیم

(SN58,3-11)

دبیری که آن حرفها را شناخت  
 به شغل جهان رنج بردن چه سود  
 جهان غم نیرزد به شادی گرای  
 جهان از پی شادی و دلخوشیست  
 می شادی آور به شادی نهیم

*In a night brighter than the shining day, / With the moon more  
 beaming than the sun,  
 When from the glittering green dome / the blackboards of the chil-  
 dren of the earth had turned into emerald,  
 And the stars were writing on those boards with silver-pen / so  
 many words of hope and fear.  
 Those who know to read these letters, / will not settle down in this  
 bottomless cave (this world).  
 What is the good of worrying with worldly affairs? / You should not  
 spend any day too much with that!  
 The world is not worth your grief, give yourself to joy! / This palace  
 has not been made for grief.  
 The world was made for joy and satisfaction, / not for oppression  
 and affliction (...)  
 Bring the wine of mirth, we will put it (the decanter) down with  
 mirth / And we will give it away (offer it to others) with mirth.<sup>85</sup>*

## ■ God

It is striking that, with just a few exceptions, Nizāmī addresses God in the second person, whereas he normally speaks of the Prophet and his ascension in the third person. These prayers to God are sometimes called *مناجات* (*munājāt*, confidential talk). Nizāmī stresses the omnipotence, the creative power of God, as in the first words of his first *mathnavī*:

هست کلید در گنج حکیم  
 نام خدایست بر او ختم کن

(MA1,1-2)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
 فاتحه فکرت و ختم سخن

*Bismillahi r-rahmani r-rahim / This is the key for the door of the  
 sage's treasury.<sup>86</sup>  
 The opening of thought and the seal of speech / Is the name of  
 God, use it as your seal.*

Some lines from *munājāt-i avval* of *Makhzan al-Asrār*:

خاک ضعیف از تو توانا شده	ای همه هستی ز تو پیدا شده
ما بتو قائم چو تو قائم بذات	زیر نشین علمت کاینات
تو بکس و کس بتو مانند نی	هستی تو صورت پیوند نی
وانکه نمر دست و نمیرد توئی	آنچه تغیر نپذیرد توئی
ملک تعالی و تقدس تراست	ما همه فانی و بقا بس تراست
قبه خضرا تو کنی بیستون	خاک به فرمان تو دارد سکون

(MA2,1-6)

*O You, from whose existence everything has come forth./ The weak dust has become mighty through You.  
Under Your banner is the universe:/ We exist through You, You exist through yourself.  
Your being does not adopt form. / You do not resemble nor resembles you any being.  
You are the one who does not change./ You are immortal (lit: have not died and will not die).  
We are all transient (fānī), Yours is eternity./ The Kingdom most high and most holy is Yours.  
The dust is in rest through you,/ You created the green dome (of the sky).*

On the one hand, Nizāmī versifies dogmas of Islamic, or rather monotheistic, theology; on the other, he describes God's creation and omnipotence with ever new and magnificent images, bold and beautiful metaphors, and of course, incredible anthropomorphisms:

چشمه خضر از لب خضرا گشاد	زهره میغ از دل دریا گشاد
جرعه آن در دهن سنگ ریخت	جام سحر در گل شبرنگ ریخت
پیه در و گرده یاقوت بست	ز آتش و آبی که بهم در شکست
در جگر لعل جگرگون نهاد	خون دل خاک ز بحران باد

(MA1,31-4)

*He released the gall of mist from the heart of the sea,/ the fountain of Khizr from the brim of verdure.  
He shed the cup of dawn upon the night-black clay, / the last drops of it into the mouth of the stone.  
From the water and the fire, which He mixed, / He formed the fat of the pearls and the suet (lit. kidney) of the topaz,  
The heart-blood of the earth, by dint of the fever of the wind,/ He put into the liver of the liver-like ruby.*

Such verses, which I chose almost at random, illustrate both the enormous difficulty in understanding Nizāmī's metaphors, and the denseness of his diction. They also exemplify one of the major rhetoric figures used throughout his work, the *murā'āt al-nazār*: (All the images in a verse or a sequence of verses are taken from the same semantic field. In this case, it is the human body, suggesting once more the influence of the Brethren of Purity. One of their tenets was the comparability, in fact the correspondence, of the cosmos and the human body.) In the anthropomorphic descriptions of God, Nizāmī's fantasy knows no limit and only paraphrases can render the density of the imagery:

جز تو فلکرا خم چوگان که داد      دیگ جسد را نمک جان که داد  
(MA2,7)

*Who except You, gave the spheres their polo-stick-like bends, / put in the body's pot the salt of the soul?*

دور جنیبت کش فرمان تست      سفت فلک غاشیه گردان تست  
(MA3,2)

*Time (the aeon) is the one that spurs the horse of your orders / The shoulder of the sky is the one that turns (i.e. bears) your saddle-cloth.*

The second *munājāt* ends with a moving prayer, in which Nizāmī, otherwise so self-assured, humiliates himself before God:

گفته و ناگفته پشیمان‌بست من که و تعظیم جلال از کجا دل به چه گستاخی ازین چشمه خورد من عرف الله فرو خوانده ایم هم تو بیامرز به انعام خویش هم به امید تو خدای آمدیم چاره کن ای چاره بیچاره گان ای کس ما بیکیسی ما ببین در که گریزیم توئی دستگیر گر ننازی تو که خواهد نواخت ... خواجگی اوست غلامی به تو معرفت خویش به جانش رسان	این چه زبان وین چه زبان‌ان‌بست دل زکجا وین پر و بال از کجا جان به چه دل راه درین بحر کرد در صفتت گنگ فرو مانده ایم چون خجلیم از سخن خام خویش پیش تو گریبی سر و پای آمدیم یار شو ای مونس غمخوارگان قافله شد واپسی ما ببین بر که پناهیم توئی بی نظیر جز در تو قبله نخواهیم ساخت ای شرف نام نظامی به تو نزل تحیت به زبانش رسان
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(MA3, 9-18 and 21-22)

*What is this speech, what is this declamation? / It's all repentance, both for the said and the unsaid.  
Where is my heart, where is this soaring flight (lit.: this feather and*



wing)? / *Who then am I, to glorify the Lord of power?*  
*What encouraged my soul to embark on this sea?/ What made my*  
*heart so bold that it drank from that well?*  
*In the endeavour to describe You, I was struck dumb,/ murmuring*  
*“Who knows God”?*  
*Now that we are ashamed of our immature speech,/ do pardon us*  
*out of your benevolence!*  
*If we have come before You headless and without feet,<sup>87</sup>/ It is out of*  
*hope in You that we came.*  
*Help us, O companion of the afflicted! / Grant us resort, O You, re-*  
*sort of the resortless!*  
*The caravan has departed, look at our backwardness! / O You, our*  
*helper, look at our helplessness!<sup>88</sup>*  
*Whom shall we seek refuge with, You are without peer! / Whom shall*  
*we flee to, you are the one who shelters.*  
*We will not seek a qibla apart from You, / If You do not console us,*  
*who will? (...)*  
*O you, through whom Nizāmī's name is honourable,/ who is a lord,*  
*because he is Your slave!*  
*Send the gift of Your blessings upon his tongue! / Send the knowl-*  
*edge of Yourself (or Your pardon: maghfīrat-i khwīsh) into his soul!*

The prayer is reminiscent of the second part of Nizāmī's grandiose self-portrait in the above-mentioned *qasīda*. We are also reminded of Shīrīn's heart-breaking prayer at the moment of her greatest despair.<sup>89</sup> Another thought in Nizāmī's prayer is the divine significance of everything created, as expressed in a *munājāt* in the prologue of the *Sharaf Nāma*:

نشان می دهند آفریننده را چگونه نبینم بدو راه تو که هستی تو سازنده و او ساخته است به نقاش صورت بود رهنمای	هر آنچ آفریده است بیننده را مرا هست بینش نظرگاه تو ترا بینم از هر چه پرداخته است همه صورتی پیش فرهنگ و رای
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(SN2,12-5)

*All that is created is for the spectator / a sign of the creator.*  
*My sight dwells where your regard abides./ How should I not see*  
*through it your path?!*  
*I behold you in everything created,/ for you are the maker, and*  
*everything else is made.*  
*Every shape, for those equipped with erudition and insight,/ points*  
*to the painter of the shape.*

In the chapter in Praise of God in the prologue to *Laylī u Majnūn*, the poet speaks of his own death almost the way a mystic would:

کان راه بتست می شناسم کو راه سرای دوستانست چون مرگ ازوست مرگ من باد این مرگ نه مرگ نقل جایست وز خوابگهی به بزم شاهی	گر مرگ رسد چرا هراسم این مرگ نه باغ و بوستانست تا چند کنم ز مرگ فریاد گر بنگرم آن چنان که رایست از خورد گهی به خوابگاهی
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(LM1,89-93)

*If death appears, why should I be afraid?/ I know, that is the way that leads to You.*

*This death, it is not garden nor a flower-bed,/ It is the way to the old friends' abode.*

*How long shall I be wailing about death?/ Since death comes from Him, so may it come!*

*For if I look with comprehension,/ this death, it is not death, but just a change of places:*

*First from a place of eating to a place of sleeping,/ then from a place of sleeping to a royal banquet.*

In conclusion, I will enumerate seven points, which seem to me of primordial importance in order to understand Nizāmī's work.

1. From the very beginning of his poetic activity, Nizāmī is aware of his unique rank as a poet and of the power of poetry.
2. Throughout his work, his message is centered on humanity.
3. He pleads for rationality, self-awareness, responsibility.
4. His work addresses the question of how to correctly handle power in all shapes and at all levels. Power is licit only when one derives it from Divine Power and when one consciously submits to it.
5. He pleads for non-violence.
6. He is aware of the transience of the world and of human existence.
7. He is unique in his understanding of the human psyche and in his – mostly silent – affirmation of the female dignity and even superiority.

## Notes

- 1 van Ruymbeke (2007).
- 2 van Ruymbeke (2000).
- 3 Würsch (2005a).
- 4 Such a concealed meaning would in fact correspond to his title *āyīna-i ghayb* or “Mirror of the Invisible”, the title which Peter Chelkowski aptly chose for his beautiful book on the miniatures of a *Khamsa* manuscript (Chelkowski (1975)).
- 5 The verse contains the two decisive terms زور (*zūr*, violence) and آزدن (*āzurdan*, to inflict an injury, here in the passive participle).

- 6 None of these stories refers to the *Kalīla-Dimna* fable collection which Nizāmī certainly knew and of which he summarized forty fables towards the end of *Khusraw u Shīrīn*. See below the article by C. van Ruymbeke.
- 7 The dead dog tale was adopted by Goethe in his *West-östlicher Divan*, from von Hammer-Purgstall's *Geschichte der Schönen Redekünste Persiens*: On beholding the carcass of a dog in a bazar, Jesus' disciples complain of its bad smell. Jesus interrupts them, saying: "Look at its teeth, how brightly they shine!", shaming the disciples. (von Hammer-Purgstall (1818) 319).
- 8 Würsch (2005a) 274-84.
- 9 Yet, this is also true for other stories of the *Makhzan*. The old woman who warns the Seljuk ruler Sanjar not to destroy the country by his tyranny (Würsch (2005a) 288) prefigures a number of other women of various age and social status, who bravely read the king this lesson (Bürgel (1988a)). The contest of the two philosophers reappears as a contest between Aristotle and Plato in the *Iskandar Nāma* (Bürgel (1991a)).
- 10 Bürgel (1998).
- 11 Bible (1998), Isaiah 11,6f.
- 12 Early pictorial evidence is found in the 1541 Nizāmī manuscript in the Hermitage (Adamova (1996a) 177). The miniature shows Solomon and Bilqis on their throne, with at their feet two male persons, an angel, two demons and various wild and tame animals. The miniature relates to a short passage dealing with this royal couple, inserted in the Sunday story of *Haft Paykar* (HP27, 93ff). Adamova wrongly interprets it as "Bahram in the yellow pavilion."
- 13 Koch (1988).
- 14 Donà (2003).
- 15 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 14,63-64. I have slightly altered Meisami's translations.
- 16 *Haft Paykar* is available in two English versions: Nizami-Wilson (1924) and Nizami-Meisami (1995), and in German: Nizami-Bürgel (1997). Nizāmī made a similar pun on proper names in *Khusraw u Shīrīn*. *Shīrīn* means sweet and she is sweet. When Khusraw, after the death of his unloved wife Maryam, daughter of the emperor of Byzantium, and still unable to win over *Shīrīn* for a furtive flirt, marries another woman called *Shakar*, which means "sugar", Nizāmī expressly points to the difference: sugar is material sweetness, whereas *Shīrīn* ("Sweet") points to grace and mental, spiritual sweetness.
- 17 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 262.
- 18 These are left out in Nizami-Gelpke (c1959)'s mutilated German version of this poem.
- 19 See above, note 9.
- 20 For example, KS102, 60, Nizami-Bürgel (1980) 329.
- 21 *Shīrīn* was, as the poet himself seems to indicate, the personification of his first wife *Apak*, a Kipchak slave, whom he had received from the prince of Darband, as a reward for his first epic poem. See further note 44.
- 22 HP20-21. See also my metrical and rhymed version: Bürgel (1967).
- 23 Nizami-Bürgel (1991) 337-48.
- 24 Utterings such as "Wives belong into the house, there they sing nicely, those outside are only the screaming mourners" and "the place of women is either the veil or the grave" (Nizami-Bürgel (1991) 202) in the work of Nizāmī have been interpreted as his own opinion, while they express that of the character who utters them.
- 25 Nizami-Bürgel (1991) 210-4.
- 26 Nizami-Bürgel (1991) 220-8.
- 27 Nizami-Bürgel (1991) 369-76.
- 28 See van Ruymbeke's contribution in this volume.
- 29 Bürgel (1995).
- 30 Bürgel (2007a).
- 31 Bello (1989).

- 32 See Saccone's contribution in this volume.
- 33 Bürdel (1991b).
- 34 In the Tuesday Story of *Haft Paykar*, HP29, 158.
- 35 Even though some scholars and readers see him as such (See also Anvar's and Seyed-Gohrab's contributions to this volume). There are, in fact, mystical tinges to be found here and there in his work, but on the whole he lacks the impregnation by mystical thought that we find in great mystical narrators.
- 36 Bürdel (2000).
- 37 Bürdel (1987b).
- 38 Soucek (1972).
- 39 KH56 and Nizami-Bürdel (1991) 162ff.
- 40 See above n. 30.
- 41 Ullmann (1972) 347.
- 42 Ullmann (1972) 317.
- 43 EN25; Nizami-Bürdel (1991) 510.
- 44 Bertels (1956); idem (1962). See also n. 21.
- 45 Bürdel (1974).
- 46 *Shar'* meaning here piety as the result of the submission to the law.
- 47 For the Qur'an-based tension between poetry and piety, see de Bruijn (1983).
- 48 Bürdel (1988b) (for the chapter on poetry); Bürdel (1991b) 230-255.
- 49 Nizami (1318) D 116/117, verses 1,2,4,5,7-9 and D 122/123.
- 50 My translation. Meisami's translation is not quite to the point. Nizāmī only warns against inquiring into these causes, seeming less apodictic than Ghazālī who states that there cannot be other causes to any event than the prime cause, i.e. God (*Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*).
- 51 He died in 1209 at the age of 68.
- 52 Persianized version of the famous Arabic dictum *khayru sh-shi'ri akdhabuhu*. See Bürdel (1970-71).
- 53 Quotation of the well-known *hadīth*: *al-'ilmu 'ilmān 'ilmu l-adyān wa- 'ilmu al-abdān*.
- 54 Bürdel (1991b) 319-35.
- 55 Large string instrument, see Farmer (1931-39).
- 56 In other words, he surpassed David's song. David was renowned for the power of his song, which would kill hundreds of listeners during a concert. The verse is a masterpiece of sound plays and puns, built on the inner rhymes of *dūd* ("smoke", "sigh") and the double meaning of *'ūd* ("aloe", incense and "lute").
- 57 Würsch (2005a).
- 58 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 283. Sām is the progenitor of the hero-kings of Sīstān and the grandfather of Rustam.
- 59 Historical figure, who lived in the first half of the fifth century. In the Arabic sources, his name is Sinimmār. His true patron was the Sasanian emperor Yazdigird I (r. 399-421). After completing Khavarnaq, he boasted that he could build an even more magnificent palace, if properly rewarded. The angry emperor ordered to throw him from the roof of the palace. His tragic fate, also mentioned by Nizāmī, is reported in many Arabic sources, such as Abu l-Faraj al-Isfahānī's great *Book of Songs* (Bürdel (2007b) 370).
- 60 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 283. The spider of the astrolabe is the center of the plate of the astrolabe, which shows the sphere of the fixed stars around the earth.
- 61 Greek sage and magician, whose works were translated into Arabic and became famous in the Islamic Middle ages. In the *Iskandar Nāma*, he is the emperor's constant companion and advisor.
- 62 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 37.
- 63 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 101-2, also Bürdel (1988b) 21.
- 64 Bürdel (2008).
- 65 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 165-6.

- 66 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 166, has translated “sage”. To my knowledge, this is the only occurrence of the term *filsūf* in Nizāmī’s work.
- 67 Bürgel (1988b) introduction.
- 68 For the meaning of *himmat*, the standard reference is Kubra-Meier (1957).
- 69 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 14-5.
- 70 Nizami-Wilson (1924).
- 71 Hallaj (1913).
- 72 Bürgel (1998).
- 73 An interesting testimony, which still holds today, on Muhammad’s mildness, is the relevant chapter in al-Nuwayrī’s big encyclopedia *Nihāyat al-arab* (Nuwayrī (1933) and Bürgel (2007b) 473-6).
- 74 Bürgel (1991b) 230ff.
- 75 Von Hees (2002) contains a long chapter on angels.
- 76 The famous miniature of the *mi’rāj* attributed to Dust Muhammad (Brit. Lib. MS OR2265 f. 195 r.) is thus rather a vision of the painter than an illustration of Nizāmī’s descriptions. See Soucek’s contribution in this volume. See also van Ruymbeke (1998).
- 77 EN19,160-6. Nizami-Bürgel (1991) 470.
- 78 EN20,15. Nizami-Bürgel (1991) 472.
- 79 For the role of Khizr in Nizāmī’s oeuvre, see the contribution by Franke in this volume.
- 80 Nizami-Ritter/Rypka (1934) 52, 108-111.
- 81 Bausani (2000), and my detailed review: Bürgel (2005).
- 82 The yellow rose points to both the sun and Shīrīn.
- 83 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 89.
- 84 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 90.
- 85 Nizami-Bürgel (1991), 358.
- 86 According to Dastgirdi, this is an allusion to the hadith *inna lillāhi kumūzan tahta l-‘arshi mafātīhuhâ alsunu sh-shu‘arâ* “Verily, God has treasures under His throne, the keys of which are the tongues of the poets”.
- 87 This seems to be an allusion to the death of al-Hallāj.
- 88 Lit.: “Our Somebody, look at our being without anybody!”
- 89 KH65 and Nizami-Bürgel (1980), 213.



## 2 The Hidden Pearls of Wisdom: Desire and Initiation in *Laylī u Majnūn*

*Leili Anvar*

The romance of *Laylī u Majnūn* is *par excellence*, the romance of desire: desire as passion, desire never satisfied in the visible world. This is not only true of Nizāmī's work, but also of its source of inspiration itself, the Arabian tale of old,<sup>1</sup> and of the story's innumerable versions in Arabic, Persian or Turkish. In lyric poetry, the mere allusion to the names of Majnūn or Laylī (or Laylā in the Arabic pronunciation) immediately evokes radical and maddening desire. In short, among the numerous hero-lovers of Islamic literature, Majnūn has become the archetype of the lover and Laylī, of the beloved. In a passage of *Salāmān and Absāl*, Jāmī, the fifteenth-century Persian poet of Herat, relates the following scene:

*A man crossing the desert saw Majnūn /Seated alone in the middle  
of that barren land.*

*As if his fingers were a qalam on the sand /He wrote words with his  
hand.*

*The man said: "Hark, my poor madman! /What is that? Are you  
writing a letter? But for whom?*

*Whatever pain you take in writing this /The winds and storms will  
erase it soon."*

*... Majnūn answered: "I tell the beauty of Laylī /I solace my own  
soul by so doing.*

*I write her name in the first and last place /I write a letter of love  
and constancy.*

*Of her I have nothing in my hands but her name /From it my hum-  
bleness acquired great fame.*

*Not having drunk even a draught from her cup /Now, I make love to  
her name.<sup>2</sup>*

Indeed, any desire is an unquenched thirst, the result of absence and/or frustration. What Majnūn does in his desert by writing the name of Laylī, by composing poem after poem on her beauty, by gazing at the muskdeers and ravens that remind him of her or by breathing the perfume of the beloved, is to fill the gap of absence and distance, to transmute emptiness

into fusion of essences. Nizāmī introduces the theme of hollowness at various levels of his work: the poem deals with an ever growing rarefaction of space, time, human relationships so as to better serve the violence of desire but also to penetrate into the very essence of things and to a higher reality. Indeed, Nizāmī has conceived his work as a reflection of the trajectory of desiring love: a movement towards nothingness that is the condition for the advent of perfect love. It is important to note that Nizāmī was commissioned by a local prince to write a Persian verse version of the Arabian tale. He complains (at the very beginning of the romance, in the chapter on “The Circumstances of the Composition of the Book”<sup>3</sup>), of the difficulty of composing a poem dealing with such a brief plot that takes place in a desert, with no occasion to describe royal feasts and beautiful gardens or to display his highly refined art of poetry:

گردد سخن از شد آمدن لنگ	دهلیز فسانه چون بود تنگ
تا طبع سواری نماید	میدان سخن فراخ باید
تفسیر نشاط هست ازو دور	این آیت اگر چه هست مشهور

(LM4,51-53)

*When the field of the tale is narrow / Then the speech that should  
come becomes lame  
The arena of speech must be vast in order to acquire the nature of  
horsemanship.  
Although this story is a famous one / It allows no description of ver-  
dant bliss*

Nizāmī complains that the story as well as its setting are so dry that they have never inspired any poet (we may infer that he meant the story as such, exclusive of the love poetry in Arabic attributed to Majnūn). He also evokes the “nudity” of the story,<sup>4</sup> the better to glorify his own poetic powers:

آنجاش رسانم از لطافت	با اینهمه تنگی مسافت
ریزد گهر نسفته بر راه	کز خواندن او به حضرت شاه
عاشق شود ار نمرده باشد ...	خواننده اش اگر فسرده باشد
خاریدم و چشمه آب می داد	می گفتم و دل جواب می داد
در زیور او به خرج کردم	دخلی که ز عقل درج کردم

(LM4,63-5 and 88-89)

*Whatever the narrowness of the field / I shall raise it to such deli-  
cate beauty  
That when read to the king / It will spread perfect pearls at his feet.  
Even depressed, any reader of it / Will fall in love if he is no dead  
man ...*



*(...) I spoke and the heart answered / I dug and the source provided  
water.  
The pearls I obtained from reason / I used them for its  
ornamentation.*

In short, although the theme did not immediately inspire him, and though he was only obedient to the prince, he decided to turn a painful love story set in the barren lands of Arabia into a “source” of inspiration. The decisive theme of the romance is love, but love considered as unquenched desire and paralleled to the process of inspiration. The metaphor of water, standing here for inspiration, is often used by the lovers in the romance, as the metaphor of love. The lovers themselves are often compared to plants and Laylī speaks of Majnūn as her *Khizr*,<sup>5</sup> guiding her in the darkness to the Water of Life. Majnūn is precisely the archetype both of the absolute lover and of the poet of love. The search for love and the search for inspiration appear as an initiation to a higher wisdom, to a specific kind of knowledge that can in turn, be transmitted through the words of poetry: *any reader of it will fall in love*. Let us remark in passing that desiring love is evoked without object, as a pure state of being in itself, a sign of the living soul in the reader of Nizāmī’s poetry. Another parallel between Majnūn’s situation and that of the narrator concerns the background that provides such importance to the image of “water”. Nizāmī insists on the fact that the story in itself is, so to speak, “barren” and that he needed to dig in order to find water in it. As to Majnūn, it is necessarily in the desert that he can dig out his own heart and achieve both perfect love and perfect poetry. The “pearl” image strengthens this idea because pearls belong to the imagery of water as a sublime transmutation of a drop of water into a jewel.<sup>6</sup> Chelkowski underlines this idea from an aesthetic perspective when he writes that “[Nizāmī] brought together in splendid tension the sparseness of the Arabian desert and the opulence of the Persian garden”.<sup>7</sup> Miquel, the French scholar who has worked on the Arabian tale and the actual poems attributed to Majnūn, also insists on the importance of the theme of the desert as the only possible setting for such an extreme love story: “En ce désert qui, loin d’être un songe, lui impose ses conditions propres d’existence, Majnūn ne fait pas non plus que rêver sa poésie, il la vit désormais elle aussi; en ces lieux de dépouillement absolu, patrie et raison comprises, métaphore et autres figures poétiques explosent, le rapport de la poésie à la vie change de signe et d’être, celle-ci devenant naturellement celle-là sans le secours d’un adjuvant quelconque. Il n’est plus question de mettre de la poésie dans la vie, par le «comme» de tous les poètes, mais de s’inscrire, en chair et en os, par la poésie, dans un univers transfiguré.”<sup>8</sup>

Traditionally, there are many versions of the story of Laylī and Majnūn and Nizāmī had certainly access to many sources (mostly oral) and he

knew of several versions, all the more so as he had a bent for research and never started a *mathnavī* without having gathered a great amount of data about his story.<sup>9</sup> His version is thus based on former legends but it is probably the first one in Persian and certainly the most admired and famous one in the Persian-speaking world. His is certainly an important contribution to the penetration of the theme in Persian aesthetics in general and more particularly in poetry, though evidence of the archetypal character of Majnūn's character exists in previous texts.<sup>10</sup> His romance has also greatly contributed to the "spiritualization" of the love story. Nizāmī has adopted the main elements of the legend, recalling its great moments, although with some personal choices and developments.<sup>11</sup> But because the story in itself is rather simple, he decided to extend those aspects that allowed a poetic treatment and the whole romance obeys a specific structure. Contrary to *Khusraw u Shīrīn* or *Haft Paykar* for example, the structure here is loose, giving the impression of successive lyric moments rather than of a tightly constructed story.<sup>12</sup> Because we know what Nizāmī is able to do, we may infer that he deliberately put aside the idea of "constructing" a plot. He designed his *mathnavī* as a great lyric that follows the structure of the desert itself: the reader wanders in the love story, sometimes relaxed by the evocation of a garden, sometimes roused to emotional climax by the poetic evocations of love.<sup>13</sup> Although a *mathnavī*, it cannot be considered an epic poem; in many ways, it is the very essence of Nizāmī's lyricism.<sup>14</sup> Although there are a few warlike episodes, we may argue that the poem basically only contains three types of action: falling in love, burning with desire and dying. And this does not only concern the main characters. In various degrees, it is also true of Majnūn's parents and of Ibn Salām, Laylī's husband, and of the lovers who visit Majnūn in his desert in order either to be initiated to true love or to gather his poems. These lovers act very little or not at all. Their main characteristic is that they long for someone they cannot possess: Majnūn's parents want him to return to reason, to life, to them, and they die in their frustrated desire; Ibn Salām literally dries up and dies because Laylī refuses sexual intercourse with him.<sup>15</sup> Initiated to supreme love and sublime poetry, but incapable of rising to Majnūn's degree in the path of love, the other "lovers" return to the civilised world, taking with them Majnūn's words. Laylī herself mostly does nothing but cry, hidden in her tent (she also prays and sometimes sends letters), and explains her inaction by the fact that she is a woman. But strangely enough, Majnūn himself doesn't act either in order to obtain Laylī. In many ways, he is a "passive character". It is his father who in vain asks for her hand and who takes him to Mecca to cure him from his love; it is his friend Nawfal who in vain wages war against Laylī's tribe in order to obtain her by force. Majnūn's only actions as a lover are to flee to the desert, to refuse food and dress, and of course, to compose poetry or to save animals who remind him of his beloved.

Chapter after chapter he increasingly disincarnates and the desert becomes a symbol of his absence from himself. The climax of this absence is reached when he swoons in the presence of the beloved. This absence of real, efficient action confirms the idea that Nizāmī's *Laylī u Majnūn* is a long complaint of love, of a love that cannot be fulfilled in this world because of its very nature. The hollowness of actions underlines the idea that, paradoxically, the only real dynamic of action is in desire itself and in putting this desire into words. In the end, both lovers are reduced to tears, to a voice, to a perfume. This hollowing-out of their selves allows them to reach a higher degree of existence. Though by the deaths of Ibn Salām and her father, there is no obstacle any more to their union, Majnūn's refusal to marry Laylī (and even to remain in her physical presence) is a sign that he has reached a stage in love that is beyond any material form or desire. In addition, chapter 62 ("Zayd dreams of Laylī and Majnūn in Paradise") shows the lovers united in Paradise, walking in that highly verdant and flowery realm,<sup>16</sup> like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The conclusion of the chapter is that:

زینگونه کشد درین جهان سر شادیش درین جهان چنیست وان عالم باقی است و پاکست	هر کو نخورد در آن جهان بر آن کس که در آن جهان حزینست ... این عالم فانی است و خاکست
--	--

*Whoever does not taste the fruits of that world [i.e. the earthly world<sup>17</sup>] / He will thus enjoy the good of this one for ever.  
 Whoever suffers in that world / Such will be his/her happiness in this world...  
 This<sup>18</sup> world is but dust, doomed to nothingness / That world is everlasting and pure.<sup>19</sup>*

This is so true that at a certain point, when Majnūn encounters Laylī, he tells her that it is not her but the love of her that he loves:

با صورت تو مرا چه کارست یا عشق مرا حریف یا تو گر روی تو غایب است شاید	چون عشق تو در من استوارست شرک است مرا شریک با تو چون عشق تو روی می نماید
---	--

*So firm is my longing for you / What need do I have of that form of you?  
 To have you in my love is crime of association<sup>20</sup> / Either love is my man or you.  
 When your love shows its face / Absence best becomes your face.<sup>21</sup>*

It is noteworthy that the concept of Majnūn not being in love with Laylī in the end, but with the idea of the ideal beloved or even with love itself, has been part of the legend, as attested by Ibn Tūlūn:

*Majnūn's beloved came one day to see him. She found him crying: "Layla, Layla!" And on his feverish bosom he threw snow that melted immediately. "Qays, she said, it is me, Layla!" Then, looking at her he said: "Go away! I'm all busy with the love of you, you are in the way!"*<sup>22</sup>

So, Majnūn's love for Laylī, is avowedly not a desire of possession<sup>23</sup>, not a desire of Laylī as a woman of flesh and blood. It is a quest of love for love's sake, the desire to experiment loving desire ('ishq) as a radical emotion that burns and destroys any other feeling, emotion or attachment. This kind of love requires the negation of all other things; that is why the only possible setting for Majnūn's wandering life is indeed the barren desert of Najd, far away from his family and tribe. That is why his outlook is that of an ascetic hermit who has renounced all the ways of the world and its attachments too. That is why from the beginning, we know that he will not obtain the right to marry Laylī, that he has condemned himself to eternal frustration by his own fault. Had he not practiced *tashbīb*, that is the public and poetic proclamation of Laylī's beauty and of his love, he would have obtained her without difficulty. Indeed, the reason why Laylī's father stubbornly refuses to let Majnūn marry his daughter is because he has publicized her beauty in love poems, which is considered a crime against the honour of the tribe. But marriage, after all, is not what he desires. He wants to experiment desire in two major modes: separation and poetry. And he is ready to pay a dear price in his quest for absolute love: he is ready to go through all the sufferings of renouncement. He renounces to be part of human society, he renounces his family, his friends, his reason, his pleasures, his status and of course, as we just said, he renounces Laylī herself. Ultimately, it is his own self that he renounces. The fact that his attitude is described through a series of negations (he does not eat, does not dress, does not sleep, does not speak) enhances the fact that he is following a path that will eventually lead to erasing his personal identity, or in other words, there is method in his madness. The method may look strange to people around him but Majnūn is perfectly consistent with himself all along the poem. He wants to go through what Laylī has initiated in him, he remains concentrated on the "idea" of Laylī, an idea expressed in successive images that are in the end but the incarnations of the idea of love.

The central role of images as incarnations is perceptible in Nizāmī's own poetic technique. In the same way as Laylī is the living image of love that triggers Majnūn's "madness", the muskdeer, the night and the moon become the living images of Laylī, filling, so to speak, the gap of her

absence. And in turn, that is exactly the role assigned to similes and metaphors both in Majnūn's and in Nizāmī's poetry. Whatever its nature, an image is possible only when there is absence because its function is evocation of that which is not there in appearance and yet is there in the heart or in the imagination as an image. And what is essential here is the idea that this kind of image crystallised by poetry, is more real than material reality and becomes a source of true knowledge, as Corbin convincingly showed.<sup>24</sup> Imagination in this sense is inseparable from initiation. The representation of love and the beloved in separation are part of the process that guides the seeker of true love to its ultimate goal. This is probably one of the most important and inspiring ideas developed by Ahmad Ghazālī in his *Sawānih*. As L. Lewisohn summed up:

*This degree of intoxication with the beloved transcends both separation and union (states that only pertain to the early stages of love). Both states relate to a knowledge gained through imagination, but when the presence of the beloved is intuitively known in the deepest level of the heart, even that imagined knowledge vanishes. On this level, the "Object-of-Apprehension of the imagination (...)" has become itself the very locus of imagination (...)" Ghazālī calls this degree: "realization" or "attainment".<sup>25</sup>*

The importance of Ghazālī's short treatise on the degrees and nature of love and its deep and longstanding influence on Persian love poetry has not yet been sufficiently accounted for.<sup>26</sup> Even though other treatises on the same theme were written before and after that, it seems that the *Sawānih* has a special status from the point of view of literary history because it states powerfully the intricacies between love as feeling, desire as an imaginative process and poetry as the only possible expression of desire. The word "poetry" means here not only the actual verses quoted or composed by Ghazālī but also in general, the process of creating a language made of images through which love can be evoked if not defined. A parallel reading of the *Sawānih* and *Laylī u Majnūn* gives the impression that Nizāmī had meditated Ghazālī's text which might have directly inspired the composition of his love romance. Historically, the *Sawānih* was known by the time Nizāmī started his career and the poet manifestly was extensively read. So, it is but natural to suppose that he was familiar with it; all the more so as Ghazālī's radical and erotic representation of transcendent love<sup>27</sup> is echoed in Nizāmī's poem but in a more developed and narrative manner. After Ghazālī, to express transcendent love in an erotic terminology<sup>28</sup> became a classical literary topos. But in Nizāmī's time the literary fusion of mystical and erotic themes was still in the making and we may consider that our author was indeed, with Sanā'ī and 'Attār, one of those who gave a powerful poetic and narrative shape to the concepts suggested in the manner of

“divine flashes” by Ghazālī. Apart from the fact that Ghazālī himself quotes two stories related to Majnūn<sup>29</sup> showing him as the archetype of the contemplative lover, many similarities may be drawn between his ideas on the different stages and forms of passionate love (*‘ishq*) and Majnūn’s progress on the path of love in Nizāmī’s poem. As far as structure is concerned, as hinted above, although Nizāmī provides a general narrative structure to his poem because he is telling a story with a beginning and an end, yet there is an apparent diffraction of time within the structure giving an impression of “successive moments of love”, rather than a real progression. The same thing happens in the *Sawānih* where we expect a full account (if not a narration) of the successive stages of love, but in fact find elusive evocations of successive “sudden events”<sup>30</sup> that don’t seem to follow a progression, and are sometimes even contradictory. Majnūn, as does the lover of the *Sawānih*, experiences love as a series of commotions that trigger contradictory desires: desire of union, but also of separation, desire to contemplate the beloved and yet the physical impossibility to do so (he swoons when he catches but a glimpse of Laylī), desire to tell the beauty of the Beloved and the certitude of losing her by so doing... And, just as the lover of the *Sawānih*, Majnūn becomes the archetype of absolute love that sees and lives for nothing else but his obsessive love. The only and major progression of the lover in both works is that through the ups and downs of love, he loses his own identity and is transmuted into the Beloved. Thus,

*When the lover sees the Beloved, this triggers in him a violent emotion because his being is but a borrowed being and he is facing the pole (qibla) of nothingness. In ecstasy, his being is overwhelmed with anxiety as long as he has not reached the ultimate truth. Then, he is not yet mature. When matured, in meeting, he becomes absent to himself because when the lover has matured in love and love has opened his inner self, then, at the rising of union, his being withdraws (rakht barbandad) in proportion with his maturity in love.<sup>31</sup>*

In Nizāmī’s work, the progress of Majnūn is definitely a progress towards nothingness to which his ascetic attitude and appearance contribute in a visual manner.<sup>32</sup> The fact that he doesn’t eat or sleep anymore is a sign of the process of annihilation. Time and again, Nizāmī reminds us that for Majnūn, *‘ishq* (loving desire) is an initiation to self-annihilation. Thus, Majnūn says to Salām Baghdādī who comes to visit him in the desert and believes that love passes with time:

عشق آتش گشت و من چو عودم  
من رخت کشیدم از میانه  
من نیستم آنچه هست یارست

عشق است خلاصه وجودم  
عشق آمد و خاص کرد خانه  
با هستی من که در شمارست

*Love is the quintessence of my being / Love is like the fire and I'm  
the aloes wood.*

*Love has come and made this house his / And me, I have withdrawn  
(rakht kashīdam) from there.*

*Who can count on my being? / I am no more, whatever is, is the  
Beloved.*

And later, in the chapter of the meeting between the two lovers:

من گم شده توام درین چاه کین دست تو است دست من نیست جز سایه تو مرا چه دانند	تو یافته منی درین راه با هست تو به که هست من نیست من خود کیم و مرا چه خوانند
--	--

*You are my found one in this path / I am your lost one in this well.*

*With your being, better if my being is not / This hand is yours, not  
mine.*

*Who am I by myself, how am I called? / Am I known as anything  
else but your shadow?<sup>33</sup>*

In the journey of love, Majnūn loses all form of identity (“being”, “hand”, “name”) and any form of material density, in order to become but a reflection of Laylī. It is as if he is going through a process of dilution into the Beloved. After the meeting, in the same chapter, Majnūn, unable to stand the burning presence of the beloved, has to flee again to the desert in order to resume the composition of poetry.<sup>34</sup> This idea that the actual presence of the beloved is a burning fire<sup>35</sup> may again be read as an echo of Ghazālī’s remark that “Union must become the firewood for the fire of desire so that it can grow”.<sup>36</sup>

We may consider today that this classical topos of self-annihilation in love has become a cliché. At the time of Nizāmī though, the theme still had its freshness. It had indeed become a “classical” mystical attitude under the impulse of such fascinating figures as Hallāj and Bāyazīd, and it had been dramatized in treatises such as the *Sawānih*. Nevertheless, it is likely that Nizāmī played a great part in introducing the theme into the realm of poetry and romance by transmuting a love story into a mystical quest.<sup>37</sup> It also is noteworthy that this self-annihilation does not lead to absolute nothingness because the aloes wood produces perfume by burning and the lover’s hollowness gives place to the “shadow” of the lover: so, annihilation in love means transmutation of the substance of the lover from dense and obscure matter into an evanescent, superior form of being. One of the keys to understand *Laylī u Majnūn* as a “mystical” piece of poetry<sup>38</sup> is precisely this strong presence of the theme of self-annihilation as a condition of true love and the only way to attain fusion (*baqā* after *fanā*). One of the key notions that points to this paradoxical conception of love as



renunciation to the self (as opposed to love as a desire of possession and affirmation of the ego) is *gharaz* (غرض) of which Nizāmī insists that Majnūn’s love is deprived of. *Gharaz* is the goal sought in action, the purpose of action or speech; but Majnūn’s love is, from a worldly perspective, precisely “purposeless”:

آن عشق نه شهوت و هواپیست شهوت ز حساب عشق دور است کس عشق عرضی روا ندارد عشقی که غرض نشست برخاست دور از تو همه غرض پرستند	عشق که ز عصمتش جدا پیست عشق آینه بلند نور است عشق (عرضی) بقا ندارد با عشق کجا غرض بود راست جز تو همه عاشقان که هستند
---	--

*A love that is disjointed from chastity / Is not love but pure lust.  
 Love is the higher mirror of light / Lust is far away from love.  
 Accidental love has no permanence (بقا baqā) / And is deprived of  
 consideration.  
 How could purpose (gharaz) in love be right? Where there is pur-  
 pose there is no love.  
 Except you, all the lovers of the world / Are purpose-worshippers,  
 far from you!<sup>39</sup>*

Nizāmī carefully and constantly refers to the “purity” of Majnūn’s love (as opposed to ordinary love or lust) and to Laylī’s chastity and virginity<sup>40</sup> even after marriage, perhaps to ensure that the reader clearly understands his interpretation. This tends to show on the one hand that in Nizāmī’s time, the Arabian romance was not necessarily understood as a spiritual story and on the other hand, that such an interpretation needed to be clearly stated because the spiritualization of the love topos was not yet a common literary ground. We may thus argue that if Nizāmī added to the Arabic original the theme of “the wild animals tamed”, it was to make sure that his purpose would be understood and Majnūn considered as an idealized mystical image.<sup>41</sup> Taming the wild animals is a classical Sufi metaphor for the taming of the carnal self and base desires (lust being one of them). In Nizāmī’s romance, it is repeatedly taken as a proof of Majnūn’s higher spiritual status and valour. The theme is echoed in the poem itself in chapter 41 (immediately placed after the chapter entitled “Of Majnūn and the Wild Beasts”) that recounts the story of a king who kept wild dogs and would throw to them the courtiers whom he disliked. One of the courtiers fed the dogs in secret and was spared when he also happened to be thrown to them. As the king’s anger subsided and he regretted his decision, he discovered that the courtier had been saved because he had tamed the wild dogs, contrary to the king. This extraordinary event “woke him up from his drunkenness and made him shun his dog-like behaviour and dog-worshipping”.<sup>42</sup> Nizāmī explicitly relates this story to the situation of Majnūn



and the fact that his “kingship” is witnessed by his control over the wild animals, symbol of his control over his instincts.<sup>43</sup> And in turn, the animals become his protection against the intrusion of the *aghyār*, those who are not admitted in the intimacy of his experience because they cannot understand his state and stamp him a madman. The wild beasts he has tamed protect him (and Laylī in the time of union) from any intrusion and are the rampart (حصار *hisār*) against both the human community that he has left and its illusory passions. Thus Zayd who arranges the last meeting with Laylī remarks:

کالوده شهوت و غرض نیست	کین عشق حقیقتی عرض نیست
کو را دده درنده رامست	هم عشق به غایب تمامست
کالایشی از ددی درو نیست	زان از ددگان بدی برو نیست
فرمانبر او شد این ددی چند	او چون دد خویش را سر افکند
سر برزند مگر به پاکی	پیداست که عشق آن دو خاکی

*This true love is no accident ('araz) / 'T is not stained with lust and purpose (gharaz).*

*It is love in an absolute sense / That is why he has tamed those wild animals.*

*The wild beasts would never harm him / Because there is no beastly pollution in him.*

*Since he has beaten his own beast / He has become the king over the beasts.*

*'T is clear that the love of those two earthly beings / Has its end and origin in purity.<sup>44</sup>*

Nizāmī has largely contributed to the “spiritualization” of the Majnūn theme by developing the idea of self-denial through a set of images. However, this interpretation of the love romance is already present in Ghazālī’s work in the two allusions to the story of Majnūn mentioned above. More generally, Ghazālī interprets the whole tradition of the attributes of beauty in a purely spiritual manner and reads the details of classical beauty in the light of mystical love. Thus, in the epoch-making passage:

*In the realm of imagination, when [Love] manifests its face, sometimes it shows a sign through vision and sometimes not. Sometimes it appears through the curl, sometimes through the cheek, sometimes through the mole, sometimes through the stature, sometimes through the eye or through the eyebrow or through the coquettish glance, sometimes through the beloved’s laugh and sometimes through her rebuke. And each of these significations is a sign in the lover’s realm of desire (...) Each of these signs in the intuitive*

*experience of love says something of the lover's spiritual or physical desire, or something on his illness or fault.*<sup>45</sup>

This perspective may account for the fact that the description of Laylī's beauty (with the traditional cypress-like stature, gazelle eyes and coquettish glances, black hair and curls)<sup>46</sup> is reserved to the beginning of the story, when Majnūn has not yet become the king of love and still needs to be initiated by Laylī's beauty to the higher reality of love. In addition, it is not Majnūn who evokes the physical beauty of the beloved but the narrator, Nizāmī, who is indeed a master in such evocations. When Majnūn speaks, his eloquence rather points to the essence of Laylī, to the reflection of her luminous and scented presence in his heart or to the nature, the impact and the trial of love. Very soon, Laylī's physical beauty is replaced by her perfume<sup>47</sup> and in the end by the idea of the Beloved (as stated above) and we realise that her celebrated beauty was seen essentially through Majnūn's eyes and revealed his own state as a lover and a seeker. Thus it is but natural that his parents and friends don't see the reason why he is so much in love; for them, Laylī is just another woman, easily replaceable by other beauties. Laylī is Laylī only in the eyes of Majnūn and vice-versa.<sup>48</sup> This is stated in the famous passage of chapter 11, when the two fall in love at school. The series of double anaphors at the beginning of each *misra'* stresses the opposition between "their schoolmates" (ياران *yārān*), those who seek knowledge in external sciences and books, and "them",<sup>49</sup> the two lovers (essentially united through the pronoun ايشان *ishān*), who seek to be initiated to a higher reality through the contemplation of each other and the experience of love.<sup>50</sup>

To express the idea of such a "higher reality", Nizāmī uses many devices and metaphors and more particularly metaphors of light that contrast with the night that is the general background of the whole poem.<sup>51</sup> But here, we will focus on the image of the "pearl" as a central metaphor that brings together desire and initiation, poetry and love. The pearl is traditionally considered as concentrated light or water hidden in the dark womb of the shell. The magic alchemy that allows the mysterious transformation of a "drop" into a shining jewel has been used repeatedly as a mystic symbol of the process of spiritual transformation of the self into a higher state of being. Thus already in one of Hallāj's orisons:

*Time (وقت *waqt*) is a shell in the heart of the ocean; tomorrow, at the day of Resurrection, the shells will be thrown on the sand, opened, and will show the pearl.*<sup>52</sup>

This pearl refers to the quintessential reality of the person that reveals itself when, at the day of Resurrection, there is no shell any more, no matter and no appearances. In the first chapter of the *Sawānih*, Ghazālī evokes the

image of an invaluable pearl that is given to the immature wayfarer to put him to trial, a pearl (در ثمنین و لؤلؤ لالا) *durr-i thamīn u lu'lu'-i lālā* so precious that not even a master would dare to hold it let alone to pierce it.<sup>53</sup> That this pearl (given as a grace) is love as reflected in the innermost of the soul, is confirmed by the last chapter where the image of the pearl reappears:

*Reasons are blind to the understanding of the essential quality (ماهیت māhiyat) and reality of the soul and the soul is but the shell of love. Thus, if the shell cannot be reached through knowledge, how could one reach the hidden pearl in the shell?<sup>54</sup>*

By putting together Hallāj's vision and Ghazālī's evocation, we may infer that love is the beating heart of the soul, its essential reality and it is this quintessential quality and shining beauty that is expressed through the metaphor of the pearl. Through a metonymic process, the pearl becomes the metaphor of both love and the heart<sup>55</sup>. In this same chapter, Ghazālī expresses the impossibility to describe such a reality through words, except by allusions and metaphors that may not be understood by the common reader. Such significations are "hidden" as the pearl is "hidden" in the shell. Indeed, the adjective "hidden" (مکنون *maknūn*) is often used to qualify the pearl because inner meanings, love's reality and the beloved's beauty, are hidden in the shell of outward reality and as far as expression is concerned, in the shell of words.

In *Laylī u Majnūn*, the pearl represents the beloved Laylī and also Majnūn's poetry.<sup>56</sup> Time and again Nizāmī uses the metaphor to refer either to Laylī as a virgin ("unpierced pearl") and a shining beauty or to Majnūn's poetry and its blazing quality, suggesting the close link between the two by the association of the images. Using traditional imagery Nizāmī also refers to his own poetry as a pearl. Thus, in the chapter devoted to the circumstances of the composition of the book, he relates that the prince Manūchīhr of Shirvān urged him to compose a book relating in Persian the story of Laylī and Majnūn:

رانی سخنی چو در مکنون	خواهم که به یاد عشق مجنون
بکری دو سه در سخن نشانی	چون لیلی بگر اگر توانی

(LM4,25-26)

*In memory of Majnūn, I want you / To scatter words like hidden pearls.*

*And like Laylī the virgin, if you can, / Compose virgin poetry.*

Nizāmī naturally complied and as an alchemist who transmutes a dry and barren story into sublime beauty, he produced a work of art that tells what seemed impossible to tell:

بر نارد گوهری چنین خاص  
از عیب تهی و از هنر پر

(LM4, 85-86)

زین بحر ضمیر هیچ غواص  
هر بیتهی از او چو رشته ای در

*From this ocean of the inner self, no diver / Can bring back such  
unique pearl.  
Each verse, like a row of pearls / Is flawless and replete with  
perfection.*

It is to be noted that Ghazālī too, complied to a dear friend's demand<sup>57</sup> in order to express what he deemed impossible to say (as he states in both the introduction and the last chapter of the *Sawānih*). Both use the image of the diver who plunges into the ocean of the inner self to find the precious pearl of love/knowledge/beauty, as in the lines quoted above:

خاریدم و چشمه آب می داد  
در زیور او به خرج کردم

(LM4, 88-89)

می گفتم و دل جواب می داد  
دخلی که ز عقل درج کردم

*I spoke and the heart answered / I dug and the source provided  
water.  
The pearls I obtained from reason / I used them for its  
ornamentation.*

That "unique" pearl-like quality is thus the result of self-knowledge obtained through the experience of love, a testimony of the lover/poet's visionary world into which the reader is invited to dive in turn. As mentioned, the poem as pearl is also the mirror of Laylī as a "hidden, unpierced pearl".<sup>58</sup> The immediate traditional function of this image is to express metaphorically the virginity of a woman,<sup>59</sup> thus Laylī's purity and lack of lust.<sup>60</sup> The theme is a reminiscence of the Qur'anic verse: "[There shall be] large-eyed Huris, resembling the hidden pearl [*al-lu'lu' al-maknūn*]" (*Qur'an*, 56; 22-23), where the "hidden pearl" of virginity is interpreted spiritually as God's Verb.<sup>61</sup> In Persian, the words "unpierced" (*nāsufta*) and "virgin" (*bikr*) are used both to express virginity and excellent quality (excellence of a pearl when not yet pierced and of poetry when new and "pure" in its style and expression) and directly relate Laylī to poetry. So much so that she herself composes pearl-like poetry:

در نظم سخن فصاحتی داشت  
چون خود همه بیت بکر می گفت

(LM19, 56-57)

لیلی که چنان ملاحظتی داشت  
ناسفته دری و در همی سفت

*Laylī who had such sweetness / Was also eloquent in poetry.  
An unpierced pearl who pearls would pierce / She would compose  
verses virgin like herself.*

From a mystical perspective, it also means that Laylī (“woven with thousands of hidden pearls”)<sup>62</sup> is indeed the personification of love, though hidden and mysterious, an object both of desire and knowledge and an object of poetry. To pierce the pearl would thus mean to penetrate the innermost mystery of love, poetry and being.

Laylī is indeed “hidden”, as a woman belonging to an Arab tribe, veiled, secluded and lonely in her tent,<sup>63</sup> but most of all unattainable, hidden from the worldly eyes like a pearl in a shell, as Nizāmī explicitly states:

چون باز شدند سوی خانه      شد در صدف آن در یگانه  
(LM19,143)

*When they went back home / That unique pearl returned into her  
shell.*

Laylī is represented as withdrawn from the world into her tent and her beautiful moon-like face as impossible to behold even by her husband Ibn Salām<sup>64</sup>. The theme of the tent again explicitly relates Laylī to poetry as the word *bayt* signifies both the tent and the verse.<sup>65</sup>

Through the complementary images of tent/veil and pearl, both Laylī and poetry are presented as uniting in their beauty, darkness and light, night and day, mystery and knowledge, desire and initiation. The supreme pearl of love and knowledge (knowledge of the lover leading to self-knowledge and in the end to the knowledge of God), echoed by the shining face of the Beloved, is hidden somewhere in the long dark hair of the Beloved, metaphor of the night of desire. Laylī is indeed a “hidden treasure (*ganj gani*)”<sup>66</sup> protected, as the tradition goes, by either a snake or a dragon:

لیلی که چراغ دلبران بود      رنج خود و گنج دیگران بود  
گنجی که کشیده بود ماری      از حلقه به گرد او حصاری  
می زیست در آن شکنجه دلتنگ      چون دانه لعل در دل سنگ  
گر چه گهری گرانبها بود      چون مه در دهان اژدها بود  
(LM43,11-14)

*Layli, the torch among the lovelies / Was a pain to herself but a  
treasure for the others.  
On this treasure a snake was coiled up / Like a protective bulwark.  
She lived in her sorrow (شکنجه) suffering / Like a ruby in the heart  
of stone.*

*Although a priceless pearl she was / Like the moon, she was in the mouth of a dragon.*

And again, the treasure she is, metaphorically relates her to Majnūn's poetry and knowledge, also represented as a "hidden treasure". This treasure is the riddle solved by Majnūn, the poet, in his quest for love:

حل کرده رموز آسمانی	داننده دانش نهانی
بیت و غزلی چو لولو تر	زیبا سخنی چو سکه زر
دیوانه نریزد آن چنان در	داند همه کس که بی تفکر

*He (Majnūn) knew the knowledge hidden / Having solved the riddles of heaven.  
With beautiful words like golden coins / With verses (bayt) and poems like bright pearls.  
Everyone knows that never could / A heedless madman scatter such pearls.<sup>67</sup>*

Thus, in the same way as Laylī *embodies* the archetype of beauty, Majnūn's poems *embody* a higher knowledge found only in the experience of love. This "embodiment" takes the form of metaphors that are, *par excellence*, poetic riddles. But the "riddle of heavens" is also solved by Nizāmī, in the "ocean" of verses that recount the story of love:

گردابه رهان خود پرستی ...	عشق است گره گشای هستی
کشتی به عدن رسید دریاب ...	دریای سخن نمود پایاب
در خواندن او خجستگی باد	این قصه کلید بستگی باد

*T' is love that undoes the knot of being / And saves from the whirlwind of self-adoration.  
(...) The ocean of words reached shallow waters / Look, the boat has reached haven!  
(...) May this story be the key that opens the riddle/ May there be radiant bliss in reading it.<sup>68</sup>*

So, both Majnūn and Nizāmī try to bring into the form of poetry the unutterable beauty of the mysterious pearl and thus to pierce the secret of love, as Ghazālī had done. For Nizāmī, embarking on the ocean of poetry is equivalent to embarking for the journey of love, the only journey through which the desiring soul can be initiated to higher realities. Both poetry and love are focused on the idealized figure of the Beloved and celebrate her Beauty.

The dynamics of desire stand in the successive evocations of the beloved's beauties as tokens of another reality. The poetic evocation inflames

the imagination, filling it with metaphors of the beloved and initiating thus to the nature of love, much more convincingly than the flesh and blood presence of the beloved which can never be so dynamic. This is what Nizāmī wants to underline when he insists that the possibility to speak through images disappears in the presence of the beloved. Indeed, in chapter 57, when Laylī and Majnūn can at last be together in a loving embrace, they suddenly become silent:

چون شمع زبانه دار بودند	تا در شب انتظار بودند
چون صبح زبان بریده گشتند	حالی که به هم رسیده گشتند

*As long as they were in the night of longing / Like candles, they had tongues.  
But now that they had joined / Like (that of) the morning, cut were their tongues.*<sup>69</sup>

Majnūn who is after all the great poet of *tashbīb*, who lost Laylī because he could not silence his love and her beauty, remains thus silent in the presence of the Beloved. Astounded by this attitude, Laylī even tries to bring Majnūn back to language, but in vain:

می گفت بدبیهه ای دل آویز	لیلی به زبان غمزه نیز
کاندیشه من زبان ربودت	کای سوسن ده زبان چه بودت
بی گل همه ساله لال باشد	بلبل که سخن سگال باشد
گوید نه یکی هزار دستان	چون ببند روی گل به بستان
من با تو چو گل به سازگاری	تو بلبل باغ روزگاری
بر درج دهان نهاده ای بند	امروز که هست روز پیوند

*Through her coquettish glances, Laylī / Spoke with charming improvised similes.*

*"Oh my lily with ten tongues<sup>70</sup>, what is it? / Why did the thought of me deprive you of your tongue?*

*The nightingale who is a sweet speaker / Without the rose remains silent all year.*

*But when in the garden he sees the rose's face / He sings not one but thousand melodies.*<sup>71</sup>

*You are the nightingale of the garden of life / And I'm in accordance with you like the rose.*

*How is it that today, the day of union / You've closed the jewel-case of your mouth?"*<sup>72</sup>

And Majnūn answers in substance, not with words but through tears red with blood, that he is unable to speak because in her presence he loses his own identity; he becomes her and thus no place is left for language. In

union, there is a fusion of identities that obliterates the need for language.<sup>73</sup> The theme of union is nevertheless evoked in forty-four *bayts*<sup>74</sup> expressing the wordless speech of Majnūn through a series of images that shun duality as belonging to the world of mere appearances and point to unity beyond duality, as the only possible dogma in the religion of love:

اینجا منی و تویی نباشد                      در مذهب ما دویی نباشد

*Here, there is no "I" and no "you" / In our religion, there is no duality.*<sup>75</sup>

and further:

چون من توام این دو پیکری چیست                      چون هر دو یکبست داوری چیست

*Since I am you, why these two bodies? / Since we are both one, why this opposition?*<sup>76</sup>

Among the series of images, the metaphor of the pearl reappears with a renewed emotional and spiritual charge related to the perfection of its form:

در دل ما ز یک خزانه ست                      الا دو صدف که در میانه ست

*The pearls of our heart are of one treasury / Only, there are two shells in here.*<sup>77</sup>

And just after this sequence of eloquent silent speech by Majnūn, Nizāmī depicts Laylī's reply in the form of a kiss and an embrace:

چون ریخت نثار اشک مجنون                      زین گونه هزار در مکنون  
لیلی به کرشمه های مستش                      بر عقد گهر علاقه بستش  
کرد از لب خود به جای آن در                      از آب حیات حقه را پر

*After Majnūn bestowed the token of his tears / Tears of this kind, thousands of hidden pearls.  
With her loving drunken glances, Laylī / Encompassed him with a necklace of pearls.  
Through her lip, instead of that pearl / She filled the jewel-case with the water of life.*<sup>78</sup>

At this point the tears of the lover (token of longing and desire) and the saliva of the Beloved (by excellence the fluid of initiation, and as such considered as the "water of life")<sup>79</sup> are united in the shining, living image



of the pearl. The eyes that behold the beauty of the Beloved and in turn become eloquent and the speaking mouth that breathes life while becoming silent are united in the same image; eyes and mouth shed pearls of a spiritual quality that stand for the realization of love and lead to a final kiss that bestows eternal life. This is indeed the final exchange that seals the fusion of identities between lover and Beloved and reunites at last the two parts of the same soul<sup>80</sup> after the long pilgrimage on the path of separation, suffering and longing.

Through the burning desire for the ideal Beloved, Majnūn has been able to empty himself from himself and thus make room for Love. He has travelled through the desert to himself and reached the ocean of love where Laylī's pearl was hidden. In the end, he has attained to that higher reality that stood in his own heart and of which Laylī was but a beautiful reflection and reminder because

*“the path from the self to oneself is the path of love”. “As long as he has not crossed through love – love that encompasses all his being – he cannot reach to himself”.*<sup>81</sup>

And for Nizāmī, it is also the ultimate function of poetry: to initiate the reader to the realities of love, to reflect the beauty of the beloved in the mirror of the heart and thus to dive into the ocean of desire to bring back the hidden pearl of knowledge.

## Notes

- 1 For further information on the Arab tale and the poems attributed to Majnūn, see Miquel (1984) and Krachkovskij (1378), Introduction to his critical edition of the romance.
- 2 Jami-Dad'alishah (1378) 400-1.
- 3 LM4,47-53. Quotations from Nizāmī's text refer to the edition by Dastgirdi: Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372). The abbreviation used is LM, followed by the chapter number and the verse number in this edition, when not otherwise stated. The last chapters are indeed considered spurious by Dastgirdi (followed by Gelpke, but not by Browne, Massé and Arberry) and when lines are quoted that are absent from Dastgirdi's edition, the reference is Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364). For more details on the question, see Chelkowski (1995).

4

و آنگاه برین برهنه روئی زین روی برهنه روی ماند است (LM4,73-74)	زیبا روئی بدین نکوئی کس در نه به قدر او فشانده است
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*Such a beautiful face [this story]has / But then so naked is her face,  
 No one has spread pearls on her price / That is why naked has remained her  
 face.*

- 5 Literally, *Khizr* derives from the Arabic root meaning “green”. This prophet, said to have guided and initiated Moses, is also the guardian of the Water of Life. LM35,111: *O you, the source of Khizr in darkness / You, moth of the morning candle*. And a few lines later, LM35,130: *Verdant is your land, and you wear the robe of Khizr / Be in accordance with*

- me like the water of Khizr*. In the miniature representations of Majnūn, this “Water of Life” is often present running under the tree that bows before Majnūn’s grandeur. (See also the contribution by F. Franke in this volume. Barry (2004) 15).
- 6 See below.
  - 7 Chelkowski (1975) 67.
  - 8 Miquel (1996) 66-7.
  - 9 On the probable sources of *Laylī u Majnūn*, see Krachkovskij (1378), the introduction to the text.
  - 10 See particularly the purely spiritual treatment of Majnūn in Ghazālī (1359): chapters 25, 52.
  - 11 See for example the displacement from the pastoral setting of the Arab tale where Laylī and Majnūn fall in love as children while keeping their camels together, to the *maktab* where Majnūn experiences love at first sight when he sees Laylī’s face. See Safa (1977).
  - 12 Although Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 54, argues that “the episodes are not only charmingly told, they are coherently arranged so that there is a line of development and a dramatic climax to the plot,” compared to Nizāmī’s mastery of complex story-telling, *Laylī u Majnūn* definitely lacks structure.
  - 13 See also the illuminating remarks of Lory (2004) on the desert as the ideal setting for the emergence of Arabian poetry.
  - 14 As Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 188, rightly puts in his convincing study of the poem: “Nizāmī produces sheer lyricism in the *mathnavī* form.”
  - 15 Critics rightly note that this is socially bold and hard to imagine: see Sarvatyan (1376) 158, and also Talattof (2000) 58-9. This question is also dealt with by Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 251ff and by Meisami (1987) 162. Whether this is a sign of the spiritual meaning of love in the romance (Sarvatyan’s viewpoint) or a proof of Nizāmī’s open-mindedness on sexual issues (Tallattof’s conclusion), Laylī clearly warns her enforced husband that she will not have him in her bed. That is why she is referred to, till the end of the story, as the “virgin”. This refusal of sexual intercourse contributes to a further disincarnation of the characters.
  - 16 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 348: a description of the “green” (*khizra*) setting of Paradise.
  - 17 These are the words of a *pīr* of the other world to Zayd in his dream, thus the reversal of perspective in the use of demonstratives.
  - 18 Now it is again Zayd who is speaking from an earthly perspective.
  - 19 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 349, 37-38 and 42.
  - 20 *Shirk*, literally «association», designates the crime of associating anything to God.
  - 21 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 245, 107-109.
  - 22 Ibn Tulun (1962) 9, quoted by Miquel (1984) 165-6.
  - 23 For a development on this subject, see Anvar-Chenderoff (2007).
  - 24 This is a recurrent idea throughout his work. See more particularly Corbin (1964) and Corbin (1952-4).
  - 25 I thank Dr. Lewisohn for putting at my disposal the longest version of an article on Ahmad Ghazālī he is preparing for the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (D. Borchert, editor in Chief) from which I quote here.
  - 26 Although it is always asserted in passing, for example by Pourjavady (Ghazali (1359) in the introduction and Pourjavady (1357)).
  - 27 As noted by Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 13: “Ahmad Ghazālī systematically used profane erotic vocabulary throughout the *Sawānih*. The use of these terms in the transcendental sense of love is noteworthy and has a lasting impact on Persian mystical love poetry.” See also Bürgel (1979).
  - 28 In many ways Ghazālī may indeed be considered as “the founder of the literary topos and mystical persuasion known as the ‘religion of love’” (Lewisohn (2006) n. 26).
  - 29 The two “Majnūn stories”: Ghazali (1359) 22 and 24 (*fasl 23* and *fasl 24*).

- 30 This is in fact the literal meaning of the word *Sawānih* (see Lewisohn (2006), n. 26)
- 31 Ghazali (1359) 24, *fasl* 25.
- 32 On Majnūn's ascetic appearance and attitude, see Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 89-113.
- 33 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 317-318; 130-132. These lines seem to echo the opening lines of the *Sawānih*:  
*In the times of nothingness [‘adam], love was for me created / I was, of all the world, love’s ultimate purpose.*  
*I will not cut from you as long as perfume does not cut from aloes wood / All day and night and month and year, notwithstanding the jealous (Ghazali (1359) 3, *fasl* 1).*
- 34 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 321; 189-194.
- 35 Early on, the theme became a classical topos of mystical literature. See for example the numerous recurrences of the image of love as fire in ‘Attār’s works. In the opening verse of one of his *ghazals*, he expresses the idea in a global image: *Loving the beauty of the Beloved-source of life (janan), Is an ocean of fire / If you are a lover, you shall burn: for love is nothing but that.* (‘Attar-Tafazzoli (1362) *ghazal* 96, 1)
- 36 Ghazali (1359) 23, *fasl* 23.
- 37 De Bruijn (1986).
- 38 Such an interpretation has been discussed, for example by Talattof (2000).
- 39 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 321-322; 196-200.
- 40 See below, the image of the pearl.
- 41 We could even use here the word “icon” for the representation of Majnūn with the wild beasts as a symbol of the man who has tamed his own nature has become a cliché in the miniature tradition.
- 42 LM33,93: هشيار شد از خمار مستی بگذاشت سگی و سگپرستی
- 43 For a development of the dog theme and its spiritual meaning, see Barry (2004: 283). See also the story of Hallāj appearing with two black dogs in a Sufi circle while master and disciples are having their meal. The master gives him his place and Hallāj eats with his two dogs by his side to the bewilderment of the disciples. When he is gone, the disciples express their disgust to the master who answers: “His dog is his slave. It runs behind him from outside whereas our dog is inside us and we run behind it. And there is a great difference between those who follow their dog and those who are followed by their dog.” (‘Attar-Isti‘lami (1370)).
- 44 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 314, 71-75.
- 45 Ghazali (1359) 31, *fasl* 37-38.
- 46 See the description of her beauty in LM19 (“On Laylī’s Beauty”), *passim*.
- 47 Schimmel (1982) 81, argues that this process is a recurrent pattern in Persian mystical poetry: “Words are the scent of the muskdeer, which leads finally to the source of the fragrance; or they are like the scent of Yusuf’s shirt, which brought his father glad tidings from his faraway son and cured his eyes, which were blind from weeping. Through the image of fragrance mystical poetry gives some news of the everlasting Beloved even to those who have never seen him, and who never realized that His Beauty is hidden behind cypress and rose, behind the dark cloud and the jasmine bush.”
- 48 This idea has been beautifully summarized by Rūmī (Rumi-Isti‘lami (1372) *Mathnavī* Book I, l. 410-1):  
*The caliph one day to Laylī said: “Is that you? / Is it you who made Majnūn mad and lost?  
 You have nothing more than the other lovelies!”/ “Silence!, she answered, for you are not Majnūn [mad]”.*
- 49 LM11,75-79 starting with یاران به حساب علم خوانی .
- 50 For the pictorial interpretation of the scene and its mystical connotations, see Barry (2004) 14-5.

- 51 On this question, see Seyed-Gohrab (2003 314-9) (“Light as the marker of time and as background”). In the opening of the text, the importance of finding one’s own inner light in the darkness of the world is stated in the prayer that Nizāmī addresses to God:  
 ده با نور خود آشنائیم ده از ظلمت خود رهائیم ده  
*Free me from my own darkness / Show me my own inner light* (LM1,63).
- 52 Quoted by ‘Attar-Isti’lami (1370).
- 53 Ghazali (1359) 4, *fasl 1*.
- 54 Ghazali (1359) 55, *fasl 77*.
- 55 Rūmī expresses this in a beautiful passage: “the jewel-box of the chest holds a heart that is a drop and a universe, a pearl and an ocean, a slave and a king” (Letter XXXIX).
- 56 Among other instances: *Laylī would hang flowers to trees / Whereas Majnūn would scatter pearls as offerings* (Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 97, 14); *Laylī would comb her long hair / Majnūn would shed tear-pearls* (Idem 97, 22); *Someone recited from Majnūn’s poems / A lyric like pearls hidden* (Idem 135, 57); *When through his pearl-scattering poems / The story of Qays became known to the world* (Idem 275, 7).
- 57 This “dear friend” alluded to in the introduction of the treatise and in the last chapter was actually his close disciple and spiritual companion, ‘Ayn al-Quzat al-Hamadānī.
- 58 See for example when she tells Majnūn that her husband has not touched her: *I am pierced but my pearl is not / No one has tested my diamond* (Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 235, 22). More generally she is referred to as “an unpierced pearl” from the beginning of the story:

ناسفته دریش هم طویلہ	بود از صدف دگر قبیلہ
چون عقل به نام نیک منسوب	افت نرسیده دختری خوب

(LM11,53-54)

*From the shell of another tribe / Was an unpierced pearl of same rank.  
 A precious girl, untouched and pure / Like reason, of such good fame.*

- 59 See Chebel (1995) 332.
- 60 This is all the more important as Laylī’s virginity is an essential element of the plot: indeed, if *tashbīb* (Majnūn’s original crime) was considered dishonourable, it was because it induced the possibility of the lover/poet to have dishonoured the beloved. It was only by marrying the girl to another man that her virginity could be proved to society (the husband, contrary to the lover had no reason to lie on this chapter). On this idea explaining somehow the social detestation of *tashbīb* which otherwise seems irrational and hard to account for, see Mestiri’s commentary in Isfahani-Mestiri (2004) 181. The theme of *tashbīb* as revelation of a secret has also been used in a mystical sense, as Schimmel (1982) 73 remarks: “For the greatest sin of the lover is *ifshā’as-sirr*, divulgence of the secret. (...) Persian poets have therefore woven a veil of symbols in order to point to and at the same time hide the secret of love, longing and union.”
- 61 See Chebel (1995) 332.
- 62 LM19,8: در بنده هزار در مکنون
- 63 On the seclusion of Laylī, see Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 243-51: *An incarcerated heroine* and more particularly his development on the theme of *parda* (244-5).
- 64 (LM43,29) شد شوی وی از دریغ و تیمار دور از رخ آن عروس بیمار  
*Pain and regret made him ill / Deprived of his bride’s face*
- 65 For a development on this idea, see the luminous article by Addas (1997) on the hermeneutic meaning of Ibn ‘Arabī’s poetic language and its cognitive function.
- 66 The theme is related to the famous *hadīth* by the prophet Muhammad: “I [God] was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known; so I created the creatures.”
- 67 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 282, 4-6.

- 68 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 350, 49; 54; 56.
- 69 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 316, 110-111.
- 70 The «tongues» being the petals.
- 71 Reference to the quality attributed to the nightingale: he usually is هزار داستان (“with a thousand melodies”).
- 72 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 317, 115-120.
- 73 In Ghazali (1359) 23, *fasl* 24, the same idea is expressed: “*In the beginning, there is shouting and screaming and crying, which means that love has not yet invaded all the territory [of the self]. When things reach perfection, and [love] invades all the territory, telling falls into eternal being/silence? and crying is transmuted into contemplation and not being/non-being? because pollution is transmuted into purity.*”
- 74 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 317-327, 122-166.
- 75 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 319, 150.
- 76 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 319, 153.
- 77 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 319, 159.
- 78 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 320, 167-169.
- 79 See Chebel (2004) 125: «...la salive est le corollaire du souffle spirituel du maître à son disciple (...) moyen mystique de transmettre son pouvoir spirituel (crachement dans la bouche du disciple)».
- 80 The platonic image is reused by Majnūn when he says: *We are one soul separated in two* (Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 319, 152).
- 81 Ghazali (1359) 4, *fasl* 2.



### 3 Descriptions and Images – Remarks on Gog and Magog in Nizāmī’s *Iskandar Nāma*, Firdawsī’s *Shāh Nāma* and Amīr Khusraw’s *A’īna-yi Iskandarī*

*Gabrielle van den Berg*

Gog and Magog – *Yā’jūj* and *Ma’jūj* in Arabic – are the names of two wild tribes of mythical dimensions, living on the outskirts of the world and representing an eternal threat for civilisation. The nightmarish image of Gog and Magog breaking loose of their bonds and scattering all over the earth out of their remote homeland is often connected with the Apocalypse. They feature in both Biblical and Qur’anic<sup>1</sup> traditions and subsequently seem to have found some degree of ill-fame in many traditions. In British legends, for example, Gog and Magog are two giants who functioned after their capture as the traditional guardians of the City of London; near Cambridge there is the Gogmagog Hill, named after a giant who fell in love with the nymph Granta, who gave her name to the river.<sup>2</sup>

In Persian literature, Gog and Magog are invariably connected with Iskandar, the historical Alexander the Great, who conquered the Persian empire by defeating the last Achaemenid king Darius in 331 B.C. This connection corresponds to their eschatological role in Islam. It is told in the *Qur’an* that the prophet Dhu’l-Qarnayn, the ‘Two-Horned One’, secured the tribes of Gog and Magog behind a wall, where they will remain until the end of time.<sup>3</sup> The prophet Dhu’l-Qarnayn is usually identified with Alexander the Great. Iskandar, in the Persian tradition, is a hero, a sage and one of the ancient Persian kings. The historical Alexander has faded and his role as a conqueror and an enemy of the Achaemenid Empire is in many cases scarcely dwelt upon. The image of Iskandar in Persian literature seems to be derived largely from the Greek Pseudo-Callisthenes’ history of Alexander. Only a limited amount of Pahlavi sources depict Alexander the Great as an evil invader, in contrast to his rather positive image in the Persian literature of the Islamic era.

Firdawsī in the *Shāh Nāma* gives the first extensive treatment of Iskandar in Persian literature, depicting Iskandar as the half-brother of Dārā, or Darius, and accordingly as the legitimate successor to the Persian throne.<sup>4</sup> Numerous stories in both Persian poetry and prose concerning Iskandar have followed up on this *Shāh Nāma* version. These stories,

brought together in the form of a book, are known under the generic title *Iskandar Nāma* or *Alexander Romance*. The Persian *Iskandar Nāma* has a long history and an intriguing background, described in a variety of reference works.<sup>5</sup> One of the most famous *Iskandar Nāma*'s is the one composed by Nizāmī around the year 1202, consisting of two parts, or two books, the *Sharaf Nāma* and the *Iqbāl Nāma*.<sup>6</sup> The former concentrates on Iskandar as a hero and conqueror of the world, while the latter is devoted to Iskandar the philosopher and the prophet, identifiable with Dhu'l-Qarnayn. This prophetic side of Iskandar is not dealt upon at all in Firdawsī's epic. After Nizāmī, the Indo-Persian poet Amīr Khusraw composed another courtly *Iskandar Nāma* in the year 1299-1300, entitled *A'īna-yi Iskandarī*.<sup>7</sup> He follows Nizāmī and Firdawsī in his choice of the *mutaqārib* metre, as does the poet Jāmī, who composed another courtly *Iskandar Nāma*, the *Khirad Nāma-yi Iskandarī* in 1484-1485.<sup>8</sup>

The story of Gog and Magog as part of the *Iskandar* cycle is present in both Firdawsī's and Nizāmī's versions. Amīr Khusraw also includes a lengthy passage on Gog and Magog. Jāmī however does not. I propose to compare in this paper the different versions of the story of Gog and Magog in the courtly *Iskandar Nāmas*, focusing on Nizāmī and Firdawsī, with some brief remarks on Amīr Khusraw.

### ■ The Story of Gog and Magog in Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma*

In the *Shāh Nāma*, Iskandar and the sage Khizr are together in the Land of Gloom, in search of the Water of Life. Iskandar and Khizr are separated as Iskandar loses his way and wanders alone through the gloomy lands. He meets talking birds who guide him towards the angel Isrāfīl, whose trumpet will sound on the Day of Judgment. Isrāfīl reproaches Iskandar for his greedy ambitions and warns him of the approaching end of his life. Iskandar replies that he finds fulfilment in his adventurous and ambitious life. After this meeting, Iskandar leaves the Land of Gloom, is reunited with his army and sets off for the West. This is where the story of Gog and Magog intervenes in the *Shāh Nāma*. In many manuscripts this story bears a title, usually variations on "The Building of the Wall against Gog and Magog by Iskandar". This story divides in two major themes: the outer appearance of Gog and Magog and Iskandar's building of the wall against them.

Iskandar is first welcomed in a town by a group of complaining people, suffering utter vexation from their wild neighbours Gog and Magog:

دل ما پر از رنج و دردست و خون  
ز یاجوج و ماجوج مان خواب نیست  
غم و رنج باشد همه بهر ما

ز چیزی که ما را پی و تاب نیست  
چن آیند بهری سوی شهر ما



*...Our hearts are full of pain, grief and blood,  
From something we cannot endure/ It is because of Gog and  
Magog that we have no sleep.  
When they come to our town to gather booty, / Nothing but pain  
and grief is our share.<sup>9</sup>*

Firdawsī continues with a description of the physical appearance of Gog and Magog. They are treated as a collection of creatures not worthy to be called “people”. Firdawsī composed the following verses on their appearance:

زبانها سیه دیده‌اشان چو خون	همه روی هاشان چو روی هیون
که یارد شدن نزد ایشان فراز	سیه روی و دندانها چون گراز
بر و سینه و گوش‌هاشان چو پیل	همه تن پر از موی و موی همچو نیل
دگر بر تن خویش چادر کنند	بخسبند یکی گوش بستر کنند
کم و بیش ایشان که داند شمار	ز هر ماده ای بچه زاید هزار
تگ آرند برسان گوران شوند	بگرد آمدن چون ستوران شوند

(Iskandar, b. 1432-37)

*Their faces are like the faces of camels/ Their tongues are black  
and their eyes like blood;  
They have black faces and tusks like boars/ Who would dare to ap-  
proach them?  
Their bodies are hairy and the hairs are like indigo/ Their breast  
and ears are like those of an elephant.  
If they go to sleep, one of the ears serves as a bed/ While the other  
one is folded over their bodies.  
Each female creature gives birth to a 1000 children / Who is able  
to count them?  
If they come together, they are like cattle / They go running and be-  
come onagers.*

Following on this description of Gog and Magog’s impressive physique, Firdawsī dwells upon their eating habits. As is related in other sources, their food is *تانین* *tanīn*, a dragon that falls from the sky in spring. The vexed citizens of the town ask for help, and accordingly Iskandar starts to build the wall:

بیاورد از آن فیلسوفان گروه	سکندر بیامد نگه کرد کوه
مس و روی و پتک گران آورد	بفرمود کاهنگران آورد
بیارید چندان که باید به کار	گج و سنگ و هیزم فزون از شمار
چو شد ساخته کار اندیشه راست	بی اندازه بردند چیزی که خواست
هر آنکس که استاد بود اندر آن	ز دیوارگر هم زاهنگران
بدان کار بایسته یاور شدند	ز گیتی به پیش سکندر شدند

دو دیوار کرد از دو پهلوی کوه  
 چو صد شاه رش کرده پهنای اوی  
 پراکنده مس در میان اندکی  
 چنین باشد افسون داناکیان  
 چو از خاک تا تیغ گشت آزده  
 همی بر سر گوهران ریختند  
 بفرمود تا آتش اندر زدند  
 بفرمان پیروزگر شهریار  
 ستاره شد از تف آتش ستوه  
 دم آتش و رنج آهنگران  
 وزان آتش تیز بگذاختند  
 زمین گشت جای نشیم و نشست  
 چو نزدیک صد باز پهنای اوی  
 جهانی برست از بد داوری  
 که بی تو مبادا زمان و زمین

(Iskandar, b. 1455-74)

ز هر کشوری دانشی شد گروه  
 ز بن تا سر تیغ بالای اوی  
 ازو یک رش انگشت و آهن یکی  
 همی ریخت گوگردش اندر میان  
 همی ریخت هر گوهری یک رده  
 بسی نفت و روغن بر آمیختند  
 به خروار انگشت بر سر زدند  
 دم آورد آهنگران صد هزار  
 خروش دمنده بر آمد ز کوه  
 چنین روزگاری بر آمد بر آن  
 گهرها یک اندر دگر تاختند  
 زیابوچ و ماجوج گیتی برست  
 به رش پانصد بود بالای اوی  
 از آن نامور سد اسکندری  
 بر او مهتران خواندند آفرین

*Sikandar came and observed the mountain/ With him brought a  
 group of wise men.  
 He gave orders to bring blacksmiths/ To bring copper and bronze  
 and heavy mortars,  
 Innumerable quantities of plaster and stone and firewood, / To  
 bring as much as was necessary.  
 Whatever he wanted, they brought it in endless quantities / When  
 everything was prepared and the plans made up.  
 The masons and the master blacksmiths/ Everyone who was a mas-  
 ter in this,  
 They came from all over the world to Iskandar / To help him with  
 this necessary work.  
 From each country the master craftsmen gathered; / Two walls were  
 made on each side of the mountain.  
 From the valley up to the crest of the mountain/ They built a wall of  
 a hundred shāhrash<sup>10</sup> wide,  
 A rash of charcoal and a rash of iron/ Copper was scattered in be-  
 tween;  
 Over this substance they poured sulphur / As prescribed by the ma-  
 gic and wisdom of the great kings.  
 Each substance formed one layer / When it was filled from bottom  
 to top,  
 They mixed a great quantity of naphtha and oil / And they poured it  
 over the substances.  
 Upon this they threw donkey loads full of charcoal /Iskandar gave  
 orders to set this on fire:*

*The blacksmiths started to give a hundred thousands blows /As ordered by the victorious king.  
 The sound of the bellows rose from the mountains / The stars were frightened by the rising flames.  
 In this manner time went by / The fiercely burning fire and the exertions of the blacksmiths melted the substances.  
 The world was saved from Gog and Magog / The earth became a place to dwell in.  
 The wall was five hundred rash high and almost a hundred wide /  
 The famous wall of Iskandar freed the world from evil and war:  
 The noblemen praised Iskandar with the words / May time and earth not be without you.*

Firdawsī's story on Gog and Magog concludes with this detailed description of the building of the wall. All in all, the episode counts 71 verses in Khaleghi Motlagh/Omidshar's edition.

How then does Nizāmī describe the people of Gog and Magog? In how far is he following the descriptions found in Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma* and in the numerous historical sources<sup>11</sup> where Gog and Magog are described?

### ■ The Story of Gog and Magog in Nizāmī's *Iskandar Nāma*

Compared to Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma*, the episodes in Nizāmī's *Iskandar Nāma* are more organised, always opening with an address to a singer, the *mughannīnāma*. In the editions of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*, the Gog and Magog episode has the following title: "رسیدن اسکندر به حد شمال و بستن سد یاجوج", "The Arrival of Iskandar at the Northern Frontier and the Closing (Building) of the Wall against Yā'jūj". In Nizāmī's version of the story of Gog and Magog, only Yā'jūj, or Gog, is mentioned while Ma'jūj, Magog, has been left out entirely. Nizāmī reaches the episode at the end of the second part of the *Iqbāl Nāma*. He relates how Iskandar meets a people described as 'muslims without a prophet'. They are pious and good, but in constant agony because of the wild people of Gog. Iskandar builds a wall against these savages. Though within the episode, the actual passage specifically on the subject of the wall is remarkably short, the whole episode counts 176 and 175 verses in the editions of Dastgirdi and Babayev respectively.<sup>12</sup>

The briefness of the story of Gog in Nizāmī is all the more surprising, because as far as the Persian Alexander romances are concerned, it is Nizāmī who has fully developed the prophetic and philosophical dimension of Iskandar in the *Iqbāl Nāma*.<sup>13</sup> The prophetic dimension of Iskandar is directly related to the identification of the Qur'anic Dhu'l-Qarnayn with Iskandar. *Qur'an* 18, 93-8 described how Dhu'l-Qarnayn builds a wall or

rampart (سد *sadd*) against Gog and Magog. Apparently Nizāmī saw no reason to dwell on the Dhu'l-Qarnayn connection.

He starts off by describing how Iskandar and his men are wandering to the north, suffering many hardships. They reach a town with pious people who regard Iskandar as a prophet. Iskandar helps them with a variety of matters, and when they see how apt he is, they venture to ask for his help in dealing with Gog and Magog:

<p>به چاره گری برگشادند راز برین زیردستان فرمان پذیر یکی دشت بینی چو دریا فراخ چو ما آدمی زاده و دیو فام</p>	<p>چو دیدند شاهی چنان چاره ساز که شفقت کن ای داور دستگیر پس این گریوه در این سنگلاخ گروهی در آن دشت یاجوج نام</p>
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(IN27,48-52)

*When they saw a king so skilful in providing remedies / They revealed their secret in order to find a cure, saying: /  
Have pity oh helping ruler with us submissive servants.  
Behind this mountain pass in this stony place / You see a plain wide like the sea.  
On that plain lives a group named Yā'jūj / Like us human-born, but looking like demons.*

The expression “human-born” (آدمی زاده), if taken literally, “born from Adam”, agrees with the description given in some Islamic sources of Gog and Magog, that they were children of Adam, but not of Eve, since they were born from Adam’s nocturnal emission of semen mixed with earth.<sup>14</sup>

After this introduction follows a further, brief description of their appearance:

<p>چو گرگان بنگوهر آشفته رنگ ز بینی نشانی نه بر رویشان کسی را نه اندیشه از گرم و سرد به خون ریختن چنگ و دندان زده</p>	<p>چو شیران آهنل الماس چنگ رسیده ز سر تا قدم مویشان بندستی ببالا جهانی بخورد بچنگال و دندان همه چون دده</p>
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*Like lions with a heart of iron and diamond claws / Like evil wolfs looking wretched.  
Their hair reaches from head to toe / There is no sign of a nose on their face.  
A span high, they eat like giants/ None of them bothers about heat or cold.  
With claws and tusks all are like wild animals/ their claws and tusks made to shed blood.<sup>15</sup>*

The description of their appearance ends here, and after having mentioned that Gog and Magog are not ایزدشناس *īzādshenās* “God-knowing”, Nizāmī continues with an account of their eating habits, mentioning like Firdawsī *tanīn*, the dragon falling from the sky in spring, giving Gog and Magog both lust and strength. He further describes how each of them has no less than a thousand children. (This well-known, and apparently rather appealing characteristic is found in every description of Gog and Magog.) Then, Nizāmī reports the fact that they eat the corpses of their dead kinsmen. This is their only virtue: by eating every corpse, they keep their country free of carcasses and pollution. Firdawsī does not report this fact, although it is mentioned in Arabic and Persian historical sources. However, it is not deemed a virtue in those sources, but rather a proof that they cannot be seen as a ملت *millat*, as a civilised people, but rather as animals, for they live in the same way as animals.<sup>16</sup> Nizāmī’s description of the habits of Gog and Magog ends here. Upon hearing the complaint of the virtuous people, Iskandar builds a rampart made of steel:

که تا رستخیزش نباشد شکست	بدانگونه سدی ز پولاد بست
که شد ساخته سد اسکندری	چو طالع نمود آن بلند اخترى
	از آن مرحله سوى شهرى شتافت

(IN27,81-83a)

*Thus he built a wall from steel / That would not break until  
Resurrection Day.  
When that high star had appeared / And the Wall of Iskandar was  
built,  
He hurried from that area to another town...*

All in all, the story of Gog and Magog does not exceed forty lines in Nizāmī’s version. In sharp contrast with the rather lengthy description by Firdawsī, Nizāmī leaves out the process of the building of the wall, on which no more than one verse is spent. On the whole, the information provided by Nizāmī is limited. Remarkably, in the description of their outward appearance, Nizāmī omits one of the most striking features of Gog and Magog: their huge ears. In many sources, Gog and Magog are referred to as “elephant-ears”. As seen in the Firdawsī description, their ears are so big that they use one as a mattress and the other as a blanket. The *Haft Iqlīm*, in line with Tabarī’s *Tafsīr*, even mentions three kinds of Gog and Magogians, one of which is the گلیمگوش *gilīmgūsh*, the ‘carpet-ears’.<sup>17</sup> The miniature painters of many *Shāh Nāma* manuscripts have gratefully used this feature.

Why Nizāmī treated Gog and Magog in such a succinct manner remains enigmatic. Could it be that, living in Ganja, in the midst of the Caucasus, he thought himself too close to the lands which were often identified as

the realm of Gog and Magog? Did he perhaps not like to dwell too extensively on a story so clearly connected to the identification of Iskandar with Dhu'l-Qarnayn, an identification that was not undisputed? Or did he deem the story too well-known? But then, why did he include the story at all? According to Bürgel, the last part of the *Iqbāl Nāma* seems to have been composed in a hurry, and is thus perhaps incomplete. Maybe Nizāmī had intended to complete it later, but forgot or did not find the time.<sup>18</sup>

### The Story of Gog and Magog in Amīr Khusraw's *A'īna-yi Iskandarī*: a Comparative Note

Whatever scruples Nizāmī may have had on the subject of Gog and Magog, his immediate successor Amīr Khusraw did not share. His version of the story is markedly different from Nizāmī's version, and much longer than Firdawsī's report (b. 1623-1888).<sup>19</sup> Amīr Khusraw dwells extensively on the appearance of Gog and Magog as well as on the building of the wall, and his story is very elaborate. The descriptions he presents of the appearance of Gog and Magog and the building of the wall are in some respects reminiscent of Firdawsī's. He starts by describing a people who have taken refuge in caves, because they despair of the 'Wild Yā'jūj' (b.1706). As did Nizāmī, Amīr Khusraw never mentions the Ma'jūj. The whole episode in the *A'īna-yi Iskandarī* takes up at least 180 verses, without counting the introduction where the 'Mountain of Yā'jūj' is already mentioned a few times. The building of the wall in Amīr Khusraw covers more than thirty verses (b. 1831-66). The description of Gog and Magog runs as follows:

<p>که دیوانه گردد سپهر کهن گروه برده در تک ز غولان دشت چو ریگ بیابان و خاشاک کوه به یکدم ز دریا بر آرند گرد نه گل ماند اندر زمین نی گیاه بگوش دراز از خران برده گوی در آن چشم کوتاه و گوش دراز نه زان دامنی کو بود عیب پوش یکی گوش بالا و دیگر بزیر حریر بر و حله تن همان کشان ریش تا زیر زانویشان مژه زرد و رو سرخ و دیده کبود شکم پهن و پا خرد و ناخن دراز ز فرزند و مادر ندارند شرم بخواهرزنی کشته مادر عروس نمیرد یکی تا نزاید هزار</p>	<p>از آن دیوخیوان چه رانم سخن گروهی به هر سو چو دیوان بگشت فزون از شمردن گروهها گروه مثل گر به دریا کنند آب خورد بهر سو که در پیش گیرند راه بکوتاه چشمی سگ جیفه جوی نه شرمی و نی بینشی دلنواز ته پا چو دامن فروشته گوش بهنگام خفتن بخسپند سیر قیاشان همانست و جوشن همان شکن بر شکن چین ابرویشان گلیمی ز موی گشن بر وجود برون آمده نیششان چون گراز برهنه به همدیگر آیند گرم ز بی دانشی همچو خرس و خروس بشهووت شب و روز باهم به کار</p>
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(b. 1726-41)

*What to say about those with temperaments like demons? / The ancient spheres are driven mad by them.  
 A troop like demons went in every direction / Outstripping the ghouls of desert.  
 Countless troops and more/ Like the sand of the deserts and the leaves on the mountain slopes.  
 If they would drink the water of the sea / They would in no time reach the bottom of the sea.  
 Wherever the road takes them / No flower remains, nor plant.  
 Short-sighted like the dog looking for carrion / Long-eared, in length exceeding donkey's ears.  
 They have no shame and provide no pleasant sight / With their small eyes and long ears.  
 Their ears hang upon their feet like a dress / But not the kind of dress which covers the body in a proper way.  
 When they go to sleep / they put one ear on top and the other below.  
 The ears form their coats and their coats of mail / This is the silk and brocade upon their bodies.  
 Their brows are full of wrinkles / Their beards hang upon their knees.  
 They are covered with a carpet of abundant hair / With yellow eyelashes and red faces and blue eyes.  
 Their tusks come out like the tusks of boars / Their belly is wide and their feet are small and their nails are long.  
 Naked they huddle together to get warm / They have no shame in front of mother or child.  
 Out of ignorance, like bear and cock, / The mother would kill the bride for being a sister in law.  
 In lust they act day and night together / No one dies before giving birth to a thousand ones...*

Whereas in Firdawsī and also in Amīr Khusraw, the outward appearance of Gog and Magog and the building of the wall by Iskandar receive an extensive description, this is not the case in Nizāmī's version of the story. He focuses on their eating habits and food, to which he has devoted thirteen verses. In comparison to Firdawsī and Amīr Khusraw, Nizāmī tells the story of Gog and Magog in a very cursory manner.

### ■ Text and Image, Gog and Magog

How do the descriptions of Gog and Magog and the building of the protective wall against them by Iskandar relate to the images of Gog and Magog in illustrated manuscripts?

For Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma*, the visual and the textual fields of enquiry have been brought together through the efforts of the Cambridge and Edinburgh Shahnama Project. The Project's Pictorial Corpus Database<sup>20</sup> has proven very convenient in providing access to visual sources. The Shahnama Project Pictorial Corpus Database so far counts 368 illustrations from 735 manuscripts for the episode of Iskandar. These illustrations have been classified into 48 scenes. In the iconographical tradition of the *Shāh Nāma*, the first appearance of Iskandar is usually at the end of the reign of Dārā, whom he consoles and supports in his hour of death. The actual chapter on Iskandar follows immediately, and some of the adventures of Iskandar during his numerous travels have become favourite subjects for miniature painters.<sup>21</sup> The story of Gog and Magog is one of those adventures, of which 25 illustrations so far have been included in the Shahnama Pictorial Corpus Database.

On the basis of the material collected in the Shahnama Pictorial Corpus Database,<sup>22</sup> Gog and Magog are not always part of the illustration scheme, while one would expect such eminently suitable subjects to be used by the painters. Where they are represented, they have diverse forms in the iconographical tradition of the *Shāh Nāma*, and do not really correspond with the description given by Firdawsī. Sometimes they resemble demons, sometimes, primitive human beings. In Firdawsī, the description of the wall built by Iskandar is an important feature, and the wall is usually part of the painting, if not its central theme. Another recurrent theme is the illustration of the fires, the blacksmiths and the bellows. Close to Firdawsī's description is for example a painting from a *Shāh Nāma* manuscript kept in Berlin, dating from the seventeenth century, which contains an enchanting image of Gog and Magog.<sup>23</sup> On this almost full-page illustration, Gog and Magog have a boar's head, as described by Firdawsī. Their skin is not only black, as Firdawsī stated, but on this painting they figure in different colours. Their ears are incredibly large, almost like insects' wings. They look more menacing than many other Gog and Magog found in other illustrated *Shāh Nāma* manuscripts.

The illustrations to Amīr Khusraw's *Khamsa* have been analysed recently by Brend in *Perspectives on Persian Painting – Illustrations to Amir Khusraw's Khamsah*.<sup>24</sup> Brend divides the illustrations to Amīr Khusraw's story of Gog and Magog in three subjects:<sup>25</sup> Iskandar attacks the Yā'jūj (seven paintings), Iskandar studies the Yā'jūj prisoners (one painting) and Iskandar builds a wall against the Yā'jūj (four paintings).<sup>26</sup> She includes two reproductions of Gog and Magog illustrations. Brend discusses the relation between the depiction of Gog and Magog and their description by Amīr Khusraw for two manuscripts of the Topkapı Saray Library in particular, namely H801, a *Khamsa* manuscript dating from 902/1497 and H 798, a *Khamsa* manuscript dated 906/1500. In connection to



the Turkman-style illustrated manuscript H801 Brend draws attention to the faithful rendering of the Yā'jūj figures:

*The latter [i.e. the Yā'jūj] suggest a careful reading of the text, being flap-eared, hairy, tusked and clawed, and having a vigorous muscularity which may connote their lechery, while demonstrating the painter's understanding of anatomy.<sup>27</sup>*

The depiction of Gog and Magog in H 798 (described in chapter 5 on Ottoman manuscripts under Bayezid II) is, according to Brend, rather problematic. They have long ears, as described in the text by Amīr Khusraw, but otherwise they

*are of varying size, have long heads, fleshy noses, white fangs, and are represented in several tones of slate-grey. Though more demonic than humanoid, they are not very close to the standard type of Persian div (...).<sup>28</sup>*

Brend sees a resemblance with the traditional drawing of a Turk, deriving from Central Asia, and adopted by the Ottomans as the shadow-puppet figure Qaragöz. For two other *Khamsa* manuscripts, Or. 11327 (British Library, copied between 903/1498-090/1504) and Or.fol. 187 (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, 1495), Brend merely mentions the wing-like ears of the Yā'jūj.

It is no easy task to find resources and information on the depiction of Gog and Magog in the *Khamsa* of Nizāmī. Many works have been devoted to *Khamsa* manuscripts and illustrations, not surprisingly, since, together with the *Shāh Nāma* of Firdawsī, it is one of the most frequently illustrated Persian literary works. However valuable, these studies are not the best tools to find information on the depiction of a specific scene and a pictorial database such as has been developed for the *Shāh Nāma* would be very welcome. The only resource of *Khamsa*-illustrations available thus far is a very useful survey of illustrated *Khamsa*-manuscripts by Larissa Dodkhudoeva, in which she has compiled an index of 3360 miniatures to Nizāmī's poems out of 245 manuscripts.<sup>29</sup> Dodkhudoeva has classified the illustrations into 338 different themes or scenes. According to Dodkhudoeva, the number of illustrations of the *Iskandar Nāma* is by no means disappointing. In the conclusion of her book, she remarks:

*It was earlier assumed that the philosophical message of Nizami's poem the IskandarNama was an obstacle to creating a variety of miniatures to it. However, the Index testifies to the opposite. Among the Khamseh poems the IskandarNama is most widely illustrated. More than 100 themes of this two-part poem are registered in the*

*Index, the most popular being stories with a philosophical message about the deeds of the legendary king.*<sup>30</sup>

Dodkhudoeva provides the following list showing the distribution of illustrations in the *Khamsa*-manuscripts she has examined:<sup>31</sup>

- Makhzan al-Asrār – 23 themes
- Khusraw u Shīrīn – 75 themes
- Laylī u Majnūn – 48 themes
- Haft Paykar – 47 themes
- Iskandar Nāma – 127 themes: Sharaf Nāma – 88 themes, Iqbāl Nāma – 39 themes
- Decorative miniature – 18 themes.

According to her list, the most frequently illustrated themes of the *Iskandar Nāma* are the following:

*Sharaf Nāma:*

- Iskandar fighting the Zanjī's (no. 218 – 80 illustrations),
- Iskandar with the dying Dārā (no. 230 – 86 illustrations),
- Queen Nūshāba shows Iskandar his portrait (no. 248 – 45 illustrations),
- Iskandar receives the Khāqān of China (no. 274 – 42 illustrations),
- Battle with the Russians (no. 285 – 42 illustrations)

*Iqbāl Nāma:*

- Iskandar's conversation with seven wise men (no. 313 – 50 illustrations),
- Iskandar and the sirens (no. 327 – 30 illustrations)

Of the Gog and Magog passage, Dodkhudoeva has listed nine illustrations. Eight of these show the actual building of the wall (scene no. 331) and one illustration shows how the people ask for Iskandar's help against Gog and Magog (scene no. 330). This is the list of these nine illustrations and three additional illustrations of Gog and Magog in Nizāmī manuscripts:

1. *Khamsa*, Shiraz, 945/1538. Topkapi Saray, H 765, folio 389v: three of the people harassed by Gog and Magog address themselves to Iskandar.<sup>32</sup>
2. *Iskandar Nāma*, Shiraz, around 1400. British Library, Or. 13529, folio 32.<sup>33</sup> This illustration of Gog and Magog features in a pocket-size manuscript of the *Sharaf Nāma*. Gog and Magog are referred to in the meeting between Iskandar and the Khāqān of Chīn, when Iskandar is cursing the Khāqān for having broken their agreement. The painting accompanying this scene is described as "Iskandar and the people of Gog and Magog", but only small figures are visible, some of whom might

represent Gog and Magog, perhaps the ones to the left, above the diagonal writing on the upper part of the page.

3. Anthology, no title, with the *Khamsa* of Nizāmī and other works, 838-40/1435-36, Chester Beatty Library, Per. 124, folio 294v.<sup>34</sup> Described as ‘Iskandar, on horseback, inspecting the building of the barrier against Gog and Magog. One of his archers is shooting at the demons that are appearing behind the wall.’
4. *Khamsa*, 850/1446-7. Topkapi Saray, H. 786, folio 309v.<sup>35</sup> Iskandar is seated on a horse in a mountainous landscape, where a wall is being constructed: a fire is ablaze. From behind the high mountain pass, the people of Gog and Magog are watching. Only their heads are visible, they have no specific characteristics.
5. *Khamsa*, 854/1450, Shiraz, Metropolitan Museum, New York, 13.228.3, folio 384a, the last of 31 miniatures in this manuscript, described as: ‘Alexander’s return from the East to the North and his shutting out Gog and Magog by a wall’.<sup>36</sup>
6. *Khamsa*, Shiraz, ca. 1450, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Suppl. Pers. 1112, folio 320. It is described as: ‘Construction du mur de Gog et Magog. Iskender à cheval regarde les travaux; singes dans les rochers; arbres.’<sup>37</sup>
7. *Khamsa*, Shiraz, around 1505, India Office Library, London, Ms. 387, folio 442b<sup>38</sup>, described as: ‘Iskandar and his followers survey the peoples of Gog and Magog from the battlements of the iron wall he has built. The treatment is unusual in that the artist has placed himself on the ‘wrong’ side of the wall and we see Iskandar from the point of view of the tribesmen of Gog and Magog. A few of the latter hide among a mass of rock on the left, represented as naked savages. Water, with fish, at the base of the wall.’
8. *Khamsa*, 936/1529, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Per. 196, folio 313v.<sup>39</sup> ‘Sikandar with his army in a rocky district. Sikandar, after capturing a fortress, sets up a barrier in a mountain pass to protect the people from invasion. An unusual miniature, both for its subject and its treatment. The small figures of young men and girls, nude above the waist, in the background, presumably represent the people of the country, whom Sikandar is aiding.’(p. 60) This painting holds an odd position in the manuscript, coming immediately after the death of Dārā.<sup>40</sup>
9. *Khamsa*, 968/1561, Shiraz, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Suppl. Pers. 1955, double-page painting<sup>41</sup>. On the left half of this double-page, painting craftsmen are busy building the wall with square bricks. Iskandar, on his horse, under a parasol, watches them. One verse (‘When that high star had appeared, and the Wall of Iskandar was built’, verse 80 ed. Babayev) is singled out to occupy a space in the painting itself, covering a few figures and the feet of Iskandar’s horse. Gog and Magog feature on the left of the painting, besides the text

block and behind the unfinished wall. They are depicted as seven small figures, some darker than others, sitting or standing in a mountainous landscape with a tree nearby. They do not seem to heed the building of the wall. The figures themselves have no specific characteristics, except for their nakedness.

- 10 *Khamsa*, 848-849/1444-1445, Shiraz / Timurid style, John Rylands Library, Manchester, Ryl Pers 36 (ex Bland), fol. 305b.<sup>42</sup> Three Gog and Magog figures can be seen on the right side of the painting, one of whom seems to be grabbing the ruler by the hands. They have long ears, reaching to their waist, and boars' tusks. The painting is entitled 'Iskandar and the people of Gog and Magog', and described as follows: 'He is interviewing them by a building behind a line of rocks. In the foreground is the sea, with three curious monsters. They are observed by a party of Iskandar's mounted followers, also behind the rocks.'<sup>43</sup>
- 11 *Khamsa*, 1439, University Library Uppsala, O. Vet. 82, fol. 388r.<sup>44</sup> Three men are kneeling down in front of Iskandar on his horse. On the right, a large tree is depicted, on the left, a high brick wall and in the middle, three high mountains. Four figures peer above the wall, watching the scene below. They are presumably Gog and Magog, but they have no specific characteristics to mark them as such. Unlike Iskandar and the three men kneeling, they have no beards or turbans. The description of Ādahl is as follows: 'On his travels to the north Iskandar reaches the country of the Ya'juj who are being constantly harassed by the savage Ma'juj. Iskandar advises the people of Ya'juj to build a high wall to protect themselves. On horseback on the right in the picture Iskandar is bidding farewell to the leader Ya'juj, who are kneeling before him. Behind this central group there are three steep hilltops and, on the left, a brick wall. Above the pinnacles of the wall four savage-looking men can be seen. There is a blue sky with white bars of clouds. The picture extends into the right-hand margin where a tall tree is growing on the bank of a little stream.' Ādahl's description is misleading as far as Nizāmī's text is concerned: she calls the people asking for help Yā'jūj, who are being harassed by the savage Ma'jūj, whilst Gog and Magog in Nizāmī only figure as Yā'jūj – no mention is made of Ma'jūj, and certainly the term Yā'jūj is not used for the victimised people.
- 12 *Khamsa*, Shiraz, around 1560, Topkapi Saray, A. 3559/K. 432, fol. 446v,<sup>45</sup> 'La Construction d'un mur contre Gog et Magog. Large bordure enluminée sur trois côtés. L'image a été ajoutée plus tard au manuscrit, et n'occupe pas la place qu'elle devrait prendre dans le texte.' The painting appears after the death of Iskandar.

On the basis of these paintings, nothing definitive can be said about the appearance of Gog and Magog in Nizāmī. In fact, they very often look

human-like, thus according with Nizāmī's description. One exception is the painting from the *Khamsa* in the John Rylands Library (Ryl Pers 36, listed under no. 10), where Gog and Magog have the proverbial elephant-ears and boars' tusks. The wall is quite central in most of the paintings. Although the brevity of the story in Nizāmī would perhaps suggest that there would not be enough material for the illustrators to draw on, this is not supported by evidence from illustrated manuscripts, such as available. There appear to be no marked differences with the wall found in *Shāh Nāma* illustrations, even though there the figures of Gog and Magog sport more often (but by no means always!) the typical characteristics attributed to them by Firdawsī. This is also true for illustrations in Amīr Khusraw manuscripts. The question remains whether it is a coincidence that in the available illustrations to Nizāmī's Gog and Magog story, they usually lack the long ears and savage tusks, or is it proof that the illustrator conformed to Nizāmī's terse text? The various depictions of Gog and Magog in *Shāh Nāma* manuscripts through the centuries indicate that the painters do not need to rely on the description provided by the poet in case of this well-known story. Gog and Magog and the wall built by Iskandar were familiar subjects, known from the *Qur'an* and the *hadīth*, also described and painted in illustrated versions of works as the *Qisas al-Anbiya'* and the *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*. Also in popular Alexander romances, such as the prose *Iskandar Nāma* dating between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, Iskandar is fighting Gog and Magog, sometimes designated as "the Elephant-ears."<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the central theme in the Gog and Magog iconographical tradition is the wall in combination with Iskandar on horseback, rather than Gog and Magog themselves. This is not at all surprising: after all, the wall forms the physical and symbolical boundary between an organised, Muslim civilisation and what lies beyond. What is beyond should be kept out of view until the End of Times. The wall is the key symbol of the story and spotting the wall means immediate recognition of the scene. The story of Iskandar, Gog and Magog is easily and immediately identified through this specific feature, while monstrous figures, such as Gog and Magog, although undoubtedly suitable objects for painting, may be met with in a wide range of other stories. That Nizāmī is not focusing on this wall is perhaps of small consequence, bearing in mind Clinton's remark in his article 'Firdawsī and the Illustration of the ShāhNāma': "Poet and painter use very different means to identify the leading characters of the narrative."<sup>47</sup> Even though Nizāmī only mentions it, this wall remains the identifying mark of the visual representation of the story of Gog and Magog.

## Notes

- 1 Al-Qur'an (2001) 18:90-99 and 21:96.
- 2 Cobham Brewer (1988). My thanks to S. and B. Martin for this reference.
- 3 van Donzel (2002).
- 4 Firdawsi-Khaleghi-Motlagh (1384), 'Iskandar', 96-102, verses 1421-92.
- 5 Hanaway (1998).
- 6 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372) vol. 2, 912-1536; Nizami-Babayev (1947). It is not certain that Nizāmī used the names *Iqbāl Nāma* vs. *Sharaf Nāma*, see de Blois (1998).
- 7 Amir Khusraw-Mirsaidov (1977).
- 8 Jami-Gilani (1366), *Khīrad Nāma-yi Iskandarī*, 911-1012.
- 9 All *Shāh Nāma* citations are taken from the edition Firdawsi-Khaleghi-Motlagh (1384).
- 10 Steingass (1892): a *shahrash* (p. 727) or a *rash* (p. 577) is equivalent to a fathom, i.e. 1,82 metres.
- 11 The historical sources have been discussed by van Donzel and Ott: van Donzel (2002) and by Hanaway (1998).
- 12 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372) IN27,1-176; Nizami-Babayev (1947) 175-186.
- 13 Bürgel (1995).
- 14 van Donzel (2002) p. 231b.
- 15 Nizami-Babayev (1947) b. 51-54. The somewhat enigmatic verse 53 (*bedasti...*) has been left out in Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372) IN27,52-53, with several minor differences.
- 16 See for example Amin Razi (1961) 516; on other Persian sources, notably Muhammad ibn Mahmud Hamadani's *Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, see Seyed-Gohrab (2007).
- 17 van Donzel (2002) 231b.
- 18 Bürgel, personal communication.
- 19 All citations are taken from Amir-Khusraw-Mirsaidov (1977).
- 20 Available online under <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk>.
- 21 For a discussion on the number of Iskandar illustrations in the *Shāh Nāma* manuscript tradition, Hillenbrand (1996), specifically on Gog and Magog illustrations: 209.
- 22 See <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/browseArchive.php?Pt=sc&Ch=-1432396385&SS=-1181211365&N=16&P=1248&>.
- 23 Ms. Or.fol.172, folio 456v; see Shahnama Pictorial Corpus under <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/browseArchive.php?Pt=il&IS=689981116&>.
- 24 Brend (2003).
- 25 Indicated as AI 13, AI 14 and AI 15.
- 26 Brend (2003) 273.
- 27 Brend (2003) 121.
- 28 Brend (2003) 155.
- 29 Dodkhudoeva (1985).
- 30 Dodkhudoeva (1985) 306.
- 31 Dodkhudoeva (1985) 306-7.
- 32 Reproduced in Stchoukine (1977) LXVIIa, description on 122-3. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 285, 330-1.
- 33 Described in Titley (1977) 136; reproduced on 101 (fig. 21, fol. 71) in Robinson (1957). Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-2.
- 34 Described in Arberry (1959) 51. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985), 286, 331-2.
- 35 Described in Stchoukine (1977) 51. Reproduced in Stchoukine (1967), 401-8. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-3.
- 36 Manuscript described in Williams Jackson (1965) 49-53; description of miniature on 53. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-4.
- 37 Blochet (1899), 46. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-5.

- 38 Reproduced in Robinson (1976) 41, description, 40. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-6.
- 39 Described in Arberry (1959), 59-60. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-7.
- 40 According to Bürgel, this miniature does not depict the Gog and Magog story, but the conquest of the robber's castle at Darband from the *Sharaf Nāma* (ed. Dastgirdi, 214 f.) (personal communication).
- 41 Reproduced in Vejrnar (1974) illustrations 167-168. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-8.
- 42 Described in Robinson (1980) 70-88. Reproduction on p. 87 (no. 423). Dodkhudoeva (1985) has not listed this painting.
- 43 Robinson (1980) 88.
- 44 Described by Ådahl (1981) 37. Dodkhudoeva (1985) has not listed this painting.
- 45 Described by Stchoukine (1977) 130-1, no. 73. Dodkhudoeva (1985) has not listed this painting.
- 46 *Iskandar Nāma*-Afshar (1964) 507; 535; *Iskandar Nāma*-Southgate (1978) 116; 150-3.
- 47 Clinton (2001) 69.





## 4 Nizāmī's Cosmographic Vision and Alexander in Search of the Fountain of Life

Mario Casari

Nizāmī's *Iskandar Nāma* (ca. 1194) is probably a highlight of the literary tradition of the *Alexander Romance*. This tradition had produced a great number of works in many languages throughout the Eurasian continent, before Nizāmī wrote his *mathnavī*. Across the geographical, temporal and cultural boundaries, the *Alexander Romance* appears to be a narrative cycle with a prominent cosmographic character: the explorations and conquests of the first historical *kosmokrátor* formed an ideal track for continuously renewed and updated geographic and ethnographic information about the world, to be presented to sovereigns aspiring to become the 'second Alexander'. Nizāmī states this at the end of the *Iqbāl Nāma*, the second part of his *Iskandar Nāma*:

جز این نامه نغز را بار نیست رصد بندی کوه و دریا کند گهی بر حبش ترکناز آورد جهان ملک آفایش آورده پیش	در آن بزم کاشوب را کار نیست بدان تا جهان را تماشا کند گهی تاختن در طراز آورد نشسته جهانجوی برجای خویش
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(IN41, 21-24)

*In that pleasant symposium this book has its place, not elsewhere:  
For gazing through it at the world, and drawing the maps of mountains and seas,  
And now riding up to Tirāz, now raiding Ethiopia's land,  
Thus the world offered to the one who longs for world dominion,  
sitting still, the rule of its own horizons.*

The authority of such a work was based primarily on familiarity with the former tradition. Nizāmī was a great erudite, as he proudly declares at the beginning of the *Sharaf Nāma*, the first volume of his *Alexandroid*:

ندیدم نگاریده در یک نور به هر نسختی در پرکنده بود برو بستم از نظم پیرایه ها یهودی و نصرانی و پهلوی ز هر پوست پرداختم مغز او	اثرهای آن شاه آفاق گرد سخنها که چون گنج آگنده بود ز هر نسخه برداشتم مایه ها زیادت ز تاریخهای نوی گزیدم ز هر نامه ای نغز او
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(SN10,17-21)

*Not in one roll alone I saw the exploits of this king explorer:  
The words had flowered like a treasure, and were scattered in every  
manuscript.  
And from ev'ry manuscript I gathered the jewels, adding to them  
the ornament of poetry.  
A wealth of Koranic, Hebrew, Christian and Pahlavi stories:  
From each book I picked out its own grace, grasping the pith from  
ev'ry skin.*

More particularly, Nizāmī did a lot of research on a very famous episode of the alexandrine saga: the expedition into the Land of Darkness in search of the Fountain of Life. This narrative closes the *Sharaf Nāma* and from a wide-ranging inquiry into this episode,<sup>1</sup> Nizāmī's version appears to be the *textus amplior* of this literary tradition with over 250 verses recounting Alexander's learning about the Fountain of Life and the dark land where it lies and his decision to search for it. They detail the features of that side of the world, the guides and the stratagems used to explore it, the meetings in the darkness, the detection and loss of the Fountain and finally Alexander's return home and the moral considerations on the episode. The episode's thematic and symbolic complexity repeatedly forces Nizāmī to relate the same feature according to several different literary traditions, despite his usual clarity.<sup>2</sup> With regard to the cosmographic essence of the episode, which is what I would like to focus on here, Nizāmī's story is one of those containing the most detailed indications.

Having freed Queen Nūshāba from the Rūs, Alexander is resting in his camp in the lands north of the Caucasus. During a symposium, an old man informs him of the existence of the Fountain of Life, behind "a veil whose name is Darkness", "under the North Pole". And he adds that "From us to that land, the way is short".

The description of the entrance into the Darkness (ظلمات *zulmāt*) contains important naturalistic details. In the first verses, Nizāmī describes Alexander's astonishment as, going northwards, he observes the rapid changes in the sun's course. At the Polar Arctic Circle, the height of the sun over the horizon drops day by day in the passage from summer to winter, whilst it rises during the period from the winter solstice to the summer solstice. Then the poet mentions a specific feature of the sun's transit at the Polar Arctic Circle: at the winter solstice, the sun remains twenty-four hours under the horizon, except an instant at noon, when it rises and immediately (به یک لحظه زود) *bi yak lahza-i zūd*<sup>3</sup> sets to the south. Crossing this land in winter-time, for many hours a day the sun is visible only as "a reflection in the water" (خیالی در آب) *khiyālī dar āb*.<sup>4</sup> But Alexander's soldiers continue to advance holding their flags, marching beyond the circle, into a land where the darkness grows, until even the pale "glimmer vanishes". No light appears anymore from the end of the way.

These detailed indications are confirmed in many key passages of Arabic and Persian texts dealing with the Alexandrine legend. As a main example, the Arabic historian Tabarī (tenth century) reports that Alexander, after the conquest of India, China and Tibet,

*penetrated into the Darkness, located beside the North Pole and the southern sun (الشمس الجنوبيه al-shams al-junūbiyya), together with four hundred men, looking for the Fountain of Eternity, and he spent eighteen days there.*<sup>5</sup>

The northern direction of the expedition into the Darkness has been alluded to in several older texts of the alexandrine tradition. In the famous Syriac *Homely*, attributed to Jacob of Sarugh, but recognized as a text of the first half of the seventh century, Alexander leads his army northwards, until he reaches the Land of Darkness.<sup>6</sup> In a less explicit form, the *Pseudo-Callisthenes*, ancestor of the *Alexander Romance*, gives the indication which is at the origin of the literary tradition of the episode. Alexander's expedition is here marked by the direction *katá tén 'ámaxan tou pólou* ("along the Polar constellation", PC, II 32). This is repeated as they come out of the Darkness (*katá tén 'ámaxan tón astéron*, PC, II 40). That land at "the end of the world" is in a region "where the sun never shines" (PC, II, 39).<sup>7</sup>

A comparative analysis enables us to pinpoint the precise geographical location of the Land of Darkness in the ancient and medieval cosmographic culture. This corrects the generally accepted view of an unknown land, sometimes subterranean and infernal. A substantial contribution, as we have seen, has been made by Nizāmī in his masterful *mathnavī*.

The classical naturalistic tradition contains many notions concerning the northern regions. Pliny says that it is a *pars mundi damnata a rerum natura et densa mersa caligine*.<sup>8</sup> The latin term *caligo* has a double meaning of 'darkness' and 'fog', which expresses the double character of darkness in the arctic region. Beside the winter darkness, due to the relation between the Earth and the Sun, there was a summer darkness, of which we can find a precise awareness in the Arabic-Persian cosmographic alexandrine tradition. In a particular Persian collection of *Qisas al-anbya*, of which a manuscript is conserved in the British Library, the chapter devoted to Dhu'l-Qarnayn, the Double-Horned Alexander of the Islamic tradition, contains some original features. Informed of the existence of the Fountain of Life, Alexander moves towards the Darkness: "This was a region of rising vapours. It was not a nightly darkness, but like that of vapour coming out from a well."<sup>9</sup> That is exactly the appearance of the sub-arctic and arctic regions, especially during the summer, and is caused by the condensation of clouds or the partial melting of ice. Light becomes veiled, orientation is difficult, and great are the risks for travellers and sailors.

A lot of fragmentary information on the Northern lands, possibly due to ancient explorers, is scattered through various texts, composing this mysterious and hostile image of the Land of Darkness. In the Eurasian Continent, this zone covers a wide area, going from Iceland to the Scandinavian peninsula, from the German to the northern Russian regions, all the way to the edge of Siberia. This area was partly known to medieval Muslim geographers, as is witnessed by the section dedicated to the Seventh Climate in the *Geography* of al-Idrīsī, working at the Sicilian court of the Norman king Ruggero II.<sup>10</sup>

In Nizāmī's account, the camp from which Alexander moves towards the Darkness is in the land of Bulgar, which he reached after the land of the Rūs. In the Arabic-Persian tradition, the name Bulgar refers to the region between the rivers Volga and Kama and south to their confluence, around the 55° parallel. According to a widespread legend, mentioned by Nizāmī himself, the local chiefs are Alexander's descendants. This geographical indication does not seem to correspond to any classical or European medieval text on Alexander. The obvious reason being that neither the historical Alexander, nor his main successors, the Roman and the Byzantine Emperors, ever sent their legions so far North on that side of the world, which was too distant from their centre of action. In fact, these regions were explored by early califal envoys, such as the famous Ibn Fadlān who reached the land of Bulgar in 921 and wrote a vast report on it.<sup>11</sup>

This route to the Darkness is found in other Arabic and Persian alexandrine narratives, such as Amīr Khusraw's *A'īna-yi Iskandarī*, or in the singular *Million* of Marco Polo, whose connection to Muslim sources is unanimously recognised today. Speaking of the region of the northern Tartars, Polo says that it is "quite impassable for horses, for it abounds greatly in lakes and springs, and hence there is so much ice as well as mud and mire, that horses cannot travel over it." This land can be crossed with sledges drawn by big dogs. "Still further north, Polo continues, [...] there is a region which bears the name of Darkness, because neither sun, nor moon nor stars appear, but it is always as dark as with us in the twilight. The people have no king of their own, nor are they subject to any foreigner, and live like beasts."<sup>12</sup>

Attracted by this Uralian route to the Darkness, of which he had fresh accounts, Nizāmī ignores certain details presented by Firdawsī, whom he claims as his main source. Actually, Firdawsī's details seem to point to a different geographical approach to the dark, northern land. In the *Shāh Nāma*, Alexander explores the North and reaches a large settlement inhabited by "powerful men [...], tawny-haired and with pale faces, all ready and equipped for war and battle."<sup>13</sup> These features are present in other Muslim texts. Al-Mas'ūdī reports that the peoples of the northern quadrant, such as the Slavs and the Franks, live in regions covered by snow and ice. They

“have powerful bodies, rude behaviour, scarce understanding, and rough language.”<sup>14</sup>

The mention of the names of the Slavs and the Franks suggests that this information was not originally Muslim, but derived from European sources. We find many antecedents in classical ancient works, such as the Hippocratic treatise on *Airs, Waters and Places* (ca. 430 BC), the Vitruvian treatise *On Architecture* (first century BC: vi,1) and Ptolemy's geographical work (second century AD).<sup>15</sup> It is remarkable that an almost perfect correspondence to Firdawsī's description is found in Tacitus's *Germany*. For the Roman historian, German people were *Truces et caerulei oculi, rutilae comae, magna corpora et tantum ad impetum valida*.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, two different possible geographical locations emerge from the Arabic-Persian tradition of the *Alexander Romance* for the gateway region to the Darkness. The Uralian route is documented in relatively recent sources, mainly by Muslim travellers; it illustrates how the narratives were constantly updated with new cosmographic information. The German route derives from more ancient sources, through a long literary tradition which we can only partially reconstruct; it shows the secular endurance of textual transmission.

Thanks to the wide range of his erudite readings, Nizāmī was aware that the Land of Darkness could also be reached by sea: “in one direction, the darkness concealed the edge; the deep sea closed the way in the other”.<sup>16a</sup> According to the Arabic cosmographer al-Dimashqī: “In the North, the Western Sea bears the name of Sea of Darkness, or Northern Black Sea, because the vapours which rise there, are never dissolved by the sun.”<sup>17</sup> The oceanic journey, up to the Northern edge, was the route chosen by the sailor and scientist Pytheas of Marseille in the fourth century BC. On his return, he wrote an important treatise entitled *On the Ocean*, which partially survives in the numerous fragments quoted in later authors. Pytheas left the Mediterranean, passing through the Pillars of Hercules. Then he sailed along the coast of Iberia and Gaul, circumnavigated Britain, pushed as far as the isle which he named Thule, and finally explored the Northern Sea (and maybe the Baltic), before coming back by the same route.<sup>18</sup> He relates that in Thule, the extreme edge of the world, there is no night during the summer solstice, whilst at the winter solstice there is no daylight.<sup>19</sup> In these Northern lands, “the local barbarians showed him the resting place of the sun, the place where it overnights.”<sup>20</sup> In the *Shāh Nāma*, the tawny-haired people described by Firdawsī, indicate to Alexander the sea-place where the sun sets. This is further evidence of the (of course, indirect) dependence of Firdawsī's account on an ultimately classical literary tradition. These Northern lands are the place in the *Qur'an* where Dhu'l-Qarnayn arrives and “there he found a people” (XVIII, 85-8). It is therefore the place of a wonderful Northern sunset, not Western, as is usually indicated.<sup>21</sup>

According to Pytheas, one day of sailing away from Thule, there is the solid sea (*mare concretum*)<sup>22</sup>: “neither real earth, nor sea, nor air, but a mixture of all these different elements which resembles a sea lung, in which earth, sea and all the elements are suspended: it is something which keeps the elements joined, but it is not possible to pass or sail through it.”<sup>23</sup> This *mare concretum* is probably the ice pack of the arctic regions, which partially thaws in summer, producing a slush of ice, water and fog, very dangerous for the ships.<sup>24</sup> Ptolemy situated Thule at the Northern latitude of 63°. According to the tradition, Pytheas claimed that he had thus reached “the edge of the world.”<sup>25</sup> This classical cosmographic tradition was renowned in the Muslim world, and it is exactly reported by the Persian cosmographer Hamadānī, for example.<sup>26</sup>

According to an authoritative theory, Pytheas could have been Alexander’s envoy, exploring the northern lands, which Alexander planned to conquer.<sup>27</sup> Though this theory is not unanimously accepted, it is known that Alexander was interested in exploring the Ocean surrounding the Earth and, as Arrianus relates, that he entrusted a certain Heraclides with the task of verifying whether the Caspian Sea was a gulf of the Northern Ocean.<sup>28</sup> In the ancient geographical concept, the Tanais (Don) was the separation line between Europe and Asia. Its sources were in the Rhipaeen Mountain range, and it followed the longitude down to Lake Maeotis (Azov Sea). Between the Rhipaeen range and the Ocean there was a strip of land sometimes described as very narrow. This strip ended at the straits where the Caspian Sea flowed into the Ocean.<sup>29</sup>

Although Alexander was never able to reach the arctic land, Pytheas’s information on the Northern regions was used as propaganda by many historians. The North, the edge of the world, had to be included into the range of Alexander’s conquests, in order to complete the myth of the *kosmokrator*. Part of the oriental exploits of Alexander were consciously transferred in the North: the river Iaxartes was sometimes renamed ‘Tanais’, the Paropamisus reached by Alexander was named ‘Caucasus’. Alexander became thus a real successor to Heracles and the Argonauts.<sup>30</sup> Strabo already denounced this operation.<sup>31</sup> In his *Geography*, Ptolemy<sup>32</sup> states that Alexander, during his expedition to the Tanais, built the altars which marked the edge of his travels: the latitude is indicated as 63°57’, corresponding to that of Pytheas’s Thule.<sup>33</sup>

This is likely to be the geographical tangle at the origin of the legend of the expedition into the Darkness, which was reworked into a wide range of texts belonging to the tradition of the *Alexander Romance*.

This Pythean and Alexandrine geography remained a constant pattern also for the true heirs of Alexander. The roman legions consolidated the knowledge of the Atlantic Ocean, sailing up to the British Islands, and at the same time refined the exploration of the Northern coast of Europe, proceeding along the rivers Rhine and Elbe. Amongst their aims, there was

always to ascertain the possibility of circumnavigation. They hoped to discover the Caspian Straits, a place of such significance that it earned the name of 'Pillars of Hercules.'<sup>34</sup> Concerning an expedition of Drusus Germanicus along the Rhine, during the empire of Augustus, Tacitus observes "We tried to explore the Ocean from that side: and they said that there were the Pillars of Hercules, [...] but the Ocean opposed (*obstitit Oceanus*) the investigation on itself and on Hercules."<sup>35</sup> The possibility of a water route between the Caspian Sea and the Ocean was a matter of evident strategic importance.

The Persian cosmographer Hamadānī gives a very important account: "I read in the *Tārīkh-i Rūm* that Alexander reached the edge of the North and saw an immense sea. He aimed to cross it but his army did not allow him to." Once on the farthest coast, Alexander sent a soldier to gather information. He returned saying that "beyond here there's no way."<sup>36</sup> The Persian expression *bīsh az īn rāh nīst* perfectly matches the famous *Nec plus ultra* on the western Pillars of Hercules<sup>37</sup>: the same message was evidently repeated on these presumed northern Pillars.

These Northern straits, which seem to be the hub of ancient Northern explorations, offer a new hypothesis for solving the geographical enigma constituted by the expression *مجمع البحرين majma' al-bahrayn* (*between the two seas*). This expression is used in the *Qur'an* in a passage which, although jumbling Moses and Alexander, is almost unanimously recognized by the first Muslim commentators and by modern scholars alike, as connected with the Alexandrine legend of the Fountain of Life. At the end of the nineteenth century, several scholars already connected this *majma' al-bahrayn* with a leg of Alexander's journey, especially reported in the seventh-century Syriac *Christian Legend of Alexander*.<sup>38</sup> In my opinion, the commonly proposed identifications as Gibraltar and Suez,<sup>39</sup> are readily corrected by the one proposed here, concerning the presumed Caspian Straits, because this is in perfect accord with the comographic context (Northern, as we have seen), in which the legend of the Fountain originated. In the Syriac *Christian Legend*, Alexander moves from Egypt crossing "the eleven bright seas" (which means the 'internal' seas). At the end of the journey, a narrow strip of land (ten miles) separates him from the surrounding water, described as foetid and dark. Though advised against it, Alexander tries to cross this Ocean, but he fails: the water is not navigable, and many soldiers are killed by its miasmas. In the text, wise men had told Alexander that the Ocean "would not give way";<sup>40</sup> *Obstitit Oceanus*, Tacitus had said about Drusus's aforementioned expedition.<sup>41</sup>

In the already mentioned Syriac *Homely*, connected to the *Christian Legend*, we witness the same scene. After having seen the miasmas, probably the suffocating fogs emanating from the Pythean sea lung, Alexander tries another route to reach the Darkness, where he wants to search for the Fountain of Life.<sup>42</sup>



The cosmographical reconnaissance of the arctic region was a main feature of universal imperial policy. Notwithstanding the continuous contribution of newly updated geographical information, many notions never disappeared and were transmitted as fossilised literary traditions. Ptolemy's *Geography*, the main base of Muslim geographical knowledge, was already aware that the Caspian was a closed sea, but nevertheless the *majma' al-bahrayn* crossed cultural and linguistic barriers, posing a lot of cosmographical questions, which resulted in various philosophical and mystical interpretations.

Nizāmī doesn't allude to this aspect of the expedition, nor does he mention the *majmo' al-bahrayn*. However, as we have seen, his precise and erudite text provides a fundamental help in illuminating the ancient cosmographical context. But in Nizāmī's story, following the tradition on Alexander's journey in the Darkness, the centre of the action is the search for the Fountain of Life, which is tied in the Muslim tradition to the mysterious figure of Khizr (خضر).<sup>43</sup>

With regard to the essence of the Fountain, Nizāmī's wonderful description is also extremely precise:

چو سیمی که پالاید از ناف سنگ	پدید آمد آن چشمه سیم رنگ
وگر بود هم چشمه نور بود	نه چشمه که آن زین سخن دور بود
چنان بود اگر صبح باشد پگاه	ستاره چگونه بود صبحگاه
چنان بود اگر مه به افزون بود	به شب ماه ناکاسته چون بود
چو سیماب بردست مفلوح پیر	ز جنبش نبد یکدم آرامگیر
چه مانندگی سازم از جوهرش	ندانم که از پاکی پیکارش
هم آتش توان خواند یعنی هم آب	نیاید ز هر جوهر آن نور و تاب

(SN60, 23-9)

*That fountain appeared like silver, like a silver stream which strains from the middle of the rock.*

*Not a fountain – which is far from this speech – but if, verily, it were, – it was a fountain of light.*

*How is the star in the morning-time? As the morning star is in the morning, – even so it was.*

*How is the undiminished moon at night? So it was that it was greater than the moon.*

*As to motion, not a moment was it ease-taker, like mercury in the hand of the paralytic old man.*

*On account of the purity of its nature, I know not what comparison I may make of its form.*

*Not from every jewel come that light and luminosity; one can call it fire, but also water.<sup>44</sup>*



After a purifying bath, Khizr:

وزو خورد چندانکه بر کار شد      حیات ابد را سزاوار شد  
(SN60,32)

*Drank of it as much as befitted: and became fit for eternal life.*

This description may be compared to a very interesting gloss transmitted in Arabic and Persian texts, particularly those pertaining the genre of *Qisas al-anbya*. So far, I have not been able to find a correspondence for this gloss in any other text of the alexandrine tradition. In reference to the Fountain of Life, it states that “The water of that Fountain is whiter than milk, colder than ice, sweeter than honey”.<sup>45</sup> Put in parallel with Nizāmī’s colourful description, the interpretation of the gloss becomes more straightforward. The arctic landscape is actually characterized by the presence of the ice-pack. Usually solid during the winter (*mare coagulatum*), in summer the ice-pack partly melts. On its surface numerous small pools of freshwater appear. The melting of smaller and larger glaciers causes springs and fountains to emerge from cracks produced in the rocks. In the regions situated slightly south of the Polar Circle, this phenomenon may endure throughout the year. This trickling water is precious sweet freshwater (*āb-i shīrīn*) cold as melting ice, and of white colour, like milk.<sup>46</sup>

In Nizāmī’s story, Alexander ponders upon that lost Fountain springing from the rock:

چو چشمه ز خورشید شد خوشگوار      چرا زیر سایه شد آن چشمه سار  
بلی چشمه را سایه بهتر ز گرد      کزان هست شوریده زین هست سرد  
(SN60, 64-5)

*Since the fountain became pleasant-tasting through the sun, why went that fountain beneath the shade?*

*Yes, for the fountain the shade is better than the sun, because that is who blends, and this is who cools.*

Thus the Fountain of Life might be yet another fossil of ancient accounts of Northern explorations: for those travelling in the salted sea or through muddy lands, the Fountain of Life represented survival rather than immortality.

The theme of the Fountain of Life has taken numerous symbolic meanings. Nizāmī, who consulted a great number of sources, gives two other versions of the Fountain: one which he defines as Rūmī, the other as Arabic. He may be uncertain about the meaning of this Fountain, but there is no doubt that his whole version of the episode, the wonderful result of a long and articulate course of indirect and partially unconscious literary

transmission, plays a prominent role in the cosmographical inquiry described here.

In any case, the real immortality, which Alexander sought to attain so unsuccessfully in the Darkness, is that of the exploration travels and their accounts. In the third version of the Fountain, the Arabic one, Nizāmī remarks that after drinking the water, Khizr and his companion Ilyās move away from the rest of the army. They devote their immortal life to protecting travellers, one over terrestrial, the other over sea routes.

## Notes

- 1 Casari (2003), Casari (2005) and Casari (2006) detail aspects of my PhD research on this topic.
- 2 SN59 and SN60,1157-1166; Nizami-Sarvatyan (1368) 509-25; Nizami-Bürgel (1991) 369-87.
- 3 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1368) 511.
- 4 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1368) 511.
- 5 Tabari-de Goeje (1881-82) 701.
- 6 Reinink (1983) I, 36-7, 40-1 and II, 40-1, 44-5.
- 7 Engelmann (1963) 306-15.
- 8 Pliny (1961) IV,12.
- 9 *Qisas al-anbiya*: Ms. I. O. 2028 British Library in London, ff. 170r-176r: *Majlis si u-duvvum dar zikr-i Dhu'l-Qarnayn*, 174v.
- 10 Idrisi (1970-84) 943-63.
- 11 Hrbek (1960).
- 12 Yule (1921) 479-86.
- 13 Firdawsi-Mohl (1838-78) 212-21.
- 14 Mas'udi (1965) 23-4.
- 15 De Anna (1994) 17-37.
- 16 Tacitus (1970) *Germany*, IV, 2.
- 16a Nizami-Sarvatyan (1368) 512.
- 17 Dimashqi (1874) 197.
- 18 Mette (1952), Bianchetti (1998).
- 19 Reported by Pliny (1961) IV, 104.
- 20 Cosmas Indicopleustes (1968-73) II, 80.
- 21 Casari (2005).
- 22 Pliny (1961) IV, 104.
- 23 Strabo (1931) II, 4, 1.
- 24 Nansen (1911) 67; Bianchetti (1998), 164-7.
- 25 Strabo (1931) II, 4, 2. For the complete Pythean fragments: Mette (1952), Bianchetti (1998).
- 26 Hamadani (1375) 349.
- 27 Dion (1977) 175-83.
- 28 Arrian (1976) VII, 16, 2. Tarn (1950) II, 5-15; Daffinà (1968) 373-4.
- 29 Bunbury (1959) II, fig. III (front of p. 238: Map of the world according to Strabo), X (front of p. 660: Map of the world according to Erathosthenes); Bianchetti (1998) 31-2.
- 30 Bunbury (1959) I, 19-30.
- 31 Strabo (1931) *Geography*, XI, 7, 4
- 32 Ptolemy (1932) III, 5, 12.
- 33 Bianchetti (1998) 34-6.

- 34 Dion (1977) 216-22; Nicolet (1988) 100-1; 258-62.
- 35 Tacitus (1970) *Germany*, XXXIV, 2-3.
- 36 Hamadani (1375) 346-7.
- 37 Piemontese (2000a) 102.
- 38 Budge (1889).
- 39 For example Friedländer (1913) 302-4.
- 40 Budge (1889) 255-8 of the Syriac text and 145-9 of the English translation.
- 41 Tacitus (1970) *Germany* XXXIV, 3.
- 42 Reinink (1983) I, 24-37 and II, 24-41.
- 43 Khizr and his role in the episode of the Fountain are possibly related to the figure of Saint Silvester (Pope Silvester I) and the Christian legend of the baptism of Emperor Constantine: see Casari (2003). See also Franke's contribution to the present volume.
- 44 As an homage to a pioneer dragoman, I used here and below the translation by H. W. Clarke from Nizami-Clarke (1881) 801-5, with a few changes. See also Nizami-Bürgele (1991) 377-8. Nizami-Sarvatyan (1368) has: ham āb-ash tavān kh'ānd ya' nī chū āb ("one can call it water, but it is almost water").
- 45 The gloss has shorter and longer versions. As an example, al-Nisaburi (1340), 330.
- 46 On the Arctic climate, Brümmer (1985).



## 5 Drinking from the Water of Life – Nizāmī, Khizr and the Symbolism of Poetical Inspiration in Later Persianate Literature

*Patrick Franke*

Nizāmī's poetry is noted for its abundant use of allusions and esoteric symbols, mostly drawn from Islamic lore and popular legend. By incorporating these symbols into his poems, Nizāmī often modified them in a significant way. This will be exemplified in this article by the case of the enigmatic prophet-saint Khizr (in Arabic *al-Khadir* or *al-Khidr*) who figures in several passages of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*.

### **The Role of Khizr in Traditional Islam and in the *Khamsa* of Nizāmī**

It may be useful to provide some background information about Khizr and his role in medieval Islam. Venerated throughout the Islamic world and playing a central role in the traditional Islamic worldview, Khizr is at the centre of a complex system of different religious phenomena. One of the core ideas for the traditional conception of this figure in Islam is the *topos* of "Encountering Khizr" (الاجتماع بلخضر , *al-ijtimā' bi-l-Khidr*). This motif is present in many works of medieval Islamic literature.<sup>1</sup> The earliest reports of encounters with Khizr are found in the Arabic religious literature of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. They are shaped as traditions going back through chains of transmission to the companions of the Prophet, their successors or other reliable authorities. From this early layer of Islamic religious culture, strongly influenced by ancient Arabic beliefs, the idea of *encountering Khizr* has passed through both literary and oral channels to later generations of Muslims. On the Iranian soil, the first accounts about such encounters appeared in the fourth/tenth century. As an example we may refer to the Arabic *Kitāb al-Luma' fi t-tasawwuf* of Abū 'l-Nasr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) from Tus in Khurasan which contains two accounts of this kind: one, telling how the famous sufi-saint Ibrāhīm al-Khawwās met Khizr in the desert, the other, how Khizr taught a prayer to a certain Ibrāhīm al-Maristānī.<sup>2</sup> From the fifth/eleventh century onwards, such accounts occur also in works written in Persian, as, for instance, that included in the chronicle of Abū l-Fazl Muhammad Bayhaqī (d. 470/

1077), reporting on Khizr's apparition to Sebüktigin, the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty.<sup>3</sup> This particular encounter motif is also present in two passages of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*. One is placed in the prologue to the *Sharaf Nāma*, where Nizāmī describes his own encounter with Khizr (see Passage I in the Appendix), the other is part of the magical tale of the young Egyptian merchant Māhān's adventures, related in the *Haft Paykar* by the Princess of the Fifth Clime in the Turquoise Dome (see Passage II in the Appendix).

Whereas Ibrāhīm al-Maristanī and Sebüktigin are said to have been asleep when they saw Khizr, encounters with him usually are described not as dreams, but as truly physical events in the material world, sometimes experienced by more than one person at a time. Perceiving Khizr usually happens in a surprising and sudden way. This suddenness of Khizr's apparition is also a striking point in Nizāmī's tale on Māhān: the young merchant is not able to observe the approach of the stranger who later introduces himself as Khizr; rather, Khizr is already present when Māhān raises his head from prayer (HP30,427).

Originally, the topos of *Encountering Khizr* is based on the popular belief that he is a super-natural helper in time of need and a bringer of good luck. Many popular texts portray him as a magic healer and rescuer of heroes.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Khizr has also the function of a comforter. As an example, we may refer to the so-called *hadīth at-ta'ziya* (*hadīth* of consolation), a tradition quoted in different versions by scholars such as Ibn Abi Dunyā (d. 894), Ibn Bābūya (d. 991) and as-Sahmī (d. 1038). It relates that when the messenger of God had died, a man, identified as Khizr, appeared in the house of the mourners to comfort them.<sup>5</sup> This is also his function in the Persian text on Sebüktigin. It recounts how Khizr exhorted this great ruler, at a moment when he was only a weak slave, not to grieve over his fate because he would become a great and famous man. Nizāmī continues this idea of Khizr as a comforter by describing in the prologue to his *Sharaf Nāma* how he himself got consolation *دلدارى dildārī* (SN8,36) from Khizr who called on him not to be grieved. It is remarkable that the words Khizr addresses to the poet when consoling him (*مخور غم makhūr gham* – SN8,15) are similar to those used when he comforts Sebüktigin (*مدار غم madār gham*).

Strictly speaking, Khizr is generally thought to be invisible. In a much-cited statement, the Eastern Islamic exegete Abū Ishāq al-Tha'labī (d. 1036) describes him as "concealed to the eyes" (*mahjūb 'an al-absār*).<sup>6</sup> So, if somebody "meets" or "sees" him, this must be understood as a divine distinction. Sufī manuals from various epochs stress that the encounter with Khizr is the privilege of the so-called "friends of God" (*awliyā' Allāh*).<sup>7</sup> For ordinary people who do not get the benefit of a real encounter with him there is a consolation, albeit a poor one: according to widespread opinion, Khizr is always present, but in an invisible way. A famous

statement of the Shafi'i scholar Abū Zakariyya al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) says that Khizr is alive and stays in our midst (*huwa hayy mawjūd bayna azhuri-na*).<sup>8</sup> The Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm al-Zāhirī (d. 456/1064) reports in his heresiographical work *al-Fisal fi l-milal* that there are some Sufis who claim that, when a person mentions Khizr, he visits this person.<sup>9</sup> The same opinion is found in an Arabic twelfth-century hagiographical work where Khizr declares to an Andalusian Sufi: "I am present wherever I am mentioned".<sup>10</sup> It is exactly this idea to which Nizāmī refers in *Khusraw u Shīrīn*:

چو گفتی خضر خضر آنجاست حاضر حضورش در سخن یابی عیانی	همه پوشیده ای با ماست ظاهر نظامی نیز کاین منظومه خوانی
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(KH102,65-66)

*All concealed becomes visible with us, If you say Khizr, Khizr is present.*

*And so it is with Nizāmī, if you read this poem, you will find that his presence has become manifest in words.*

In order to be present wherever he is mentioned, Khizr must be able to cross great distances in a flash. Sufi circles interpret such a miraculous capability as "contraction of the earth" (*tayy al-ard*).<sup>11</sup> Several encounter reports describe Khizr hurrying over the earth, which has contracted under his feet. The above-mentioned account on Ibrāhīm al-Khawwās, for instance, says that this Sufi saw Khizr "moving through the air".<sup>12</sup> Another encounter report, transmitted by al-Qushayri in his *Risālat at-Tasawwuf* tells how two Sufis (al-Muzaffar al-Jassas and Nasr al-Kharrat) who were visited by Khizr at night saw him flying "between heaven and earth".<sup>13</sup> In the same manner, Khizr seems to transport Māhān in Nizāmī's tale. The young merchant only has to close his eyes and open them again in order to find himself back in a completely different environment (HP30, 434-5).

The description of Khizr's appearance remains vague in the encounter reports. He resembles an angel, free from space and time and seems to belong to the celestial rather than to the human sphere, although it is generally accepted that he is not an angel but a human being stemming from a primordial time, to whom a long life has been granted. Al-Tha'labī, for instance, characterizes him as a "prophet preserved alive" (*nabi mu'ammār*).<sup>14</sup> A number of etiological legends explain in the Islamic tradition the extraordinary longevity of Khizr. The most famous of them is the tale of his drinking from the Fountain of Life. As Friedländer has shown in his classical study on the background of this legend, it was popular in the Near East since Late Antiquity, namely in the various Greek, Hebrew and Syriac versions of the *Alexander Romance*. There, however, it was not Khizr, but Alexander's cook named Andreas who gained immortality by

drinking from that fountain. The substitution of Andreas by Khizr is a trait found only in the Islamic versions of the legend.

Since the legend on the Fountain of Life forms an integral part of the oriental versions of the *Alexander Romance*, it is logical that Nizāmī, when writing his *Iskandar Nāma*, concerned himself with it. In the *Sharaf Nāma*, the first part of *Iskandar Nāma*, the poet offers two versions of this legend. In the first, which he designates as that of the *Dihqān*, he describes Khizr's contact with the fountain in the following way:

بدو چشم او روشنائی گرفت سر و تن بدان چشمه پاک شست حیات ابد را سزاوار شد می ناب در نقره ناب کرد ... شد آن چشمه از چشم او ناپدید که اسکندر از چشمه ماند تهی نهان گشت چون چشمه از چشم او	چو با چشمه خضر آشنائی گرفت فرود آمد و جامه بر کند چست وزو خورد چندانکه بر کار شد همان خنگ را شست و سیراب کرد چو در چشمه یک چشم زد بنگرید بدانست خضر از سر آگهی ز محرومی او نه از خشم او
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(SN60,30-34 and 36-38)

*When Khizr caught acquaintance with (sight of? / got acquainted with) the fountain / by it, his eye caught illumination.  
 He alighted and quickly plucked off his garments/ bathed head and body in that pure fountain.  
 Drank of it as much as befitted / and became fit for eternal life.  
 Also he washed that grey steed (khing) and made him sated/ put pure wine (i.e. the water of life) into pure silver (i.e. the grey steed) (...)  
 When he cast a look at the fountain/ from his eye that fountain became hidden.  
 Through intelligence Khizr knew / that Alexander would be denied the fountain.  
 On account of his disappointment, not on account of his anger he himself / like the fountain, became concealed from his eye.<sup>15</sup>*

This version of the legend stands out from many others by the fact that it gives an explanation not only for Khizr's longevity but also for his invisibility. Also, the peculiarity that Khizr bathes his horse in the fountain is not found in any other version of the legend. Did Nizāmī want to insinuate with this new detail that it was not only Khizr himself but also his grey that became immortal at the Fountain of Life? With the addition of this detail, he might have wanted to offer a mythological explanation for the fact that in many encounter reports, Khizr appears as a horseman mounted on a grey.<sup>16</sup>

In any case, the Fountain of Life has become a fixed attribute of Khizr in Islamic tradition. In Persian and Turkish poetry in particular, this motif often occurs in connection with Khizr without being explained *in*



*extenso*.<sup>17</sup> From this we can conclude that both the poets and their audience and readers were familiar with the tale alluded to. The motif may also be included in encounter narratives. A good example is Nizāmī's tale on the adventures of Māhān: the young merchant sees the Water of Life as soon as he hears Khizr's greeting (II. 429). With this detail, Nizāmī establishes a link between the *Haft Paykar* and the *Sharaf Nāma* in which the legend about Khizr's drinking from this water is related. In another of his *mathnavīs*, we learn that Nizāmī himself has once been compared to Khizr and his Fountain. In *Khusraw u Shīrīn* he relates that one day when he came to his patron, the Seljuq sultan Toghril Shāh III, the ruler dismissed his cup-bearers and musicians saying:

که آب زندگی با خضر یابیم

چو خضر آمد ز باده سر بتابیم

(KS103,55)

*Since now Khizr has come, we should turn away from wine/ in order to gain the Water of Life from Khizr.*

The *Alexander Romance* in its Arabic, Persian, Turkish and even Malay versions had a determining influence on the popular image of Khizr in the lands of Islam. However, the official Islamic conception of this figure is based on another text, namely the Qur'anic account, which relates how the Israelite prophet Moses travels to the *majma' al-bahrayn*, a mythical connection between two seas, and there meets a nameless servant of God, whom he seeks to accompany in order to attain some of his heaven-inspired knowledge (*Surah* 18, 60-82). Based on several *hadīth*-traditions, found in the great canonical collections, the servant of God appearing in this account is generally identified as Khizr. It is remarkable that this account, which plays an important role in Sufi thought, has met with only little response in Nizāmī's work. The only point, which might be an indirect echo of this account, is the description of Khizr at the encounter with the poet (SN8,3). Nizāmī says on this occasion that Khizr came to him as a teacher (مرا خضر تعلیم گر بود دوش) *marā Khizr ta'līmgar būd dūsh*). This idea of Khizr as a supernatural instructor, which is widespread in Sufi-circles, goes back to the Qur'anic account in which the servant of God, identified with Khizr, figures as the teacher of Moses. In the Persian context we have another well-known story of Khizr as a teacher, as recounted by Nizāmī's contemporary Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār, about the famous sufi Muhammad ibn 'Alī al-Tirmidhī in his *Tadhkirat al-Awliya'* (606). According to this story, Khizr visited al-Tirmidhī in his youth for three years giving him private tuition in various fields of religious knowledge.

The Qur'anic account on Moses and the servant of God and the etiological legends explaining his longevity form Khizr's mythical dimension. But the veneration for the figure has also a cosmic dimension that manifests

itself in the assignment of certain natural elements to him. The fact that in Islamic belief Khizr has a special relationship to vegetation and to spring-time is self-evident from his name: in Arabic, al-Khadir or al-Khidr means “the Green one”. In the tale on Māhān (HP30,428), Nizāmī too plays with this idea, when he describes Khizr as “dressed in Green, like April’s season” (سبزپوشی چو فصل نیسانی) *sabz-pūshī chū fasl-i naysānī*).

But Khizr’s cosmic function is not restricted to vegetation, rather he is associated with sea, desert and land as well. In an anonymous Arabic version of the *Alexander Romance* for instance, we find the statement that Khizr is “God’s attorney on sea and his guardian on land” (*wakīl Allāh ‘ala l-bahr wa-amīnū-hu ‘ala l-barr*).<sup>18</sup> In consideration of such ideas, it is no wonder that Khizr is generally seen in an antagonistic relationship with the spirits of the evil. In Nizāmī’s tale on Māhān his antagonist is a wicked *dīv*: Khizr brings the young merchant back to that “place of security” (سلامتگاه) *salāmatgāh*), from which the *dīv* had tempted him away (HP30,435).

In his cosmic-guardian function Khizr is often accompanied by another person. A famous tradition quoted in many Arabic, Persian and Turkish works says that the earth is divided between Khizr and Ilyās, one of them being responsible for the sea and the other for land and desert.<sup>19</sup> According to Islamic tradition, Ilyās, the biblical Elijah, is another pre-Islamic prophet to whom a long life has been granted. In the classical Arabic chronography, the extreme longevity of Ilyās is explained by a slightly modified version of the biblical account on Elijah’s ascension.<sup>20</sup> Popular Islamic tradition makes Khizr and Ilyās a permanent couple and to a large extent assimilates both figures to each other. It is on account of this assimilation process that in a Persian tradition transmitted already by the eleventh-century Nīsābūrī<sup>21</sup>, the longevity of Ilyās is also explained by contact with the Water of Life. This tradition corresponds to the second version of the legend on the Fountain of Life offered by Nizāmī in his *Sharaf Nāma* (SN60,39-49). Like his first version of the legend, it has an extended etiological function: not only does it explain Khizr’s longevity, but also that of Ilyās and, in addition, it describes how the two figures were assigned to their spheres of responsibility:

از آن تشنگان روی برتافتند یکی شد به دریا یکی شد به دشت (SN60,55-56)	چو الیاس و خضر آبخور یافتند ز شادابی کام آن سرگذشت
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*When Ilyās and Khizr found the drinking-water/, they turned from those thirsty ones;  
 From the moistening of the palate by that event/ one went to the sea; the other went to the desert.*<sup>22</sup>

Since the early days of Islam, Khizr holds a central position in the traditional cosmological theories of this religion. From the thirteenth century onwards, the figure became the subject of new spiritual interpretations. Spiritual and allegorical conceptions of Khizr have been popular particularly in that school of sufism which was influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī.<sup>23</sup> But we also find a similar re-interpretation in the *Khamsa* of Nizāmī, more precisely in the story of Māhān's encounter with Khizr. In order to understand the novel feature of this interpretation, we have to recall that Māhān meets Khizr at the end of his strange adventures exactly at that moment when he is healed from his avarice and turns his heart to God. He intends to do good, repents, makes vows and performs his prayer. It is at this very moment that a person appears in front of him who is the spit and image of himself: دید شخصی به شکل و پیکر خویش *dīd shakhsī bi- shikl-u paykar-i khīsh* (HP30,427b).

When Māhān asks him about his identity, the man answers:

آدم تا ترا بگیرم دست	گفت من خضرم ای خدای پرست
می رساند ترا به خانه خویش	نیت نیک تست کامد پیش

(HP30,430-1)

*I am Khizr; o pious man/, and I have come to help you.  
It was (your) good intention, however, which has come before/, to  
bring you back to your own house.*

In this self-presentation, Khizr links his apparition with the mental change of the hero: he has come in his usual function as helper for those in distress, but also as the personification of the hero's "good intention". With this breathtaking scene, in which Khizr appears as a reflection of the hero, Nizāmī offers an ingenious psychological re-interpretation of Khizr, transforming him into a purified *alter ego* of the person seeing him. This re-interpretation of the figure anticipates later Sufi theories according to which Khizr is only a gnostic phenomenon (مظهر عرفانی *mazhar-i 'irfānī*) originating from, and going back to, the person who perceives him.<sup>24</sup> The idea of Khizr as an *alter ego* is perpetuated in some Turkish encounter reports<sup>25</sup> and seems also to have influenced Watson's modern English Science Fiction novel *Miracle visitors*, in which Khizr appears as the projection of a British psychoanalyst who experiments with so-called ASCs (Altered States of Conscience)!

In the discussion of the spiritual interpretations of Khizr, another detail in Nizāmī's description deserves our attention. Nizāmī describes him not only as "dressed in green, like April's season", but also "ruddy-faced as the radiant dawn" (سرخ رونی چو صبح نورانی *surkh-rūyī chū subh-i nūrānī*) (HP30, 428). This image, which at the time was unusual in connection with Khizr, might be influenced by the allegorical tale *'Aql-i surkh* ("The

Red Intellect”) of Nizāmī’s contemporary Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), in which a wise old man with exactly this attribute appears.<sup>26</sup> The man’s red face in Suhrawardī’s tale is explained as a symbol for the merging of youth and old age in one person. It is probable that we ought to understand Khizr’s red face in Nizāmī’s account in the same manner.

### ■ The Poet’s Encounter with Khizr

With his magical tale on Māhān, Nizāmī offers a subtle and shrewd re-interpretation of Khizr. It is the *Sharaf Nāma*, however, which presents the most far-reaching re-modelling of the figure. This is what we hope to demonstrate in the second part of this article.

The episode of the Fountain of Life is the first element that comes to mind in relation to Khizr’s role in the *Sharaf Nāma*. In reality, however, Khizr plays a prominent role in the general plan of this work. This is already manifest from the fact that the two places in which he appears – the prologue and the narrative about Alexander’s expedition into the darkness (SN8 and SN60) – form a bracket for the book. The main subject of the prologue describing the poet’s encounter with Khizr is the question of poetic originality. Nizāmī was interested in this question because he had taken the material for his book from the work of a former poet, Firdawsī’s *Shāh Nāma*.<sup>27</sup> This made him fear that he would be considered by others – and perhaps also by himself – as a plagiarist. Khizr who visits him after a seclusion of forty days exhorts him:

مگویی آنچه دانای پیشینه گفت      که در در نشاید دو سوراخ سفت  
(SN8,11)

*Do not repeat what the ancient sage [i.e. Firdawsī] said, for it is not proper to pierce two holes in one pearl.*

Only in cases of absolute necessity should he repeat what has been written previously. Khizr recommends that as a new leader (پیشوای نوی *pīshwā-yi nu’ī*) in poetry, he should not follow the old arts (کهن پیشگان *kuhan pīshigān*) (SN8,12-3). Thus, Nizāmī claims to write something new, which differs to a considerable extent from the work of the older poet. In his own words:

شرفنامه را فرخ آوازه کرد      حدیث کهن را بدو تازه کرد  
(SN7,125)

*He made the Sharaf Nāma wide of renown. With it, he refreshed the old tale.*

The person who enables him to create something new is Khizr himself. He, who, as Nizāmī writes, was Alexander's guide (پیشرو *pīshraw*) (SN60,11), teaches him "a secret no other ear has perceived before" (SN8,3), and helps him "to wrest his head from bondage" (SN8,5). This bondage, we may deduce, would consist in the slavish imitation of Firdawsī's text. A servant the poet still is, but only of Khizr's plan (SN8,4). Khizr promises that, since he had received sprinkling with the Fountain of Life (SN8,5), he will speak in his book like running water (سukhan rānad kh<sup>v</sup>āhī chū āb-i ravān) (SN8,6). It is easy to understand that this work is not a mere reproduction of the *Alexander Romance*, as Friedländer considered, but a complete reworking of the old material, under Khizr's inspiration.

Now, the remarkable point is that Nizāmī's claim to be novel is illustrated in a particularly obvious way in the chapter in which Khizr appears for the second time: the story on Alexander's expedition to the realm of darkness and his search for the Fountain of Life. From a note at the end of the passage (SN60,86), we learn that Nizāmī wanted to lay new foundations (اساسی دگر *asāsī-i digar*) with regard to the other poet (Firdawsī). All in all, the story extends in his book over several pages and is told in various versions. As Ethé has shown, using two Persian commentaries on the *Iskandar Nāma*, the text is full of terms which could be understood as allusions to Sufī concepts. The first of the versions cited by Nizāmī, that of the Dihqān, goes back to Firdawsī in its general framework, the second, in which Khizr and Ilyās appear together, is said to go back to "the ancient Romans". But, as Nizāmī says, the Majūsī, who seems to be Firdawsī, and the Rūmi both lost their way: according to the Arab history (تاریخ نازی *tārīkh-i tāzī*), the Water of Life is "of another place" (که بود آب حیوان دگر *kih būd āb-i haywān digar jāygāh*) (SN60,53). Does this mean that Alexander's search for the Water of Life was not in vain after all, as was told in the former versions of the legend? With Nizāmī, we may state that indeed it was not:

گر آبیست روشن در این تیره خاک      غلط کردن آبخوردش چه باک  
(SN60,54)

*If there be a luminous water in this dark dust/ why should he worry  
to miss his lot?*

It is a *hātif*, a mysterious voice, which finally explains to the ruler:

(یکی هاتف از گوشه آواز داد)      که روزی به هر کس خطی باز داد  
سکندر که جست آب حیوان ندید      نجسته به خضر آب حیوان رسید  
سکندر به تاریکی آرد شتاب      ره روشنی خضر یابد بر آب  
(SN60,77-79)

*Destiny (rūzī) has given everybody his lot.  
Alexander, who sought the Water of Life, didn't see it/ to Khizr the  
Water of Life, unsought, arrived.  
Alexander hastens to the darkness/ Khizr finds the path of lumi-  
nousness on the water.*

It is this philosophy of destiny, which seems to represent Nizāmī's principal matter of concern in rewriting the tale of the Fountain of Life. In the end of the passage, he further sets out the idea:

دوید از پس آنچه روزی نبود	چو روزی نباشد دویدن چه سود
به دنبال روزی چه باید دوید	تو بنشین که خود روزی آید پدید

(SN60,91-92)

*[Alexander] strove for what was not his destiny/, if it is not destiny,  
what profit to strive?  
Why should you run behind destiny/ Sit thou! that destiny itself may  
appear.*

With the last verse, Nizāmī reverts to an important element of his prologue, where Khizr advises the poet not to hasten around the world like the wind (SN8,28), but to stay in his spiritual home country, the Persian Iraq (SN8,21), mining jewels (SN8,29). Then “*it will be Alexander himself who comes purchasing jewels*” (سکندر خود آید به گوهر خری) *Sikandar khud āyad bi gawhar kharī* (SN8,30). This admonition to *stabilitas loci*, at one place put in the mouth of the globetrotter Khizr, at the other, conveyed by the poet himself, is another aspect which, like the Fountain of Life and Khizr himself, is connecting the prologue to the narrative on Alexander's expedition to the darkness. Both of them, as has been said, form a framing bracket to the whole work.

Beside this, we detect another feature relating to Khizr in the *Sharaf Nāma*: the repetitive invocations of the poet to a certain *sāqī* to pour him wine, which are separating the sections of the book. One of the first invocations of this kind is preceded by an explicit address to “*Khizr of auspicious foot*” (ای خضر پیروزی) *ay khizr-i pīrūz-pay* (SN6,67). Khizr's apparition at the end of the prologue may be understood as a positive response to this invocation. In his opening words to the poet at this instant, Khizr not only tells him that he has received sprinkling with the Water of Life, but also addresses him as “*my taster of the cup of speech*” (ز جام سخن) *zi-jām-i sukhan jāshnīgīr-i man* (SN8,4). Nizāmī seems to allude here to an old *topos* of divine vocation which is already present in the apocryphal inter-testament literature. In the Apocalypse of Ezra, for instance, it is told how, after having drunk from a divine chalice, the Jewish priest of the same name restores the Holy Scriptures lost during the

destruction of Jerusalem. On this revelatory act, Ezra himself is cited with the words: “Then I opened my mouth, and, behold, he reached me a full cup, which was full as it were with water, but the colour of it was like fire. And I took it, and drank: and when I had drunk of it, my heart uttered understanding, and wisdom grew in my breast, for my spirit strengthened my memory: And my mouth was opened, and shut no more.” (4 Ezra 14:39-41)

### ■ Khizr as a Symbol of Poetical Inspiration after Nizāmī

In order to understand the novel feature of Nizāmī’s re-modelling of Khizr we have to go back to the general idea of this figure in medieval Islam. Already before Nizāmī, Khizr was often used as a symbol of religious authorization. We may refer for example, to the large number of invocations said to possess magical powers because they were conveyed by Khizr.<sup>28</sup> In addition, accounts on encounters with Khizr, as the one included in the chronicle of Bayhaqī, served the religious legitimization of rulers and dynasties and played an important role both in the Shi’i apologetic discourse and in the propaganda of the various Sunni schools of law.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, Khizr was an important agent in the sanctification of localities and the legitimization of sanctuaries.<sup>30</sup> In his *Sharaf Nāma*, Nizāmī transferred this authoritative function of Khizr into the poetic field and thus transformed him into a symbol of literary originality.

Subsequently, several other poets of Persian, Turkish and Urdu tongue adopted this new *topos* of poetical inspiration created by Nizāmī. One of the first poems written after Nizāmī presented as an inspiration by Khizr is the Persian *mathnavī Tariq al-tahqīq* usually ascribed to Hakīm Sanā’ī of Ghazna, which, as has been shown by its editor Utas, in reality probably goes back to a certain Ahmad ibn Hasan al-Nakhchavanī flourishing in the eighth/fourteenth century. As in Nizāmī’s *Sharaf Nāma*, Khizr’s inspiring action is described in this poem in a separate section (l. 110-123) following the doxological opening address with praises to God and his prophet. This section called *Fī qudūm al-Khizr* (On the arrival of Khizr) tells how, in the first daylight, the “prophet Khidr, that friend of God” paid a visit to the poet in his room (وثاق *withāq*), admonishing him to come out of his “dark narrowness” (تنگنای ظلمانی *tangnā-yi zulmānī*) in order to seek “the water of spiritual life” (آب حیات معنی *āb-i hayāt-i ma’ni*) and to gain life in the world of permanence (بقاء *baqā*). Alluding to the Qur’anic narrative on Josef, Khidr asks the poet, how he could stay in “the house of sorrows” (بیت احزان *bayt-i ahzān*; cf. *Surah* 12:84ff), while in reality he is looking for the “Egypt of love” (مصر عشق *mīsr-i ‘ishq*). Khizr’s exhortation is followed by a section containing the answer of the poet (l. 124-133) in which our figure is praised with a row of epithets expressing its auspicious and illustrious character. The poet asks Khizr to help him to get his foot out of “the snare



of desire” (دم حرص *dam-i hirs*) and to follow the path of devoutness (تقوى *taqwā*) so that he may reach “that station” (آن منزل *ān manzil*) by gaining knowledge from the “reality of the heart” (دل حقیقت *haqīqat-i dil*) and establishing himself in the world of perfection (کمال *kamāl*). The two sections of the *Tarīq al-tahqīq* devoted to Khizr and the prologue to the *Sharaf Nāma* have several points in common. In both the poet is visited by the mysterious figure who comes as a consoler and exhorts the poet to high-mindedness, and it is the Fountain of Life which appears as Khizr’s attribute and instrument for showing the poet the way to success.

Another poetical work presenting itself as inspired by Khizr is the Turkish *Divān* by Mehmed Chelebi Sultan (d. 900/1494), a South-Anatolian Sufi sheykh of the Zayniyya order. This fascinating poem, which describes in great detail the visionary travels of the poet through the upper and lower realms of the Islamic cosmos, is also known under the title of *Hizur-nāme* (Book of Khizr) and represents one of the pinnacles in the history of the Turkish Khizr veneration.<sup>31</sup> As the poet recurrently emphasizes, it was Khizr, that “hand of the Divine omnipotence” (*yed-i qudrat-i Allāh*; fol. 19b), who guided him through the visionary worlds. For him, however, Khizr is not only a mystagogue, but also a mighty cosmic ruler “to whom every people is subject” (*her millet aña mahkūm*; fol. 58b) and to whom he himself feels under an absolute obligation to obey. Although the devotion to Khizr manifest in Mehmed Chelebi’s *Divān* is much deeper than that one in Nizāmī’s *Sharaf Nāma*, the general role played by this figure in the two works shows several similarities. Again, Khizr is presented in the *Divān* as a source of inspiration. After one of his visions, the poet declares:

*When I had travelled all the realms which are up and down, I wrote this divan of love [...] from King Khizr, I received teaching (sabaq), completely learned the esoteric knowledge (‘ilm-i ladunni) and, by this, became a manifestation (mazhar) of the hand of God (fol. 25b, l. 8-10).*

Just as Nizāmī presents himself as a taster of Khizr’s “cup of speech” (جام سخن *jām-i sukhan*), the Turkish poet describes how Khizr becomes a *sāqī* and offers him the “cup of encounter” (جام لقاء *jām-i laqā* fol. 80a); *Muhyiddin Dolu* “Muhyi d-Din, the filled Cup” is also the nom de plume (مخلص *makhlas*) adopted by the poet in his *Divān*. An introductory section of the *Divān* (fol. 1b-2a), following the praise of God and of the prophet Muhammad, mentions the poet’s drinking from the Water of Life, here called عین بقاء *‘ayn-i baqā* (fol. 2a, l. 6; “fountain of eternity”). This section devoted to an unnamed واهب کمالات *wāhib-i kamālāt* (“bestower of perfections”) can be interpreted as a counterpart to the Khizr-sections in the prologues of the *Sharaf Nāma* and the *Tarīq al-tahqīq*.



In later Persian and Turkish literature, the *topos* created by Nizāmī makes its appearance not only in poetical works presenting themselves as inspired by Khizr, but also in stories and legends attributing “inspiration by Khizr” to famous poets of the past. As for Persian literature, we may refer to Jāmī’s *Nafahāt al-uns* written in the fifteenth century. It relates that Khizr saturated Sa’dī (d. 691/1292) at the beginning of his poetical career “from the fresh fountain of his favour and graces” (از زلال انعام و افضل خود) *az zulāl-i in ‘ām-u afzāl-i khud*.<sup>32</sup> When later the Indo-Persian poet Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī (d. 725/1325) met Khizr and requested him “to lay down the water of his blessed mouth in his own mouth”, Khizr is said to have answered: “This fortune has already been taken away by Sa’dī” (این دولت را این سعدی برد *in dawlat rā Sa’dī burd*).<sup>33</sup> In Ottoman Turkish literature, accounts on Khizr inspiring poets can be found in the chronicle *Kūnh al-akhbār* by Mustafā ‘Alī (d. 1008/1600) and in the guide to the mosques of Istanbul, *Hadīqat ül-jevāmi‘*, by Hāfiz Husayn Ayyānsarāyi, finished in 1193/1779. According to ‘Alī (1399), Khizr called on the Turkish Sufi-poet Mehmed Yāziji-oglu (d. 855/1451) several times, when he was writing his main work, *Muhammediyye*, and helped him solve poetical difficulties. In Ayyānsarāyi’s book, it is the Turkish poet Hamd Allāh Hamdī (d. 903/1503) who is inspired by Khizr. He is said to have translated Jāmī’s love epic *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā* into Turkish at the command of Khizr,<sup>34</sup> the encounter with him having taken place in the centre of the domed hall of Aya Sofya, a spot famous for being haunted by the hidden presence of Khizr.<sup>35</sup>

Jāmī’s text on Sa’dī and Amīr Khusraw is explicit in that the loosening of the poet’s tongue was effected by transference of saliva. This rite of poetical initiation is also found in other texts stemming from Central Asia. As an example, we may refer to the legend on the Eastern Turkish poet-saint Hakīm Ata<sup>36</sup> (d. 582/1186) as told in the *Hakīm Ata Kitābi* published in Kazan in 1846. According to this legend, Hakīm Ata’s poetical career started in his youth, when Khizr put “blessed saliva” in his mouth and ordered him to show the “divine flood” (*ḥayd*). It was from this moment onwards that Hakīm Ata recited his famous mystical *hikmet*-poems.<sup>37</sup> Another piece of evidence is found in the *Tazkira-yi Bughrakhānī* of Ahmad ibn Sa’d al-Dīn Uzganī (fl. ca. 1600) in which it is told that Khizr gave strength to a certain ‘Abd al-Ghaffār from Multan by spitting three times into his mouth. When Khizr had vanished, ‘Abd al-Ghaffār started to recite poems.<sup>38</sup> We recall that Khizr’s moistening the poet’s mouth is a motif already present in the prologue of Nizāmī’s *Sharaf Nāma*. The difference, however, is that this act, which is described in a sublime and abstract way by Nizāmī, has taken a more tangible and corporeal form in legend.

The cup is another symbol, already mentioned by Nizāmī and recurrent in accounts on *khidric* initiation of poets. Cups are playing a central role in the poetry of the Western Turkish bards called ‘āshīqlar.<sup>39</sup> As P.N.

Boratav (*IA* V 468) has shown, the popular Turkish concept of the *‘āshiq* has an ambiguous character: *‘āshīqlıq* means on the one hand the passionate longing for the beloved one, on the other, the poetical gift. The career of an *‘āshiq* usually starts with a dream, in which a *pīr* proffers to him the “cup of love” (*‘āshq badesi*) and shows him the beloved destined for him by God.<sup>40</sup> The interesting point is that in many tales on the *‘āshuqlar* that *pīr* is identified with Khizr. As an example, we may refer to the *Hikāye-i ‘Āshiq Garīb*, one of the most popular tales of this genre which has been translated into Russian already at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the romantic poet M.J. Lermontov (1814-1841).<sup>41</sup> Here, the dream, in which the bard falls in love with Shah Senem, the daughter of a trader, is described with the following words:

*When [‘Āshiq Garīb] fell asleep, Khizr – peace be upon him – came in a dream to the boy, gave him the cup of Shah Senem of Tiflis to drink and thus made both of them lovers. While reaching one of the golden cups to the boy and the other one to the girl, he said: “One of you is ‘Āshiq Garīb, the other Shah Senem.” Then he disappeared from sight.*<sup>42</sup>

The same motif is found in the legend on the Turkish Qızılbaş-poet ‘Āshiq Ibrahim (eighteenth century) who is said to have met Khizr twice. The second time, he sat together with Khizr for a long while talking with him and drinking the “filled cup” (*dolu*). From this day onwards, he is said to have composed poetry.<sup>43</sup>

Around the same time, Hāfiz of Shīrāz became the object of a similar legend. As Jones relates,<sup>44</sup> the people of Shīrāz told the story that the poet in his youth fell in love with a beautiful girl of the city called *Shākh-i-Nabāt*, “branch of Sugar-cane”. About four Persian miles from Shīrāz there was a spot called *Pīr-i-Sabz*, “Green Old Man”; and a popular opinion held that a youth who should spend forty sleepless nights there, would infallibly become an excellent poet. Young Hāfiz had accordingly made a vow that he would serve that apprenticeship with the utmost exactness, and for thirty-nine mornings he walked beneath the windows of *Shākh-i-Nabāt*, at noon he ate, then he slept, and at night he kept watch at his poetical station. On the fortieth morning, *Shākh-i-Nabāt* called him into her house and told him that she was ready to become his wife. She would have kept him with her that night, but Hāfiz was now filled with desire to become a poet and insisted upon keeping his fortieth vigil. Early next morning, Khizr dressed in green garments came to him at *Pīr-i sabz*, with a cup brimful of nectar and rewarded his perseverance with an inspiring draught of it. As Jones noted, this legend was based on a poetical statement by Hāfiz himself. Perhaps it was this very couplet, which had already prompted Bell for a thorough comment on the special relationship between Hāfiz and Khizr.<sup>45</sup> In this

couplet<sup>46</sup>, the poet asks “Khizr, the blessed one” (خضر پی خجسته *Khizr-i pay-khujasta*) to help him, because he has to toil afoot, whereas the fellow-travellers (rival poets?) are hastening on horseback.

It is likely that a thorough search of works of Persianate<sup>47</sup> literature would bring to light other tales on poetical inspiration by Khizr. As for modern Urdu literature, we may refer to the poem *Khizr-i Rāh*, recited by Muhammad Iqbāl in Lahore in April 1922 on the thirty-seventh annual meeting of the Society for the Defence of Islam (انجمن حمایت اسلام *Anjuman-i Himāyat-i Islām*). This poem, later included in Iqbāl’s poetical collection *Bāng-i darā*, discusses events which upset the Islamic world after World War I: the Greek invasion of Turkey, the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, the imminent abolition of the Califate, the occupation of several Arab countries by Western powers and the political behaviour of the Meccan Sharif who, in the opinion of Iqbāl, “had sold the honour of the religion of Mustafa (i.e. Islam)” (v. 14). At the outset of the poem it is related that one night, as the poet stands on the bank of the river “lost in vision” (محو نظر *mahw-i nazar*; V. 1a), Khizr suddenly emerges from the floods in front of him. The poet seizes this rare opportunity and asks him the questions which were weighing upon him: What is the secret of life? What is kingship? How is this wrangling over capital and labour? How can the Islamic World be healed from its suffering? Khizr’s answering monologue, extending over the remaining five stanzas of the poem, takes up each of the topics mentioned by the poet. In its structure, Iqbāl’s poem shows a similarity with a textual genre popular in Sufi circles, called “questioning Khizr”.<sup>48</sup> Yet, it differs from the typical representatives of this genre by the fact that Khizr’s words are increasingly intermingled with the voice of the poet so that they become indistinguishable from each other. Finally, the exclamation “It is not just the message of Khizr, it is the message of creation” at the beginning of the fifth stanza, brings the poet back to the fore, eclipsing the encounter with Khizr outlined at the beginning of the poem as the setting of the dialogue. Thus, the words of the last stanza addressed in a prophetic-mobilizing way to the Muslim masses are no longer the speech of Khizr, but the words of the poet who speaks after having received instruction by Khizr.

Iqbāl’s poem *Khizr-i Rāh* is a political text imbued with a strong spirit of pan-Islamic action.<sup>49</sup> Why did the Indo-Islamic thinker choose the form of a poem inspired by Khizr for expressing his modern ideas? This must be partly due to his well-known admiration for the symbolism of Persian poetry and spirituality. The general popularity of this figure among the Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent may be another reason for this choice. Iqbāl evidently used Khizr as the bearer of his message in order to be more easily acceptable by his audience. The fact that it is not the Water of Life which functions as Khizr’s attribute in this poem, but a river, may be interpreted as a concession to this audience, for, in the Indian subcontinent,

rivers are generally conceived as Khizr's permanent dwelling places.<sup>50</sup> Whereas the theme of the Water of Life was dropped, another element of Nizāmī's *khidrology* experienced a surprising revival in Iqbal's poem. In the *Haft Paykar* Khizr was depicted as "ruddy-faced as the radiant dawn", here he appears as a figure, "in whose old age the colour of youth is like dawn" (*jus ki pīrī meñ hai mānand-i sahar rang-i shabāb*; v. 5b).

In the preceding remarks, I have tried to show that, starting from Nizāmī's prologue to his *Sharaf Nāma*, "poetical inspiration by Khizr" has become a well-known *topos* in later Persianate literature. In conclusion, let us have a short look at Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan*, which may be described, in a certain way, as a European representative of Persianate literature. This poetical collection, first published in 1819, starts with the following verses:

*Nord und West und Süd zersplittern,  
Throne bersten, Reiche zittern,  
Flüchte du, im reinen Osten  
Patriarchenluft zu kosten,  
Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen  
Soll dich Chisers Quell verjüngen.*

*North and west and south are breaking,  
Thrones are bursting, kingdoms shaking:  
Flee, then, to the essential East,  
Where on the patriarch's air you'll feast!  
There to love and drink and sing,  
Drawing youth from Khizr's spring.<sup>51</sup>*

Is it by chance that the German poet opens his *Divan*, which represents the outcome of his thorough and long-lasting study of Oriental literature, with a reference to Khizr and his fountain? We can almost certainly answer this question in the negative. As is well-known, Goethe conceived his *Divan* as a Western answer to the *Divan* of Hāfiz, a poet to whom he felt mentally akin to the highest degree so that he called him his *Zwilling*. Goethe was not able to read Hāfiz's *Divan* in the original Persian version. He knew it only through von Hammer's two-volume translation with which he became acquainted in June 1814. In the introduction to this translation, von Hammer compiled some biographical accounts on the Persian poet, including the legend on Hāfiz's encounter with Khizr, which he borrowed from Jones. More than Jones, von Hammer had taken this legend as an account on poetical initiation. This is evident from the words he chose to mention the proffered cup:

*Es war Chiser, der Hüter des Quells des Lebens, der Hafisen davon zu trinken vergönnte, und ihm unsterblichen Ruhm verhiess. So gelangte er zur Weihe des Dichters.*

(“It was Khizr, the guardian of the Fountain of Life, who gave Hāfiz to drink from it and promised him immortal fame. Thus did he get his ordination as a poet.”)

From the existence of this description in Hammer's introduction, we may conclude that Goethe was aware of Khizr's symbolic function as a spiritual guide of poets in Persianate literature. His reference to this figure at the beginning of his *Divan* must be seen in the context of his competition with Hāfiz whom he wanted to match in every aspect of his poetical existence. In order to bring himself completely in line with his oriental “twin”, Goethe could have opened his *Divan* with the poetical description of a personal encounter with Khizr. That he did not do so but referred to this figure in a way which is rather reminiscent of a conventional invocation to the Muses – with Khizr's fountain forming a parallel to the water of Aganippa – may be explained as a conscious attempt by him to assimilate this Oriental symbol to the literary traditions of the Occident.

## Appendix

### D) Excerpt from the prologue to Nizāmī's *Sharaf Nāma* (SN8,3-39):

برازی که نامد پذیرای گوش	مرا خضر تعلیم گر بود دوش	3
ز جام سخن چاشنی گیر من	که ای جامگی خوار تدبیر من	4
نم از چشمه زندگی یافته	چو سوسن سر از بندگی تافته	5
سخن راند خواهی چو آب روان	شنیدم که در نامه خسروان	6
که در پرده کژ نیابند ساز	مشو ناپسندیده را پیش باز	7
پسندید گانت پسندند نیز	پسندیدگی کن که باشی عزیز	8
بیانباشتن در دهان نهنک	فرو بردن اژدها بی درنگ	9
که ببند همی ناپسندیده را	از آن خوشتر آید جهان دیده را	10
که در در نشاید دو سوراخ سفت	مگوی آنچه دانای پیشینه گفت	11
که از باز گفتن بود ناگزیر	مگر در گذرهای اندیشه گیر	12
کهن پیشگان را مکن پی روی	درین پیشه چون پیشوای نوی	13
بهر بیوه خود را میلای دست	چو نیروی بکر از مائیت هست	14
که پختی بود هر چه نا خورده ...	مخور غم بصیدی که نا کرده	15
دماغ مرا تازه تر کرد هوش	چو دلداری خضرم آمد بگوش	36
سخن کز دل آید بود دلپذیر	پذیرا سخن بود شد جای گیر	37
زبان برگشادم بدر دری	چو در من گرفت آن نصیحتگری	38
مگر در سخن نو کنم نامه	نهادم ز هر شیوه هنگامه	39

### II) Excerpt from the tale on the adventures of Māhān (HP30, 418-36):

رست چون من ز قصه ماهان	چونکه ماهان ز چنگ بدخواهان	418
توبه ها کرد و نذرها پذیرفت	نیت کار خیر پیش گرفت	419
راه می رفت و خون زرخ می ریخت	از دل پاک در خدای گریخت	420
شست خود را ورخ نهاد بخاک	تا بآبی رسید روشن و پاک	421
با کس بی کسان بزاری گفت	سجده کرد وزمین بخواری رفت	422
وی نماینده راه من بنمای	کای گشاینده کار من بگشای	423
تو نمایم ره نه دیگر کس	تو گشاییم کار بسته و بس	424
کیست کورا تو راه ننمایی	نه مرا رهنمای تنهایی	425
روی در سجده گاه خود مالید	ساعتی در خدای خود نالید	426
دید شخصی بشکل و پیکر خویش	چونکه سر برگرفت از بر خویش	427
سرخ رویی چو صبح نورانی	سبزپوشی چو فصل نیسانی	428
قیمتی گوهرها که گوهر تست	گفت کای خواجه کیستی بدرست	429
آمدم تا ترا بگیرم دست	گفت من خضرم ای خدای پرست	430
می رساند ترا بخانه خویش	نیت نیک تست کامد پیش	431
دیده بر هم ببند و باز گشای	دست خود را بمن ده از سر پای	432
تشنه بد آب زندگانی دید	چونکه ماهان سلام خضر شنید	433
دیده در بست و در زمان بگشاد	دست خود را سبک بدستش داد	434
کاوش دیو برده بود ز راه	دید خود را دران سلامتگاه	435
سوی مصر آمد از دیار خراب	باغ را در گشاد و کرد شتاب	436

## Notes

- 1 In the Appendix of my doctoral thesis (Franke (2000) 377-529), I have compiled in chronological order translations of 151 texts describing encounters with Khizr, but stemming from different times and regions. Many of these encounter reports are taken from works of medieval Arabic, Persian and Turkish literature.
- 2 Sarrāj (1914), 168, 262 and Franke (2000) 402, 404.
- 3 Bayhaqi (1371) 247-249 and Franke (2000) 429.
- 4 Franke (2000) 24-27.
- 5 Franke (2000) 383-386, for the different version of this tradition.
- 6 Tha'labi (n.d.) 198.
- 7 See Tirmidhi (1992) 57, for instance, where the conversation with Khizr (*muhadathat al-Khizr*) is mentioned as one of the signs of the *awliya' Allah*.
- 8 Nawawi (1842) 229.
- 9 Ibn Hazm (n.d.) V 37.
- 10 Sadafi (1998) 83f.
- 11 Gramlich (1979) in particular 184ff.
- 12 Sarraj (1914) 168.
- 13 Qushayri (1330) 172.
- 14 Tha'labi (n.d.) 198.
- 15 Nizami-Clarke (1979) 802.
- 16 See for instance Hujwiri (1376) 272 for his version of the story on al-Khawwās's encounter with Khizr.
- 17 For Persian poetry see Shamisa (1373) 249; for Turkish poetry, Ocak (1990) 181-7.
- 18 Friedländer (1913) 314. For other evidence material, Franke (2000) 88-105.
- 19 Franke (2000) 140-1 for source material.

- 20 For instance Tabari-Ibrahim (1962) I 461-4, Tabari-Yarshater (1985) III 122-5.
- 21 Nisaburi (1340) 342.
- 22 Nizami-Clarke (1979) 804.
- 23 Franke (2000) 209-22.
- 24 For instance Sha'rani (1408) II 26.
- 25 We may refer, for instance, to Bremer (1959) 249-51, for the encounter report of the *Risale Ahval-i Ashchü Dede Ibrahim 'Ali al-Naqshbandi al-Mevlevi*, in which Khizr performs exactly the same actions as the person seeing him, behaving as a mirror image.
- 26 Suhrawardi (1977) III 226-39.
- 27 He also used other sources and points to this fact.
- 28 Franke (2000) 109-13.
- 29 Franke (2000) 274-80, 292-300.
- 30 Franke (2004) and Meri (1999).
- 31 See Ayan (1990) and Ocak (1988).
- 32 Jami-Abedi (1370) 598.
- 33 Jami-Abedi (1370) 607.
- 34 Ayvansaray (2000) 8.
- 35 Franke (2004) 44.
- 36 Compare with Alpay (1971).
- 37 Köprülü (1966) 74f. On the importance of the Hikmet-Genre in popular Eastern-Turkish literature, see Iz (1960).
- 38 See Baldick (1993) 85 and 159: in another story by Ahmad Uzgani, a Sufi originating from the city of Yarkand asks Khizr to check his hikmets before publication. The poems were regarded as infallible because inspired by the "hidden tongue" (لسان الغيب).
- 39 On the *'ashuqlar*, wandering Anatolia and Azerbaidjan from the sixteenth century onwards, see Lewis (1960).
- 40 See Günay (1992), which pays attention also to *'Ashuqlar* flourishing in the twentieth century.
- 41 See Lermontov (1990) II, 447-54.
- 42 Translated here from Ocak (1988) 200.
- 43 Ocak (1988) 188. See also Günay (1992) 146 for further evidence for the motif of the "proffering of the cup by Khizr".
- 44 Ouseley (1846) 36f, who reports the legend within a long quotation from Jones without indicating the title of his source-text. It may be *Oriental poems*, as given by von Hammer (1812-13), xxii-iii.
- 45 See Bell (1897), her notes on the ode Nr. 18.
- 46 It corresponds to *dal* 23, l. 15 in Hafiz-Rosenzweig (1858-64), Vol. I, 360.
- 47 I use this term to designate the common literary, religious and political traditions influenced by Persian culture, which can be found to this day also outside Iran in regions like South Asia, Central Asia and the lands of the Ottoman Empire.
- 48 Franke (2000) 288-91.
- 49 Irfan (2004).
- 50 Cf. Longworth-Dames (1978) and Franke (2000) 96-8.
- 51 Goethe (1988) 9 and Goethe-Luke (1986) 230.





## 6 The Enigma of Turandot in Nizāmī's *Pentad*. Azāda and Bahrām between Esther and Sindbād

Angelo Michele Piemontese

### ■ Sequence

The earliest extant Persian Bahrām-romance is related in Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma* (ca. 1000 AD), who constructs the plot with a prologue followed by two distinct parts. The prologue consists in a report of the reign of the Sasanian king Yazdigird I, father and predecessor of Bahrām V (r. 421-439 AD). The latter, surnamed Gūr (گور 'The Onager / The Tomb'), is the royal huntsman protagonist of the romance. An intriguing maiden of his retinue challenges the sovereign prince to show off his marksmanship, a distinctive prowess at the hunt. She is "the charming (دلارام *dilārām*)" harpist, a "Roman (رومی *rūmī*)" slave girl called Azāda, a name that is tantamount in Latin to *Liberta*: "The Free Slave Girl". This main story constitutes the framework of the Bahrām-romance. It recalls the ancient topic of the ritual challenge to a cynegetic performance, confronting king and slave, man and beast, power and nature. A variant of this story is given by Nizāmī in the *Haft Paykar*, who calls the maiden Fitna.<sup>1</sup>

The crucial point of the challenge as it is recounted by Firdawsī, by Nizāmī and also by Amīr Khusraw, recalls a passage from *De Vita Caesarum* "On the Caesars' Life" by the Latin historian Suetonius (ca. 69-121 AD). It represents the Roman emperor Domitian (r. 81-96 AD) hunting on the Alban mounts close to Rome:

*Armorum nullo sagittarum vel praecipuo studio tenebatur. Centenas varii generis faeras saepe in Albano secessu conficientem spectare plerique atque etiam ex industria ita quarundam capita figentem, ut duobus ictibus quasi cornua efficeret. Nonnumquam in pueri procul stantis praebentisque pro scopo dispansam dexteræ manus palmam sagittas tanta arte derexit, ut omnes per intervalla digitorum innocue evaderent.*

*He took no interest in arms, but was particularly devoted to archery. Many have more than once seen him slay a hundred wild*

*beasts of different kinds on his Alban estate, and purposefully kill some of them with two successive shots in such a way that the arrows seemed to be horns. Sometimes he would have a slave at a distance holding out as mark the palm of his right hand, with the fingers spread; then he would direct his arrows with such accuracy that they passed harmlessly between the fingers.<sup>2</sup>*

Following this episode, Firdawsī constructs the Bahrām-romance in two distinct parts: a) the king huntsman and knight (سوار *suwwār*) explores the Persian countryside; b) the king engages in international affairs. This latter is a continuation of the theme on the ancient rivalry between the countries that dominated the world, which was represented as a quadripartite space: the four empires of China, India, Persia and Rome (روم *Rūm*), with its new capital, Constantinople.

About half of the verses of part a) develop a narrative sequence, a continuous series of fourteen tales in which the narrator paints the protagonist Bahrām as the knight-errant. The character of each tale (داستان *dāstān*) represents a different category of the realm's subjects and its respective trade: Lambak the water-carrier, Abraham the Jew, Mihrbandād the old *dihqān*, Kabrūy the greengrocer, the boy-shoemaker, Rūzbih the *mūbad*-constructor (story of the destroyed and rebuilt village), the miller-father who manages his four glamorous daughters, Mushknāz, Mushkanak, Nāzyāb and Sūsanak. This is the seventh tale. But, if we take into account the story of Azāda related in the prologue, or framework, the tale of the miller's daughters actually takes eighth place. In the successive development of the story, Bahrām represents the legitimate royal heir, as he is the discoverer of mythical king Jamshīd's hidden treasure. A merchant represents the host and the gardener's wife plays the role of the hostess. Following on this episode, the *dihqān* Būrzīn grants Bahrām the hands of his three daughters, Māhāfarīd the poetess, Farānak the harpist, Shambalīd the dancer. Then another harpist, Arizū, daughter of Māhyār the jeweller, is also given in marriage to Bahrām. The story of Farshīdvar the landlord and Dilāfrūz the little peasant, concludes this series of narratives.<sup>3</sup>

Altogether, Bahrām, the knight, resembles an obstinate wandering huntsman who at night is in search of comfortable hospitality and nice maidens, preferably sisters and artists, whom he marries in order to cheer up the royal harem. "The Nights of the Knight" seems a suitable title to the narrative sequence that constitutes the first half of Firdawsī's Bahrām-romance.

In total, Bahrām marries Seven Sisters, plus Arizū and, when abroad (part b), Sapīnūd the daughter of Shangul the emperor of India. The figure seven (which will be so paramount in Nizāmī's Bahrām-romance) reappears at the end of the second part of Firdawsī's romance, when Shangul visits the court of Bahrām together with the Seven Kings. They reign in Kabul, Sind, Jogyān, Sandal, Jandal, Kashmir and Multan, a chain-belt

between India and Persia both by land and by sea. In Dīnawarī's (d. ca. 895 AD) and Gardīzī's (d. 1050 AD) chronicles, the figure seven is strictly associated to Bahrām's deeds. King Bahrām organizes an army-corps of 'seven thousand brave men', then orders to kill 'seven thousand bulls and he carried with himself their skins and seven thousand one-year-old colts.'<sup>4</sup> Note also this other occurrence of the figure seven in Gardīzī:

*Bahram Gur was a polyglot. He used to speak [1] Pahlavi when playing polo, [2] Turkish on the battle-field, [3] Dari in public audience, [4] Persian with priests and scientists, [5] Heratian (hrīv) with women, [6] Nabatean when he was on ship and [7] Arabic when he became angry.*<sup>5</sup>

From this structural map of Firdawsī's Bahrām-romance, we may argue that the scanty information concerning the historical deeds of King Bahrām-i Gūr required the insertion of an organic series of tales so that the basic plot assumed the substantial proportions of a romance. Thus, narrative materials drawn from a different *corpus* were included, setting up the Bahrām-romance as a composite work, a two-fold structure of which later authors remained aware.

## Order

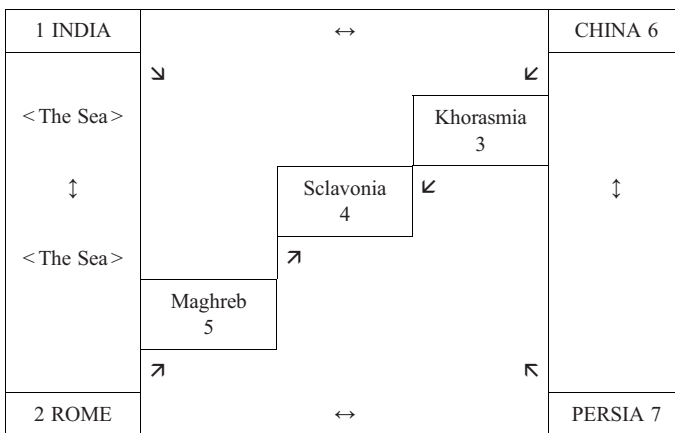
Nizāmī of Ganja displays in his great narrative *Pentalogy* (*Khamsa*) five kinds of poetical books that form a coherent series with a thread of historical perspective coordinating the items. The *Pentalogy's* time process is retroactive, moving 1) from the Islamic tenet (*Makhzan al-Asrār*) to the pre-Islamic epoch, both of the Persian (*Khusraw u Shīrīn*) and of the Arabic (*Laylī u Majnūn*) erotic-dramatic sphere; 2) from the age of Sasanian maturity (*Haft Paykar*) to the fall of the ancient Persian empire and the establishment of a new strategic and philosophical world order (*Iskandar Nāma*, the Alexander-romance).

Nizāmī's Bahrām-romance, the *Haft Paykar* "The Seven Figures" (593/1197) is the fourth book of his *Pentalogy*. The story of Bahrām Gūr develops in the shape of a prologue and an epilogue framing the main part of the romance, the Royal Seven-day Feast, which is presented as the wedding of the king with his seven brides-cum-instructive-narrators. These beautiful damsels originate from 1) Persia, 2) China, 3) (empire of) Rome, 4) Maghreb, 5) India, 6) Khorasmia, 7) Sclavonia (*Saqlāb*). Indeed, Bahrām had ordered that his messengers travel abroad, demand and obtain these wise princely virgins in marriage, that they may give universal character and prestige to his court, according to the idea of the 'Seven Climes'. The damsels' endowments are 'The Seven Tales' and 'The Seven Bodies' they represent, as well as the seven principal members, 'namely, the head,

breast, belly, hands and feet; or the head, hands, sides and feet.’<sup>6</sup> It is remarkable that the title itself of this seven-fold poem, *Haft Paykar*, can be translated in seven possible ways: *Seven Bodies*, *Seven Members*, *Seven Effigies*, *Seven Tales*, *Seven Climes*, *Seven Planets*, or *Seven Heavens*. The nature itself seems ‘to display its preference for the number seven’ (though it appears there are six, not seven, colours in the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet, while ‘the number six is, perhaps, a perfect number.’)<sup>7</sup>

There are four world empires (China, India, Persia and Rome), as Firdawsī reports in his *Bahrām-romance*. But Nizāmī opens up new international horizons for the King’s benefit by adding Khorasmia (neighbouring Turkistan), connected to Sclavonia (including Russia) and, finally, counting also the Maghreb, ([North] Africa, which corresponds more or less to Andalus, neighbour both eastwards and westwards to the domain of Rome – the *Iqlīm al-Rūm* ‘Rome’s Clime’ on Arabic and Persian mediaeval globes.)

Nizāmī’s seven-day narrative series, which springs from a set of different stories, presents the wedding feast held in the magnificent royal palace. During her wedding night, each bride educates the silent king with an evocative tale, for the benefit of this sole listener. The Seven Brides have become the Seven Queens of Persia and the hierarchy of their respective pavilions, cupolas, colours, symbols, planets, days-nights and tales now follows a well-defined political order: 1) India, 2) Rome, 3) Khorasmia, 4) Sclavonia, 5) Maghreb, 6) China and 7) Persia. Thus the four empires: Indian, Roman, Chinese and Persian, are set at the four corners, Khorasmia and Maghreb are situated inwards and Sclavonia fills the centre. This is a perfect narrative mapping, a dramatic scenery reproducing important routes of the Silk and Book Road. The journey there and back agrees with the following geographical pattern:



The story narrated to Bahrām ('Mars' in Persian) by his Slavonian bride, daughter of the King of the Fourth Clime, in her 'Red Cupola' on Tuesday (Latin *dies Martis*), 'the navel of the week (ناف هفته *nāf-i haftā*)', represents the meeting-place, the cross-road on the map and the kernel in the shell of the poem. The theme of this story, which became the legend of Turandot in modern times, is that of the secluded virgin, 'The Maiden of the Castle' (بانوی حصاری *bānū-yi hisārī*). She is the royal princess, a nameless, widely-read painter of the workshop of Chin (نقاش کارخانه چین *naqqāsh-i kārkhāna-yi Chīn*). Her self-portrait is charming like the Moon Figure (پیکار ماه *paykār-māh*). Depicted on the writing black silk (سواد پرند *sawād-parand*), it was both the token of the city of Rus 'as beautiful as a bride' and also a strong talisman (طلسم *tilism*) protecting the castle perilously built on the top of the realm's mountain. There, the maiden challenges the princes who seek her in marriage as pretenders to the royal throne of her father, to perform four difficult tasks. As each competitor is defeated, he pays the blood price and his head is exposed as a trophy at the gate of the powerful city. At long last a nameless but gifted royal prince overcomes the four tasks, – the fourth of which consists in a riddle about the preliminary ritual exchange of symbolic gifts between the maiden and her aspirant, providing evidence of fitness for the nuptial pact. He thus wins the steadfast lunar maiden. As the conqueror of her castle, the hero becomes the realm's new Red-clothed King (ملک سرخ جامه *malik-i surkh-jāma*). In European term, we would compare him to the reigning Mars who meets Venus, his spouse.

As a wedding gift, the hero presents the maiden, *ex officio* guardian and transmitter of the royal legitimacy, with a small blue-eyed shell (مهره ازرق *muhra-yi azraq*). This is the precious countermark the Maiden of the Castle has long been waiting for. She, now a sweet loving bride, unfolds the sense of the emblematic enigma and concludes:

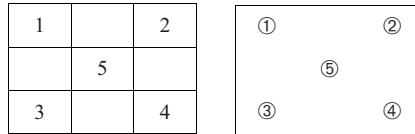
مهره مهر او به سینه من  
مهر گنج است بر خزینه من

(HP29,284)<sup>8</sup>

*His shell for the love of my heart/ is the seal of the treasury on my lap.*<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the enigma is not that bewildering. As a ritual procedure, in order to approach the nuptial investiture, as a last challenge, he must be able to give the right answer to the following synthesising riddle: 'How can 2 pearls (لولو *lu'lu*) and 3 related jewels (جواهر *jawāhir*), hiding 4 mysteries (رمز *ramz*), equal 1+1 gems (گوهر *gawhar*), equalling 5 secrets (راز *rāz*) and 1 seal (مهر *muhr*) to 1 treasure (گنج *ganj*)?' This question is easy to solve if we use a little square board on which 'a pentad (خمسه *khamsa*)' takes shape simultaneously. It appears the key of the bridal enigma.

Elsewhere, Nizāmī, a grand master of various arts, refers symmetrically to the ‘box (خزینہ *khazīna*)’ enclosing ‘the five treasures (پنج گنج *panj ganj*)’, his *Pentology* in verse (also called ‘pearl’ in Persian poetry), on the shelves of his own library:



*Makhzan al-Asrār* ① *Khusraw u Shūrīn* ② *Laylī u Majnūn* ③ *Haft Paykar* ④ *Iskandar Nāma* ⑤

As regards the fourth bridal tale of the *Haft Paykar*, Nizāmī might have gathered information about the Rūs people in the ‘*Ajā’ib-Nāma* (The Mirabilia), a narrative Persian cosmography by Muhammad (or Najib) Hamadānī (d. ca. 1160-1170 AD). This text relates how the Rūs women wear a golden or wooden jewel-case on their breast, as well as many golden necklaces, gifts from their wooers. For these women, the greatest gem is ‘the green shell (مهره سبز *muhra-yi sabz*)’. This resembles (save for the authorial choice of colour) the *muhra-yi azraq* mentioned by Nizāmī.<sup>10</sup>

Nizāmī also mentions that the Maiden of the Castle of the Rūs realm is an expert painter of the Chinese school. Her self-portrait was exactly like a Moon Figure depicted on black silk. This recalls Mānī’s outstanding painting gift and school. It is interesting in this context to mention a remains of a Manichaean painting on silk from the archaeological site of Kocho (Chinese *Gao-ch’ang*), the ancient royal Uighur capital. It represents the Portrait of ‘The Deity of Moon’, the Maiden of Light for the community of *Electi* and *Auditores*. The figure of light ‘in Uighur texts is invoked simply as “Moon God” (*ai tāngri*)’.<sup>11</sup>

The theme of the wedding enigma and other elements of Nizāmī’s fourth bridal tale are already present in two older and influential narrative texts. The first is the initial part of *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* (ca. third c. AD). This Latin novel influenced the subsequent European literatures, for instance the *Gesta Romanorum* and Shakespeare’s *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (1608 AD). The second is the *Kathasaritsagara*, the ‘Ocean’ of Sanskrit stories by Somadeva (ca. 1063-1081 AD).<sup>12</sup> In book V, 24, we find the story of the Golden City and of Kanakarekhā, the daughter of King Parapakārin. In book XII, 72, we find the story of Udayavatī, the daughter of King Udayatunga.

The story of the fair royal princess isolated on a mountain-top or secluded in a castle is a topos. Its origins pertain to the remote royal/bridal rite involving the succession to the throne, which is also at the core of ancient Latium, and consisted in a competition among the pretenders accompanied by the sacrifice of the losers. Later the motif reappears in typical stories of Georgian, Mingrelian, German lore. In Russian folk-tales, the

decisive task entails the solution of an enigma. In Christian variants, the fair maiden stands like a saint isolated on a column.<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare relates another variant in *The Merchant of Venice* (1597): the story of the rich Lady of Belmont, Portia 'fairer than word / Of wondrous virtues' (act I, sc.1), whose suitors are faced with the enigmatic task of choosing one of her three caskets: the Prince of Morocco, whose scimitar 'slew the Sophy and a Persian prince' (act II, sc. I), the Prince of Aragon, who reads the inscription 'The fire seven times tried this' (act II, sc. IX) and Bassiano, the friend of Antonio the merchant of Venice, who correctly chooses the leaden casket containing 'Fair Portia's counterfeit' (act III, sc. II), the portrait of the Maiden of Belmont, her lovely countermark.<sup>14</sup>

The name Turandot, by which the Princess is known in European modern literary developments, originates in d'Herbelot's posthumous *Bibliothèque Orientale* prefaced by Galland. After a first Tourandokht, Queen of Persia and daughter of Khosrou Perviz, d'Herbelot introduces a second Tourandokht:

*C'est le nom de la fille de Hassan Ben Sahal, le plus riche Seigneur de son temps, qui fut mariée au Khalife AlMamon. Voyez la magnificence des Nôces de cette Princesse dans le Titre de Hassan Ben Sahal. Cette Princesse était fort sçavante, & douée d'un très bel esprit... Hassan, Fils de Sahal, ou de Sohail, comme quelques-uns l'appellent, fut gouverneur de l'Iraq Babylonienne, ou de la Caldée pour le Khalife AlMamon. Il était frère de Fadhel Ben Sohal Vizir & favory de ce Khalife qui épousa la fille de Hassan nommée Touran-Dokht. Le Tarikh Al Abbas, ou l'histoire des Abbasides, raconte fort au long la magnificence de ces nôces. [...] Le Prince la trouva assise sur un trône la tête chargée de mil perles [...] Le Khalife voulut que cette riche coeiffure lui fuit assignée pour son doüarie. [...] L'on attribue ordinairement à cet Hassan Ben Sahal ou Sohail que l'on dit avoir été le Vizir d'AlMamon, la traduction du livre Persien intitulé Giavidán Khirde, en Arabe... La Sagesse de tous les tem[p]s. C'est un livre de Philosophie morale composé par Huschenk ancien Roy de Perse, lequel a été traduit plusieurs fois, & en plusieurs langues. Entre autres versions celle de Hassan fils de Sohail Vizir d'AlMamon septième Khalife de la race Abbasides est célèbre: il la fit en langue Arabique sur l'ancien texte Persien; & elle a depuis été mise en Turc, dans un stile très-élégant, par un Auteur qui l'a intitulée Anvâr Sohaili, c'est-à-dire, les lumières de Soheil, en faisant allusion du nom de ce Vizir à l'étoile de Canopus, que les Arabes appellent Sohail.<sup>15</sup>*

As we can see from this text, the figure of Tourandokht, the learned and sagacious Princess who became a prosperous bride of al-Ma'mun (813-833),



the seventh Abbasid Caliph, at a royal wedding feast at the powerful court of Baghdad, stands within the *Alf Layla wa Layla* ambit. Indeed, the story of the slave Tawaddud in this latter book presents some traits comparable to Nizāmī's fourth bridal tale. Furthermore, the *Javidan-khirad* "Sophia Perennis" is the Pahlavi collection of ancient Persian, Indian, Greek and Arabic moral precepts, later translated into Arabic by the Persian philosopher and historian Miskawayh (ca. 986-992 AD). The collection includes the *Kébêtos Thêbaïou Pínax* (*Cebetis Tabula*, ca. first c. AD). This famous story of an allegorical Picture containing 'The Enigma of Cebes (*Qabis*)' is again presented by Miskawayh in his *Adab al-'Arab wa al-Furs* "The Arabian and Persian Cultures". It becomes a source for the Persian eschatological poem *Sayr al-'ibad ilà al-ma'ad* by Sanā'ī of Ghazna (ca. 1119-1123 AD).<sup>16</sup> As to the *Anvār-i Suhaylī*, "The Lights of Canopus", it is a well-known Persian recasting of the Kalīla and Dimna fables, a label for the Sanskrit and subsequent Eurasian forms of "Bidpay's Fables".<sup>17</sup> This great book, together with other ones, such as "The Precepts of Ancient Philosophers", the romances of Sindbad, Alexander, Barlaam and Josaphat, and the lost *Hazār Afsāna*, reshaped as "Thousand and One Nights", constituted the narrative bulk of what could be termed the International Library of the Mediaeval World.<sup>18</sup>

As an answer to *Les Mille et Une Nuits, Contes Arabes* translated by Galland (Paris 1704-1717), Pétis de la Croix and Lesage published *Les Mille et Un Jours, Contes Persans* (Paris 1710-1712), where Turandotte becomes the Princess of China in a Persian-Turkish variant of Nizāmī's bridal story. In this new garb, the Maiden of the Castle steps on the international scene of literature, theatre, music. Her fame spreads more particularly through *Turandot* or *Turandotte*, the 'Chinese fable', a tragic-comedy versified by Gozzi (Venice, Teatro S. Samuele, 1762) and she is also adopted by Schiller and Goethe (Weimar, Hoftheater, 1802).<sup>19</sup> Several later operas adapted the Gozzi-Schiller's play.<sup>20</sup>

Let's turn back to the *Haft Paykar*, where on the eighth day, Bahrām's one-week honeymoon comes to an end. During this period, a despot minister, Rāst-Rawshān, has mistreated the country and is now denounced by seven injured witnesses. Bahrām condemns the guilty minister to the gallows. Following on this act, the King disappears. This episode of conspiracy and consequent trial pertains to a subsidiary theme, which receives more conspicuous developments in other parallel texts (see par. 3 and 5 below).

When we include the leading-story of King Bahrām-i Gūr, we obtain eight tales instead of the seven figurative tales narrated by the royal spouses. In the same manner, Nizāmī tells of seven co-protagonists and their seven portraits, plus one: this eighth portrait was to be seen in 'the private room' of Khavarnaq. Bahrām-i Gūr himself had been portrayed 'in the middle (*dar miyān*)' of the pictorial scene representing the seven



portraits of the king's future spouses (HP13). From this point of view the title *Haft Paykar* "The Seven Portraits" refers to this bridal gallery of the romance and Nizāmī involves without emphasis, almost secretly, the number eight (the octad): by joining the scene of the seven wedding tales, the central narrative sequence, to the story of King Bahrām, the part of the romance based on historical grounds.

We first set off in search of previous books presenting a plan, or a core of structural features, similar to those of Nizāmī's Bahrām-romance. We will now continue examining several clues and, more particularly, we will examine elements springing from two dissimilar sources: the *Book of Esther* and the *Sindbād-romance*.

### ■ Feast

An ancient text yielding an interesting comparison with the *Haft Paykar* is the *Book of Esther*, named after the beautiful Jewess who becomes spouse to the Achaemenid Ahasuerus. This biblical book (fourth or second c. BC) evokes the Persian empire through an outstanding theme, the royal wedding feast.<sup>21</sup> It also relates the institution of the Purim, the Jewish festival. Olmstead identifies Ahasuerus with the Achaemenid King Artaxerxes II Memnon (r. 404-359 BC). It is his court then, which the book of Esther describes in detail, also mentioning the ancient Persian term *dat* 'the law' in the Hebrew form *dath*.<sup>22</sup> *Esther* is placed as the fifth book, the most prominent scroll (*megillā*) of the pentalogy that, according to the third division (*Ketūbhīm* 'The Writings') of the Hebrew canon, is called 'The Five Scrolls (*ōāmeš Megillōt*)'.<sup>23</sup> *Esther* contains a source suitable for setting the story-telling to a framework, like the prologue of *Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>24</sup> This Arabic book transmits a separate version of the Bahrām-romance, while *Esther* and *Haft Paykar* are set within a pentalogy and bear similarities.<sup>25</sup>

Let's point out the narrative traits relating the framework of Nizāmī's Bahrām-romance and its bridal core to the *Book of Esther*. The pertinent data is self-evident. The vicissitudes of Ahasuerus, who reigned over all the lands and the isles of the sea, 'are described in the books of the Medes and of the Persians' (*Esther* 10.1-2). Seven eunuchs attend to the king's personal service, while seven Median and Persian princely leaders are his special advisors on state matters (*E.* 1.10-14).<sup>26</sup> Ahasuerus orders a convivial 'seven-day feast' in the paradise-like garden of his royal palace at Susa, which contains sky-blue pavilions (*E.* 1.5-6). The king repudiates the very beautiful queen Vashti, as she demurely refuses to obey his order to show herself to the male guests at the banquet on the seventh day (*E.* 1.10-20). As the question of replacement arises, the court counsellors propose to 'search for beautiful young virgins in all the provinces' in order to install them in the royal harem, so that the king may choose the new queen. The

royal order is sent out in all languages and scripts of the provinces of the empire (*E.* 1.21-22; 2.2-4). Then seven very beautiful girls of the palatial dwelling-place are assigned to the king's service, each virgin entering his room in the evening and emerging in the morning (*E.* 2.9-14). In the seventh year of the reign of the king it is the turn of Esther (Hadassa), who then becomes his favourite spouse (*E.* 2.16). At night, King Ahasuerus, unable to sleep, orders that be read out to him instructive stories from 'the histories and the annals of the ancient times' (*E.* 6.1). Another element of the *Book of Esther* recalls the end of the *Haft Paykar*: the plot of the wicked Macedonian minister Haman and his punishment (*E.* 5-7; 12; 16.10) is analogous to the conspiracy and the punishment of Rāst-Rawshān, the tyrannous minister of King Bahrām.

It is possible that Nizāmī or his informers were aware of – at the very least had heard hints of – a compendium of the *Book of Esther*. Besides, Nizāmī pays particular attention to the convivial theme in the *Iqbāl Nāma*, (the second volume of his Alexander-romance), which is a broad variant of the Greek *Septem Sapientium Convivium*.

## Trace

As already mentioned, Nizāmī also combines the Bahrām-romance with another Persian narrative text, an extended source that serves to structure the romance itself. A trace of this source is found in the "The Book of Sindbād" the philosopher. This work is famous as *Historia Septem Sapientium*, "The Seven Sages of Rome", or under other names in its European correlative variations. Several tales of Greek, Latin and Asiatic origins were included in this book and spread over the Eurasian continent.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the classical legend of Secundus 'the silent philosopher' affects the structure of the book, which is also connected to the mediaeval legend of the Latin poet Virgil.<sup>28</sup> The twin romances of Sindbād and of the Seven Sages are excellent examples of the mutual connections between the Eurasian narrative literatures since ancient times.<sup>29</sup> The direct communication links between the empires of Rome-Constantinople and of Persia throw light on the Latin references that are scattered and recognizable in Persian historical and narrative texts. Some Latin-Persian connections are also present in the mediaeval cosmographical texts concerning the topography and the legend of Rome.<sup>30</sup>

According to the *Mujmal al-Tawārikh wa al-Qisas*, a remarkable Persian history and cosmography by an anonymous author (520/1126), the *Kitāb-i Sindbād* was an outstanding work among the 'seventy books' written during the Arsacid period (ca. 247 BC-225 AD), which might represent the now lost Parthian literary heritage. The anonymous historian quotes the *Surūr Nāma*, an archaic Persian text, recording a rare and interesting biographical note: Simnār (سمنار) the builder of the Castle of Khavarnaq (قصر

(خورنق) was the *rūmī* father of the sculptor Kītūs, to whom he evidently transferred the inheritance of his craft.<sup>31</sup> In the *Haft Paykar*, Simnār is presented as 'a famous' artist from 'the land of Rome (کشور روم)' who was first of all a sculptor: 'a skilled man who makes the stone soft like the wax (زیرکی کو سنگ سازد موم)' (HP9,7). The name Simnār, related as Sinimmār in Arabic mediaeval texts, is of foreign origin, as is Kītūs, and the etymology of the word *khavarnaq* also deserves our attention.<sup>32</sup>

It seems likely that the name Simnār/Sinimmār derives from the late Latin term *signārius* 'sculptor, statuary'.<sup>33</sup> For instance, a Latin obituary inscription found in Rome mentions a young artist called Maecius Aprilis Signarius, that is 'the Sculptor'.<sup>34</sup> As to Simnār's son, the name Kītūs doubtless reflects the Latin term *citus* 'swift' that exists also as the surname Citus.<sup>35</sup> At least eight ancient Latin inscriptions prove the popularity of the surname Citus for historical characters living in various provinces of the Roman Empire, above all in Africa.<sup>36</sup> Finally, it does not seem a rash conjecture to suggest that the word *khavarnaq* is linked to the classical Latin term *caverna* 'cavern, cave, cavity'. This term very often denotes 'the convex form' of a material thing, 'everything that is arch-shaped' and 'the interior part of a building'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in the *Haft Paykar*, Nizāmī specifies that the Khavarnaq palace (کوشک *kūshk*) built by Simnār has a 'round (گرد *gird*)' shape.<sup>38</sup>

The Pahlavi version of the *Book of Sindbād* and its possible Arsacid version are lost. The archaic Persian versions of the *Sindbād*-romance by Rūdakī (before 940 AD), 'Amīd Abū'l Favāris Fanārūzī /Qanavāzī (ca. 950 AD) and Azraqī (before 1070 AD) are so dispersed that they also may be considered part of the world-library of absent manuscripts.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the Greek *Liber Syntipae* by Michail Andreopoulos (Mitylene, Cappadocia, ca. 1090 AD) constitutes the oldest surviving version of the *Book of Sindbād*. Andreopoulos states in his brief Prologue that his work is based on an anonymous lost Syriac book deriving from the one written by Musos the Persian.<sup>40</sup> This Persian author or translator, Musos (Mūsa), maybe of Christian affiliation as was his Syriac transmitter, must have been at work in the ninth-tenth c. AD.<sup>41</sup> It is possible to identify him with Mūsa ibn 'Isa al-Kisrawī, the presumed translator of the *Book of Sindbad* from Pahlavi into Arabic (ca. ninth c. AD).<sup>42</sup> This latter is also listed among the early collators and translators of the *Khwadāy-nāmag*, the lost Pahlavi 'Book of the Sovereign', already transmitted through the missing Arabic translation by Ibn al-Muqaffā' (first half of the eighth c. AD).<sup>43</sup>

## ■ Trial

The pattern, the initial part and some typical traits of the *Liber Syntipae* are comparable to the framework and some narrative traits of *Haft Paykar*. A well-known passage by the Arabian historian and geographer Mas'ūdī

(d. 345/956) is worth mentioning here: under the reign of ‘Kurush?’ [Cyrus] King of India ‘vivait Syntipas (*Sindibad*), auteur du Livre des Sept vizirs, du Maître, du jeune esclave et de la femme du roi, c’est à dire du livre intitulé *Kitab as-Sindibad*.’<sup>44</sup>

The name Cyrus, so authoritative but commonly lost in the Persians’ memory, reverberated widely in the Greek historical and literary tradition. Thus, King Cyrus appears also at the *incipit* of the *Liber Syntipae*. In fact, Syntipas was the foremost philosopher at his court, the master among the Seven Philosophers/Ministers, according to the text transmitted by Moses the Persian. Andreopoulos in his informative ‘Prologue’ presents the characters and the thread of the *Liber Syntipae*, that is ‘a philosophical narration concerning the Persian King Cyrus, his legitimate son, the prince’s master Syntipas, the seven court philosophers and one of the royal spouses, a wicked stepmother of the prince hatching a plot against him.’<sup>45</sup> As a result of this conspiracy the king harshly condemns the prince to death, but the seven wise philosophers or ministers delay the execution with a prospect of getting a fair process and the right sentence. At this point, the moral device of the seven-day narration of *exempla* is inserted. On each day of the week, each philosopher in turn tells a couple of instructive stories to the king. The stepmother, who accuses the prince, relates a contradictory tale to her husband the king, in order to refute the defence. The theme of the trial frames the narrative sequence of the romance, and the brief story of the prince is enlarged by the insertion of this series of tales.<sup>46</sup> In the *Liber Syntipae*, the trial is settled on the eighth day, when the prince is allowed to break his silence, becoming the ninth narrator, and Syntipas intervenes as the tenth and last narrator. Andreopoulos sums up at the *explicit* of the book: the tales by the philosophers, each one pertinent to a moral teaching, ‘are 14’; the tales by the concubine 6, the ones by the prince 6, plus 1 by Syntipas, so ‘in all 27 tales’ are reported.<sup>47</sup> Firdawsī’s Bahrām-romance also features a series of fourteen tales (see par. 1). This detail might be the trace of a link with the *Sindbād*-romance.

It is not necessary here to come back to the *Haft Paykar*, where the structural topic of the trial during which each of the seven injured witnesses tells his own brief story as a deed of indictment against the minister recalls an analogous trial of the minister who is sentenced in the *Book of Esther* (see par. 3). We shall focus on the initial part of the *Liber Syntipae* and on one of its tales that undoubtedly constitute two structural traits of the Bahrām-romance as well as of the *Haft Paykar*.

## School

The narrative *incipit* of Andreopoulos’s book bears evidence of the connection between the *Sindbād* and Bahrām romances. The Greek text reads: ‘There was a King by the name of Cyrus who had seven spouses.’<sup>48</sup> This

simple line is promising: the story of the king and his seven brides is the narrative core of *Haft Paykar*. However, the *Liber Syntipae* diverges from this theme and introduces the brief story of the youth of the Crown Prince, Cyrus' son, in whom one easily recognizes the young Bahrām. In fact, Cyrus plays here the role of King Yazdigird I in the prologue of the Bahrām-romance. King Cyrus sends the prince "to a school, so that he can receive a full education about the whole knowledge" from his teacher, the philosopher Syntipas, "a great man of science" who is "also learned in medical art."<sup>49</sup> In the introductory part of *Haft Paykar* the master's role is played by Munzir, learned in astronomy, who teaches prince Bahrām three languages (Arabic, Persian and Greek), astronomy and finally, the art of the arms, fit for a knight (HP 10, 45). The prince's school is situated in Khavarnaq castle, which Simnār had just built as "a silver pavilion (سیمین رواقی *sīmīn riwāqī*)", chiefly white (سپید *sapīd*) and painted with "thousands of images, including astral ones."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Syntipas, who as technician also plays the role of the architect and painter Simnār, builds for his pupil "a new and very large residence decorated in an artistic fashion and plastered in a shining white. Then he painted on the walls of the house all that could be a lesson for the young man." Syntipas explains the meaning of the paintings, where "he has included the Sun, the Moon, the planets and the stars" (HP 9, 15-7).<sup>51</sup>

The narrative topic evoked in the *Liber Syntipae* through the step-mother's tale on the third day of the trial relates to the introductory part of the Bahrām-romance. The *incipit* of this tale reads: "There was a king who had a son very fond of hunting." A counsellor takes the prince to a hunting party and the young man spurs his horse to chase an onager on his own (the wild ass, called *gōr* in the pre-existent Persian text). On the way, the prince meets a princess who had just fallen from her elephant and he offers her his mount. But this is "a deception," as the false princess traveller represents female deceit. It is also noteworthy that the *Book of Sindbād/Seven Sages*, as is the case with its connected literature, represents the paradigm of the misogynous novel. The princess guides the prince to "an inn," where two fellows are waiting for her. The prince, hearing their "uproar" – their quarrel about whose turn it is to share the guest-room – realizes that the princess and her fellows are "witches." Cautiously, he does not enter the inn but immediately turns back to his starting-point. There, the would-be princess appears again and, replaying what has just passed, again joins him on his horse. The prince invokes God to be saved from "this evil devil and his deceit": instantly, "the witch fell down, wallowing in the dust."<sup>52</sup> This story constitutes an old version of the adventure of the prince huntsman and knight with his female fellow-traveller, who plays the role of Azāda ('Liberta' in Firdawsī's version) / Fitna ('Diversion', 'Sedition' in Nizāmī's version) / Dilāram ('The Charmer' in Amīr Khusraw's version which is inspired by Firdawsī). Thus, in

Andreopoulos's text some episodes of the story of Bahrām Gur are merged with the narrative sequence of the *Liber Syntipae*. This indicates the early literary connection between the romances of Bahrām and Sindbād.

Finally, an unusual item, a piece of Egyptian textile (seventh or eighth c. AD) has been added recently to the rich iconographical inventory of the adventure of Bahrām-i Gūr with Azāda. The only remaining medallion of this textile shows a knight archer with a young girl galloping on a horse. The girl seems to grasp an arrow and two strange figures appear in the scene.<sup>53</sup> In my interpretation, this arrow is a whip or a sickle, the girl is the princess/witch, her two fellow witches are represented as masks, one of them in the shape of a strange tree. I believe that this is a representation of the above-mentioned story of the *Liber Syntipae*. A variant of it can be found in the Pahlavi novel *Kār-nāmag ī Ardakhshīr ī Pābagān*, the story of the epoch-making struggle between Ardawān, the last Parthian King (r. ca. 215-225 AD.), and Ardakhshīr, the founder of the Sasanian kingdom. This short book contains in its first part various typical traits of the Bahrām-romance. Let us summarise this story which is similar to the Greek text of Syntipas. During a royal hunting party, Ardakhshīr spurs his horse in order to chase the onager. A slave girl (*kanīzag*) at Ardawān's service is Ardakhshīr's mistress and behaves like a spy, a female thief and 'a whore'. Treacherous to her king, she elopes with Ardakhshīr, on their respective horses towards 'the road of Pars'. At a crossroad, Ardakhshīr stops outside a village, a crucial place. Two women diviners who were sitting there predict a brilliant future to the next king. Ardakhshīr then continues on his way. The Ardakhshīr-romance does not further mention the mistress, who has presumably disappeared into the village or was abandoned on the way.<sup>54</sup> However, this episode is similar to that of the prince huntsman's meeting-place with the princess/witch, the Diverter, who had fallen down from her elephant in the *Liber Syntipae*. We further notice evidence about the connection of this topic, as a passage of the *Testament of Ardakhshīr* reports that elephants were kept at court. The *Elucidation* of the text records: "elephant" refers to his ordering that highway-robbers and heretics be cast beneath an elephant's feet.<sup>55</sup> Diverters and highway-robbers probably deserved the same kind of treatment.

## ■ Response

Amīr Khusraw's *Hasht Bihisht* "The Eight Paradises" (Delhi, 701/1301) is the earliest and major Persian variation to the *Haft Paykar*. This fifth book of his narrative *Pentology* is a keen poetical answer to Nizāmī's almost century-old work. It is thanks to its "answer" by the poet of Delhi that Nizāmī's *Pentology* became a canonical work for both the Persian narrative poetry and the art of the book. Amīr Khusraw's artistic skill is appreciated in the classical survey of the Persian poets that the Herat poet Jāmī places

in 1487 in the seventh garden of his *Bahāristān* (in which eight gardens represent eight chapters). Jāmī, who made of his own pentalogy into an heptalogy (*Haft Awrang*), states about Amīr Khusraw that “no-one answered Nizāmī’s *Pentalogy* better than he did.”<sup>56</sup> According to the plan of *Hasht Bihisht* the tales are eight in all, including one in the prologue, whose narrator is the author himself. He cuts down the legend of Bahrām, retains the prologue, with his delicate adventure with Dilāram, culminating with the construction of the paradisiacal palace (first tale). He also retains the epilogue that recalls the disappearance of the king huntsman. The nuptial feast, the core of *Hasht Bihisht* after the model of *Haft Paykar*, frames the narrative sequence of the Amīr Khusraw’s Bahrām-romance. During her wedding night, each new queen narrates an evocative tale to the silent king, the listener, whose mania for hunting had to be treated with a traditional psychotherapy, the story-telling. In the sixth paradise, the poet proposes a subtle rewriting of the first bridal tale of Nizāmī’s *Haft Paykar* and in the fifth paradise, he recounts the story of the fair Maiden secluded on top of a column/tower. It is a delightful variant of the tale that comparative scholarship classifies as *Inclusa* (‘Reclusa’, ‘Puteus’, too) and is found in almost all European versions of the book of the Seven Sages.<sup>57</sup> We have, then, further evidence that the fourth bridal story narrated in *Haft Paykar*, the legend of Turandot, is pertaining to the twin romances of *Sindbād/The Seven Sages*.

Besides Asiatic, Indian and old Greek sources, the narrative material selected by Amīr Khusraw for his *Hasht Bihisht* can be compared with Latin texts by authors like Suetonius (see par.1 above), Plautus (*Miles Gloriosus*), Vitruvius (*De Architectura*), even Saxo Grammaticus (*Historia Danica*) (ca. 1208-1218), as regards some traits of the legend of Hamlet.<sup>58</sup>

## ■ Conclusions

The story of King Bahrām-i Gūr required the insertion of a series of tales for the book to assume fitting proportions for a romance. Firdawsī and early Persian historians associate the number seven to the character of this Sasanian King. This figure is significant for Nizāmī also who deals with the same romance in the *Haft Paykar*, the masterpiece of his *Pentalogy*. The poet of Ganja sets at the core of his romance the mysterious story of the Maiden of the Castle, a subtle painter of the workshop of China, that pertains to an ancient narrative topic appearing again as the legend of Turandokht, known as Turandot in Europe since the early eighteenth century. As he narrates the nuptial enigma proposed by the Maiden, Nizāmī also alludes to the structure of his poetical *Pentad*.

The seven-day long royal Feast, the subsequent plot of the wicked minister and his punishment depicted by Nizāmī constitute the core and the final process of the *Haft Paykar*. These motifs seem related to features found



in the *Book of Esther*, the convivial novel about the wedding of an ancient Persian King. Apparently, Nizāmī knew a compendium of *Esther*, a book which is also meaningfully placed in a definite pentalogy, the biblical “Five Scrolls”. A seven-day narration of stories and a trial also frame the romance of *Sindbād/The Seven Sages*, which is associated to the Bahrām-romance, as these books moved together, twinned like fellows active in neighbouring grounds of the mediaeval narrative world. The structural connection of the *Book of Sindbād/The Seven Sages* with the Bahrām-romance is proved by the outline and by several topics of the Greek *Liber Syntipae* by Andreopoulos, the earliest extant complete *Book of Sindbād*. The *Syntipae* is based on the Syriac translation of the work by a former author, Moses the Persian, whose historical identity remains uncertain. The text he transmitted and other comparative factors show that half of the pahlavi novel *Kār-nāmag i Ardakshūr ī Pābagān* was based on a variant of the story labelled as the adventure of Bahrām with Azāda (Firdawsī) / Fitna (Nizāmī) / Dilāram (Amīr Khusraw), a cynegetic topic as old as its correlative Latin report by the historian Suetonius about the Roman emperor Domitian.

Amīr Khusraw of Delhi in his *Hasht Bihisht*, gave a beautiful response to *Haft Paykar*. The pattern and the narrative contents of *Hasht Bihisht*, including the typical story of the Maiden of the Castle (‘Reclusa’ in its European correlative texts), confirm that the *Sindbād*-romance was a core source of Nizāmī’s *Haft Paykar*. On the whole, he gave a splendid variation on the convivial scene of *Esther* and the framework of *Sindbād*.

Finally, several Latin texts and terms, like *signarius* ‘sculptor’ (becoming *Simnār*), appear connected to Persian mentions, particularly concerning the Bahrām-romance, through intermediary Greek, Syriac and Arabic books, or maybe in a direct manner, as shown by linguistic segments and literary findings about the contest between the empires of Rome and Persia in ancient times.

## Notes

- 1 HP20. Early on, the visual arts have illustrated this story of Azāda or Fitna, together with Bahrām-i Gūr mounted on camel or horse: Bürgel (1967) 26-34. Pantke (1974) 133-42. Shreve Simpson (1985). Fontana (1986) 79-9, 103-20, plates I-XX.
- 2 Suetonius (1979) II/ 380-1: *Domitianus* XIX.2-5.
- 3 Firdawsī-Nafisi (1314) 2085-185, 111-1251; Azāda and Bahrām Gūr: 2085-7; Shangūl and the Seven Kings: 2250, 2401-4.
- 4 Dinawari (1371) 84-5.
- 5 Gardizi (1363) 77-8.
- 6 Steingass (1892) 1502, lemmas هفت حکایت = هفت اندام
- 7 Giora (1988) 171-8. Krotkoff (1984).
- 8 For the first *misra*, see Nizami-Ritter/Rypka (1934) 35,284.
- 9 Nizami-Barat-Sanjani(1373) 114-5, 3306, 3331, 3333. (*sīna* in fact denotes the *sinus*).



- 10 There are other similarities between this cosmography and Nizāmī's work: Hamadani (1375) also recounts 'the diversion (فتنه)' caused by the religions of Zaradusht and Mānī in ancient Persia. A further similarity is the mention that the Isle of Thyle is 'under the Northern Pole (زیر قطب شمالی): 121-2 (*fitna*), 229 (*Rūs*), 439 (*Tulya*). See also the article by Casari in this volume. As a character, Fitna represents 'the Diverter' in *Haft Paykar*. In the *Iskandar-Nāma* the 'Water of Life (آب زندگانی)' is found 'under the North Pole (زیر قطب شمال)'. Piemontese (2000a). Nizāmī recounts in his Alexander-romance the story of the skill of Mānī, the prodigious Chinese painter in the Persian historical and literary tradition (Piemontese (1995a). Raza (1997).
- 11 Klimkeit (1982) 7, 45-4, pl. XXV.
- 12 Somadeva (1928).
- 13 Frazer (1922) I, XIV.v. Propp (1949) II/57-62; IX/485-6. Di Nola (1978).
- 14 Shakespeare (1962) 225, 229, 233-4, 238-9.
- 15 d'Herbelot (1697) 399-400: 'Giavidan khird'; 436: 'Hassan, Fils de Sahal'; 895-896: 'Tourandokht'.
- 16 de Bruijn (1983) 39-41, 194-5.
- 17 de Blois (1990).
- 18 Piemontese (1999).
- 19 Maria de Bernardis (1932). Wesselski (1934). Wesselski (1937). Meier (1941). Rossi (1956).
- 20 For instance: a) *Turandot*, music by F. Danzi, Karlsruhe, Hoftheater, 1816; b) *Turanda*, name of the daughter of Cosroe King of Persia after d'Herbelot, libretto by A. Gazzoletti, music by A. Bazzini, performed in Milan, Teatro alla Scala, 1867; c) *Turandot*, libretto in German and music by F. Busoni, dedicatee A. Toscanini, Zürich, Stadttheater, 1917; d) *Turandot*, libretto by G. Adami & R. Simoni, unfinished music by G. Puccini (1921-1924), posthumous performance in Milan, Teatro alla Scala, conductor A. Toscanini, 1926. In this latter work, an unfortunate but very handsome 'Principino di Persia' appears: he is given no chance to sing as he is promptly executed after a unique cry of 'Turandot!...' (act I). See Arcà (1983) 9. See also Chelkowski (1370).
- 21 Bible (1998) *Book of Esther* XVII, 793-812.
- 22 Olmstead (1959) 119-20, 171, 183, 395, 423). Ahasuerus is traditionally identified with Xerxes (r. 486-465 BC).
- 23 These comprise the books of 'Ruth', 'Canticles', 'Ecclesiastes (*Qohelet*)', 'Lamentations' and 'Esther'. In the biblical manuscript tradition, these five brief but important books have been grouped as a pentalogy at least since the thirteenth century. See Paton (1908) 1-2. Myers (1987) 353, 706. Prévost (1990). Lexicon (1995) columns 894-5; (1998), columns 65-6.
- 24 Cosquin (1909) 7-49, 161-97.
- 25 Piemontese (2000b).
- 26 The possibly original Persian names of the eunuchs are Abataza, Bigtha, Bizthā, Kharbōnā, Karkas, Zēthar, while the first eunuch is Mauman / Mehuman. The princes are called Admāthā, Karshna, Marsenā, Meres [: Mares], Shēthar, Tarshīsh, with the seventh prince called Mamuchan / Memukan. See Justi (1895) I, 5, 68, 69, 158, 170, 195, 203, 298, 322, 359 (Queen Washti), 385.
- 27 Historia (1912). Epstein (1967). Runte (1974). Campbell (1975). Brunner (1988).
- 28 Perry (1964). Comparetti (1896). Spargo (1934).
- 29 Comparetti (1882). Chauvin (1904). Perry (1960). Runte (1984). Belcher (1987).
- 30 Piemontese (2002).
- 31 Mujmal-Bahar (1318) 79, 93-4. Mujmal-Omidsalar (2001) ff. 30r, 34v.
- 32 Bassat (1906).
- 33 Forcellini (1930) 361. Du Cange (1954) 480. Enciclopedia (1966) 288.
- 34 Inscriptions (1882) 1289 n° 9896.

- 35 De-Vit (1868) II/296. Thesaurus (1906-12) c.1208-9.
- 36 Mommsen (1873) I/502 n° 3943, II/1092. Zangemeister (1871) 124 n° 1936. Wilmanns (1881) n° 136, 422, 3618, 4938, 9094, pp. 26, 61, 388, 494, 779. Cagnat (1891) 1458 n° 15028.
- 37 Thesaurus (1906) III, c. 644-6.
- 38 HP10,11. Vesel (1995).
- 39 Safa (1336) 1001. Rudaki (1961) 481-4. Zahiri (1975) 280-3. de Fouchécour (1986) 420-5.
- 40 Liber Syntipae (1912) 3.
- 41 Andreopoulos (1993) 10 and 42.
- 42 Tafazzoli (1376) 299-300.
- 43 Safa (1333) 68-70.
- 44 Mas'udi-Barbier de Maynard (1962) I/68.
- 45 Liber Syntipae (1912) 3.
- 46 The second tale told by the philosopher speaking on the first day bears the trace of the theme that is developed as a plan for the *Tūī-Nāma*, Nakhshabi (1330).
- 47 Liber Syntipae (1912) 129-30.
- 48 Liber Syntipae (1912) 3.
- 49 Liber Syntipae (1912) 4.
- 50 See Vesel's article in this volume.
- 51 Liber Syntipae (1912) 5 and 119. A variant of this story is found in Nakhshabi-Mujtaba'i (1372) 71-84, whose tale (*dāstān*) narrated on the eighth night represents a *textus brevior* of the "Book of Sindbad" itself.
- 52 Liber Syntipae (1912) 24-7.
- 53 Wien, Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Inv. N° T 417. Fontana (2000) 20 and 31, fig. 8), quoting Egger (1967) pl. 53 and Hagedorn (1992) 188, fig. 54. Also Waetzoldt (1964) 34, n° 120, Abb. 74.
- 54 Pagliaro (1927) 23-30. Cereti (2000) 194-8.
- 55 Boyce (1968) 48.
- 56 Jami-Hakimi (1371) 106.
- 57 Krappe (1924-37) 385-407; (1925) IX, 345-65; (1927) XI, 163-76; (1932) XVI, 271-82; (1937) XIX, 'IX. *Inclusa*' 213-26.
- 58 Piemontese (1995b). Piemontese (1995c). Amir Khusraw-Piemontese (1996) 150-78.

## 7 What is it that Khusraw learns from the *Kalīla-Dimna* stories?

Christine van Ruymbeke

... *Khusraw Parviz, was unequalled by any of the kings in dominion, resources of funds and weapons, and enjoyment of the pleasures; were we to describe it all, this book would indeed be long. His reign lasted 38 years.*<sup>1</sup>

In his second *mathnavī*, *Khusraw u Shīrīn*, written in 1180 AD, Nizāmī informs us that the source for his 6.500 *bayt*-long romance was Firdawsī's epic (KS11, 52-3). But his inspiration also rests on other works of the medieval Islamic culture, such as, notably, Gurgānī's eleventh-century *Vīs u Ramīn* romance.<sup>2</sup> Towards the end of the story, there is also the explicit mention of the *Kalīla-Dimna* cycle of stories. It is this latter understudied passage which forms the topic of the present paper (KS92,1-43),<sup>3</sup> in which we shall glance at Nizāmī's aims underlying his choice to rewrite the fables and at his rewriting technique of this particular work.

In the *Shāh Nāma*, the passage dealing with the reign of Khusraw Parvīz contains mentions of the (in)famous and tortuous affair between Shīrīn and the twenty-second Sassanian King (who reigned from 590 to 628 AD)<sup>4</sup>. But the recital of the episode as told by Firdawsī has very little in common with a love-story. Nizāmī now wants to stress the love interest, the عشقیازی *'ishq-bāzī* (KS11,53 and KS12,4). In the process, he transforms the scandalous affair into a touching and noble love-relationship. Shīrīn is presented as an Armenian Princess. Her purity and her strength of character will allow her eventually to conquer her difficult lover Khusraw, and to help him reach some state of perfection, making him worthy of the Iranian idea of kingship accompanied by divine effulgence (فر *farr*).<sup>5</sup> Judging from the words of Ghazālī (d. 1111) quoted above, Khusraw Parvīz never was remarkable as a monarch, but for his wealth, army and harem. Nizāmī's choice of this particular ruler for the purposes of his *mathnavī* might have derived from the fact that Khusraw presented an excellent instance of a monarch in need of reforming. The poet pictures a misguided Khusraw, both as lover and as king, who misses opportunities and systematically embarks on the wrong paths. In Meisami's words describing medieval romances, "the protagonist's conduct as lover reveals his fitness, or

unfitness, for kingship; this aspect of his qualitative, or ethical, identity, depends directly on his capacity to be guided by love and to understand its nature correctly as encompassing, not merely private passion, but public order... [The romance explores] the relationship between love and justice, and specifically the role of love as the source of that wisdom which leads both to justice and to universal harmony.”<sup>6</sup>

It is thus possible to consider with Meisami that Nizāmī’s romance is in fact a Mirror for Princes, using the example of Khusraw’s quest, to point to the path leading from king *de natura* to king *de iure*<sup>7</sup>. Love, ‘*ishq*, is a guide to rightful actions and thus Shīrīn (representing Khusraw’s “better self”)<sup>8</sup> endeavours to lead her beloved king away from his former state of submission to the rule of his *هوس* *havas* (concupiscence).

Before reaching the tragic end of the *mathnavī*, the skies seem to finally clear as Shīrīn marries her capricious king-charming. She immediately embarks on a gentle coaxing policy to transform Khusraw into a perfect human being and king... Her efforts first seem in vain, as the king continues boisterous and pointless as before. Until one day, after years of feasting and drinking, Khusraw suddenly realizes that his hair is growing white as “on the locks of the dark violet he discovers some flakes of jasmine” (KS89,151). The king reacts with shock at this sign of age. Shīrīn, who had to bide her time till now, seizes upon the opportunity and exhorts him to think about his life and his career, to turn from pleasure’s joys towards wisdom in order to attain the heart’s fulfillment (KS90,2-39).<sup>9</sup>

ز رامش سوی دانش کوش یک چند	زمین بوسید شیرین کای خداوند
بسی دیگر به کام دل برانی	بسی کوشیده ای در کامرانی

(KS90,2-3)

Her words are harsh as she paints the bitter reality: he has not been a just ruler, is not very popular amongst his people and is in danger of being overthrown, or at the very least of leaving behind a negative memory.<sup>10</sup>

سیه گشت از نفیر دادخواهان	بسا آیینه کاندل دست شاهان
همه کاری نه بر موقع کند شاه ...	چو دولت روی برگرداند از راه
ترا به گر رعیت را نوازی	جهانسوزی بد است و جور سازی

(KS90,9-10 and 16)

Next, when he dies (the day approaches, as the white hair warns him), he will leave all his worldly possessions behind and, as any wise man would tell him, he should thus worry about other, deeper matters.<sup>11</sup>

در این منزل ز رفتن با خبر باش	نجات آخرت را چاره گر باش
قیامت را کجا ترتیب سازد	کسی کو سیم و زر ترکیب سازد
ز مال و ملک و شاهی هیچ بردند؟	ببین دور از تو شاهانی که مردند

ببخشی شهنه راه تو باشد

بمانی مال بد خواه تو باشد

(KS90,24-27)

Duly chastened, Khusraw calls upon his vizier, wise Buzurg-Umīd, and puts all sorts of difficult questions to him (KS91,1-89). But Khusraw mistakes knowledge for wisdom. All eagerness, and brimming over with hope to discover the meaning of life, Khusraw's curiosity covers (impossible) questions on astronomy, metaphysics, the universe, the life of the soul, the hereafter, why people do not come back from death to indicate the right path to those who remain, etc. Buzurg-Umīd's answers are evading: "this is too subtle for you... you'll know once you are dead." Thus, the wise vizier considers that Khusraw is not able to grasp these truths or sciences and does not even attempt to explain them, or it may be that he modestly considers that true wisdom consists in admitting one's incapacity to answer these fundamental questions. It is manifest from this dialogue that Khusraw is asking the wrong questions, probing subjects with which a monarch need not bother. There are however two exceptions. The first consists in Buzurg-Umīd's several answers on the metaphysical question of the separation of body and soul, and the survival of the latter and its faculty of memory.<sup>12</sup> The second is a practical advice on keeping balance in food and drink. This frustrating dialogue ends with the mention of Muhammad and this is an occasion for Nizāmī, through the tongue of Buzurg-Umīd, to state Islam's divine nature. Khusraw is shaken, though he fails to understand the religious salvation Islam could offer him. In considering this passage, it is interesting to remember the *Siyāsāt Nāma* where Nizām al-Mulk (d.1092) advises the king to listen to "religious elders" debating and interpreting the *Qur'an* and *Traditions* of the Prophet in his presence. This will open the "way of prudence and rectitude in both spiritual and temporal affairs" for him.<sup>13</sup> But Nizāmī's intellectual horizon is also informed by pre-Islamic elements such as the idea encapsulated in ancient maxims of statecraft, also present in works of political advice such as the *Siyāsāt-Nāma* and Ghazālī's *Nasīhat al-Mulūk*: "A kingdom may last while there is irreligion, but it will not endure when there is oppression."<sup>14</sup>

So, Khusraw misses the opportunity to obtain information on spiritual perfection, but also to ask the right questions about the worldly art of government and ethics, which is what a king's job really is all about. It is at this point that Shīrīn, ever the wise counselor to Khusraw, steps in and requests that the vizier should also give her a portion of his wisdom and "open up" (and not bind in chains) and comment on some passages of the *Kalīla-Dimna* stories for them.

نصیبی ده مرا نیز ار توانی  
فرو خوان از کلیله نکته ای چند

کلیدی کن نه زنجیری در این بند

(KS91,92b-93)

An almost farcical indication that Shīrīn strikes the right note is that Buzurg-Umīd's face "blossoms like a rose petal" with contentment as he is about to embark on forty tales accompanied by their *nuktas* or lessons, taken from the *Kalīla-Dimna* stories.

بزرگ امید چون گلبرگ بشکفت      چهل قصه به چل نکته فرو گفت  
(KS92,1)

When the vizier has enumerated his forty moral points from the *Kalīla-Dimna* tales, Khusraw feels that the advice is profitable for him. Though it is Shīrīn who had requested the tales, it is in fact Khusraw who profits from them, as he guards [the words of the old counselor] in his heart like a treasure within a fortress.<sup>15</sup>

چو بر گفت این سخن پیر سخن سنج      دل خسرو حصارى شد بر این گنج  
(KS92,43)

Unfortunately, almost immediately after this, Khusraw is compelled to abdicate. He finds refuge in religion and in a fire-temple. Shīrīn accompanies him showing her devotion for the person of the king. Khusraw is then imprisoned and murdered, while asleep next to Shīrīn. The curtain falls on Shīrīn, stabbing herself on Khusraw's tomb (KS 96, 29).

Thus, Khusraw's albeit short foray into science and knowledge in the hope of becoming a perfect monarch is three-layered: there is Shīrīn's advice, Buzurg-Umīd's evincing answers to Khusraw's scientific and metaphysical questions and, finally, the forty *Kalīla-Dimna nuktas*. With reference to these latter, I may already pinpoint three important – and apparently opposed – elements. By naming *Kalīla-Dimna* immediately after the most weighty philosophical, astronomical metaphysical and theological questions, and after Khusraw's failure to be touched by true religion, Nizāmī seems to underline the importance of the work and perhaps also its positive difference as advice to monarchs, compared with the previous abstruse scientific or purely religious topics. Thus, by contrast, he seems to confirm the use of the fable collection as a practical Mirror for Princes.<sup>16</sup> This is misleading however, as will become apparent in the conclusions to this essay. Another element is the fact that it is Shīrīn who proposes to look at the *Kalīla-Dimna*, presenting this request as advice for herself, carefully steering Khusraw away from his unsatisfying foray into science without wounding his ego. I would like to posit the hypothesis that this might be an oblique indication of the poor regard the fables of the *Kalīla-Dimna* cycle enjoyed in Nizāmī's circle. Did they count amongst stories without importance, fit only for the entertainment of female minds? The analysis of their contents will indicate whether perhaps, on the contrary, Shīrīn's request for explanations of the *Kalīla-Dimna* gives us an insight in

what a monarch really ought to know. The third observation is that this newly acquired and fitting knowledge profits Khusraw but very little. Nizāmī does not comment in anyway on the profitability of these tales, although he mentions Khusraw's immediate repentance of his past *بدعتهاى بيداد* (*bid'at-hā-yi bīdād*, unrighteous tyranny/heresy) and striving to establish the *سرای عدل* (*sarā-yi 'adl*, dwelling place of justice). Is it so then, that the points recounted by Buzurg-Umīd refer to religion, to royal morals, showing the way to justice? Following on this, as if to confirm that the divorce between justice and monarchy is impossible to bridge and that righteousness inevitably leads to religion, the king chooses to retire in a fire-temple and is subsequently deposed by a (Byzantine-friendly) political faction backing his son Shīrūya.

This paper will address several questions related both to the author's tools and to the use he makes of his source: Do we know what version of the *Kalīla-Dimna* cycle Nizāmī had in hands and can we trace the forty verses in Nizāmī's *mathnavī* to the extant stories of the cycle? Is Nizāmī respectful of his original or does he manipulate and adapt the fables? Is he using these fables to further the action-line of his *mathnavī*? Do they shed light on the previous actions of the king and do they impact his future? Finally, judging from the way in which Nizāmī presents the relevance of the fables to Khusraw's search for knowledge, can we consider them apt advice for kings and deduce what is the lesson that Khusraw learns from the *Kalīla-Dimna*? (And is Duda correct in declaring that these fables help Shīrīn in her search for justice?)<sup>17</sup>

The *Kalīla-Dimna* cycle of stories has a complex history which need not be retold here.<sup>18</sup> It is however interesting to note that Nizāmī commits no anachronism as he mentions these fables in the context of his story; they are suitable in a romance dealing with the grand-son of Khusraw Anūshīrvān (r. 531-579), during whose reign the cycle of stories is supposed to have been imported to Iran and translated into Pahlavi Persian.<sup>19</sup> Anūshīrvān is a legendary figure of wisdom and excellent kingship (perhaps thanks to the guidance he found in the *Kalīla-Dimna* fables?). Nizāmī refers to him elsewhere in the course of the romance, when he appears in a dream to young Khusraw and promises him four things in life (most remarkable amongst which features Shīrīn) (KS 17, 150-1). This makes him the influence which shapes the prince's early ambition and life pursuits. The second, tacit reference to Anūshīrvān, through the *Kalīla-Dimna* fables, might conceivably be expected to have a similar life-shaping influence on the second part of Khusraw's reign, though, as mentioned above, that monarch's almost immediately ensuing deposition and murder preclude this.

The passage under scrutiny in Nizāmī's *mathnavī* consists of forty *bayts* (KS 92, 2-41).<sup>20</sup> In one instance only do we have an *enjambement* of two *bayts* (bb. 24 and 25) with the repetition in another context in b. 25 of the

character of the hypocritical cat, whose fable illustrates the point of b. 24. In Dastgirdī's edition used here, the *bayts* are arranged to follow the order of the fables as they appear in the extant *Kalīla-Dimna* texts,<sup>21</sup> but for some inversions. This does not necessarily correspond with the order of these *bayts* in manuscripts of the *mathnavī*. A further analysis of the order of the *bayts* is probably irrelevant, as the order of the stories also differ in the versions of the *Kalīla-Dimna* texts themselves, whether in Arabic or in Persian.

What is more relevant is that no strict pattern or logical progression is apparent in the contents of these forty *bayts*. In fact, it is possible to identify several themes, some of which are clustered together (as for example in bb 33 and 34, both referring to the danger of hasty action and bb 37 and 38 both referring to how honesty and good actions may rid one of bloodthirsty enemies). The present order in Dastgirdī's edition though, seems to backtrack several times to a previously mentioned theme (as for example for the encouragement to "suicide" in b. 8 and again in b. 35 and perhaps also in b. 36. Another instance would be in bb. 3 and 23, the tale of the Fox and the Drum teaching one not to be impressed by an enemy's bulk and sound and similarly the tale of the Elephant and the Hare which teaches the lesson not to evaluate an enemy's stature as an indication of his might). A recurrent theme is that of deceit, which is presented as useful (bb. 9, 10), or which ought to be discovered (b. 15), but which is also presented as dangerous and backfiring on its user (bb. 1, 6, 13, 14, 16). Thus *nuktas* may contradict one another or mention different or opposed ways to a same end (as also in b. 10 recognizing the usefulness of tricks to escape enemies and bb. 37 and 38 which advocate sincerity and virtue in order to be saved from enemies).

The fifteen first stories referred to by Buzurg-Umīd are taken from the first book of the *Kalīla-Dimna* cycle, the story of the Lion and the Bull, by far the best-known part of the whole work. The most famous stories<sup>22</sup> from that chapter are mentioned: that of the Ape and the Carpenter (b.2), of the Fox and the Drum (b. 3), of the Crab and the Fish-eating Bird (b. 6), of the Jackal, the Wolf, the Crow and the Camel (b. 9), of the Tortoise and the two Geese (b. 11) and of the Iron-eating Mice and the Child-stealing Falcon (b. 15). The two following *bayts* (bb. 16 and 17) retell stories from the chapter on Dimna's Trial. Next, the chapter on the story of the Ring-dove is referred to in bb. 18 to 21, with, for example the story of how the birds managed to escape all together from the net (b. 18), and the story of the Rat who took the Saint's barley (b. 20). Another famous chapter, that of the Crows and the Owls, receives eight mentions (bb. 22 to 29). Amongst these, there is the story of the Elephant and the Hare (b. 23), that of the Hypocritical Fasting Cat (b. 24) and that of the Estranged Wife who is frightened by a Thief and turns to her Husband (b. 26). The other chapters receive each one or two mentions: the Ape and Tortoise (bb. 30-1); the



Monk and Weasel (bb. 32-3); the Rat and the Cat (b. 35); the King and the bird Fanzah (b. 36); the Lion and the Austere Jackal (b. 37); Iladh, Beladh, Irakht and the wise Kibarioun (b. 34); the Lioness and the Horseman (b. 40); the Traveler and the Goldsmith (b. 38); the King's Son and his Companions (b. 39).

Nizāmī does not refer to any of the lengthy introductory chapters relating the story of Burzūya and he also ignores the chapter of the Monk who berates his Guest for citing Hebrew sentences when he actually knows no Hebrew.

Nizāmī's references are extremely pithy. One *misra'* (usually the second) consists of a mention of the protagonists, enabling us to identify the fables<sup>23</sup> and the other *misra'* gives the point of the tale (according to Nizāmī), the *nukta*, or lesson which is offered to Khusraw and Shīrīn.

It is not possible to ascertain what version of the *Kalīla-Dimna* stories Nizāmī knows and uses. Can it be the eighth-century Ibn al-Muqaffa' Arabic version? As far as the Arabic text is concerned, it is fair to agree with de Blois that "a comparison of the various manuscripts reveals at once such a degree of discrepancy that one must often wonder whether they are really copies of one and the same book [...]. We cannot truly say that what we possess today is Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation, but rather a variety of Arabic texts derived in one way or another from it."<sup>24</sup> In an attempt to check similarities between Nizāmī's version and the existing Arabic text, I have used for expediency's sake, an English and two French translations of the Arabic text(s),<sup>25</sup> which are each based on different manuscripts. The story mentioned in Nizāmī's b. 14, that of the Snake who eats the Frogs, is probably an indication that Nizāmī has not looked at the Arabic version of the fables. In two of the three translations, the story is not present. In Miquel's translation, which does mention the fable, the victim of the snake is not a frog but a cormorant.<sup>26</sup> The mention of two stories taken from the chapter of Dimna's trial, which is generally considered an addition made by Ibn al-Muqaffa' to the original Pahlavi collection of fables, also closes the door on the possibility that Nizāmī used a hypothetical version of the fables from a strand independent of the Ibn al-Muqaffa' translation.

Nizāmī might rather have consulted a Persian version. We know of the versified version by Rūdakī (d. 940), which only survives in stray verses collected in the *Lughat-i Furs*, the mid-eleventh-century Anthology of Asadī Tūsī<sup>27</sup>. There are also two extant prose versions, almost contemporary with Nizāmī's work: the version by Muhammad ibn 'Abdullāh al-Bukhārī (amputated at the end) and that by Nasrullāh Munshī, which both date from the 1140s AD.<sup>28</sup>

Our tools are scanty and the ground is shaky on which to search for the particular Persian version Nizāmī might have used. First, we may check the presence or absence in these different Persian texts of the stories mentioned by Nizāmī. I used a sample of three extant Rūdakī *bayts* in the

*ramal* metre containing elements enabling me to identify the fables to which they belong and thus to link them with certainty to Nizāmī's forty points. All forty stories chosen by Nizāmī are mentioned in Nasrullāh Munshī's version. The only extant Bukhārī manuscript is incomplete at the end,<sup>29</sup> which prevents me from checking the stories in bb. 38 and 39. It is relatively safe however, to infer from the structure of the rest of the work that indeed all forty stories must also have been present in Bukhārī's complete version of the fables.

Another and perhaps more refined check is the comparison of Nizāmī's choice of vocabulary with the extant Persian versions. A systematic resemblance between Nizāmī's words and one or the other of the three Persian works might indicate a possible relation, while a recurrent difference in vocabulary will point to the absence of such relation. Unfortunately, the latter is the case both with Bukhārī's and with Nasrullāh Munshī's versions. There is a marked difference in Nizāmī's choice of terms to designate both animals and human genres. For example in b. 2 and again in b. 28, to designate the carpenter Nizāmī uses the (Arabic) term نجار *najjār*, while both Nasrullāh Munshī and Bukhārī use the (Persian) term درودگار *durūdgar*. The story of the Tortoise and the two Geese (b. 11) is another interesting instance, where Nizāmī's tortoise کشف *kashaf*, becomes باخه *bākha* with Nasrullāh Munshī and سنگپشت *sang-pusht* with Bukhārī. So also with b. 12, where Nizāmī calls the ape کبی *kapi*, Nasrullāh Munshī, uses بوزینه *būzīna* and Bukhārī, the term همدونه *hamdūna*.<sup>30</sup>

These variants in vocabulary tip the scale towards a perception that Nizāmī's source text was neither that of Bukhārī nor that of Nasrullāh Munshī, though there is naturally the possibility that Nizāmī chose synonym terms for reasons of his meter or of personal poetical preference. However, the lemmata used in the stories mentioned in b. 11 (*kashaf*) and b. 12 (*kapī*) are identical with those in the relevant Rūdakī quotes found in Asadī's *Lughat-i Furs*!<sup>31</sup> It is particularly unfortunate that Rūdakī's work survives only in such fragmentary manner, preventing us from reaching any conclusion. The only point to be made by this analysis is the indication that Nizāmī's choice of terms is close to those of Rūdakī's fragmentary version.

In a third of the cases only, does Nizāmī keep the stories' moral lessons.<sup>32</sup> These lessons deal with the following themes: awareness that life is endangered by tricksters; union and tricks may defeat an invincible foe; worthless people are not worth worrying about; one will not profit from fraudulently obtained goods; sagacity is more useful than reliance on obvious stupidity; it is dangerous to trust a stupid person with one's life; fidelity is stronger than tricks; one must mistrust hypocrisy and cupidity; gullible behaviour is the cause of grievous loss; grief might sometimes bring profit; one should not rely on hypothetical future benefits; one should never harm anyone without thinking it over carefully; sincerity will never

bring one to harm; daily portion is appointed according to one's needs and, finally, bloodthirstiness will always backfire. I shall come back to this bewildering array of advice, containing practical pieces of advice which are often opposed to ethics, which contradict one another and which sport – if any at all – extremely flimsy relations to theories of kingship.

In all the other verses, not only does Nizāmī ignore the stated morals of the *Kalīla-Dimna* text, but he also voices an unexpected *nukta*, which shows a different facet and a different understanding of the tales. Such manipulation of the original is most likely to happen in a strong, self-assured cultural environment, by an author who considers he can improve an original which falls short of perfection and with a text which does not enjoy a high status amongst the target audience.<sup>33</sup> In some cases, the poet adds an element, mostly an adjective qualifying one of the protagonists, which is not present in the fables and colours the understanding of the episode to fit his purpose. In many instances, he takes the point of view of another character than the received hero, thus again, changing the understanding of the fable's moral. Elsewhere, the protagonists are used as emblematic opposites, referred to only in order to illustrate the opposition Nizāmī mentions, bearing no relation to the contents of that particular fable. And some verses present a mixture of these techniques.

*Bayt* 16 presents an example of a slight shift given by Nizāmī to the original fables by changing its point of view. "If you practice tricks (lit. draw tricks on the veil), then you will remain with this cloak-burning painter!"

بدان نقاش چادر سوز مانی

چو نقش حيله بر چادر نشانی

He refers to the rather unlikely episode of the woman who fails to notice on a particular occasion that it is her painter-lover's servant who wears the painted cloak (the signal agreed between them) and accordingly she lets this servant enjoy her sexual favours. The fable is meant to teach how dangerous it is to act, like the woman in the story, without carefully ascertaining one's data. Nizāmī takes a different point of view, that of the painter-lover who regrets the inefficiency of his original trick and burns his cloak, the instrument of the present catastrophe. So also with b. 7, ("Don't practice usury, listen to the advice [telling] what the hare did to the usurer-lion!"), referring to the story of the usurer-lion and the hare, usually told from the point of view of the desperately cunning hare who defeats the lion by playing on the latter's feelings of superiority and stupidity.<sup>34</sup>

که با شیر رباخوار کرد خرگوش

ربا خواری مکن این پند بنیوش

Nizāmī refers to the actual core of the story and mentions the lion's mistake in practicing usury (*ribā-kh"ārī*): the lion gives up his royal right to kill his subjects for subsistence. In exchange for this "cash-money" (the

safety of the animals), he receives as “interest payment” a daily prey. So again in b. 30 “By turning back (*vā gashtan*), one can escape from this coast, the ape (*kapī*) escaped from the tortoise (*kashaf*) by this art.”, where Nizāmī takes the point of view of the ape who escapes from the tortoise by turning back, while the traditional fable focuses on the mistake of the tortoise who is incapable of keeping the coveted goods (i.e. the ape).

به واگشتن توانی زین طرف رست      که کیی هم بدین فن زان کشف رست

\*

\* \*

By adding a qualifying adjective, not present in the original fable, Nizāmī changes its interpretation completely. For example, in the mention of the story of the ascetic and the robe (b.4), Nizāmī refers to the ascetic, the *zāhid*, as being *mumsik*, miserly.

مکن تا در غمت ناید درازی      چو زاهد ممسکی در خرقة بازی

Nizāmī advises one not to act in order to prolong one’s bad luck, while the classical understanding of this story is that the loss of his robe (through theft) is attributable to the ascetic’s own indiscretion in admitting the dubious stranger (the thief) into his society. He is the cause of his own bad luck as he did not carefully consider the possible outcome of his gesture.

In b. 21 Nizāmī describes the wolf-bowman as *maghrūr*, proud, on whose heart “suddenly the bow/fate may send an arrow!”, while the fable’s point is the danger of hoarding: the wolf prefers to keep the juicy bits for a rainy day and proposes to first frugally rest content with the lean bow.

مشو مغرور چون گرگ کمان گیر      که بر دل چرخ ناگه می زند تیر

Similarly, in b. 31, the donkey is described as *ghāfil*, negligent, asleep, while the fable’s point is the donkey’s stupidity that allows him to fall in the same trap twice. “One oughtn’t to be like the negligent donkey on this road, for because of this negligence, the fox ate the donkey’s heart !”

چو خر غافل نباید شد درین راه      کزین غفلت دل خر خورد روباه

In b. 33 “Turn your back on the perfidity (*ghadr*) of that ascetic!”, Nizāmī chooses to describe the *zāhid*, the religious man, as perfidious, on the grounds that he killed his innocent (*bīgana*) faithful weasel (*rāsū-yi amīn*), while the fable only shows the destructive consequences of hasty action.

به ار بر غدر آن زاهد کنی پشت      که راسوی امین را بیگنه کشت

\*  
\* \*

*Bayt* 2, referring to the tale of the monkey and the carpenter, presents yet another way for Nizāmī to use the fables. The lesson of the tale is that whoever interferes in a business for which he does not possess the necessary knowledge or technical skills, will meet with catastrophe, as did the monkey who tried to ape the carpenter. What Nizāmī says is that desire, *havā*, can no more change into friendship, *yārī*, than a monkey can turn into a carpenter. He uses the antithesis of monkey vs. carpenter, which, presumably had become proverbial, to oppose desire and friendship.

هوا بشکن کزو یاری نیاید                      که از بوزینه نجاری نیاید

So also in b. 22, where he compares elements which are antithetical to each other: *hirs* (cupidity) is opposed to *khirad* (wisdom), like owls to crows. "Give up cupidity, for this miserable carrier is opposed to wisdom as the crow to the owl!"

رها کن حرص کاین حمال محروم                      نسازد با خرد چون زاغ با بوم

Thus, he completely ignores the whole fable telling of the war between the two bird-kingdoms. He simply refers to the two emblematic enemies as the terms of comparison. Again in b. 23, Nizāmī uses the dramatic opposition in physical size between the well-known characters of the fable of the hare and the elephant (whose point is that one should rely on one's intelligence), to warn against short-sighted evaluation (*khurd-bīnī*) of the enemy (*khasm*)'s puny stature as an indication of his weakness: "See how the hare (*khargūsh*) stole the water from the elephants!"

مبین از خرد بینی خصم را خرد                      ز پیلان بین که خرگوش آب چون برد

In b. 29, Nizāmī mentions the mouse turned into a woman, who finally chose a male of her own original species, in order to advocate not to be attracted to evil people if one's nature is not evil.

اگر بد نیستی با بد مشو یار                      چنان کان موش نسل آدمی خوار

\*  
\* \*

Yet another technique to change the point of the fables is exemplified in b. 14 referring to the episode of the snake, the frog (*ghūk*) and the weasel.

چو بر دانا گشادی حیلہ را در                      چو گوک مارکش در سر کنی سر

Indeed the fable shows that the frog is ultimately loosing her family in the same manner as the trick she had played on her enemy the snake, but the emphasis is on the danger of using tricks which can backfire, no mention is made of the intelligence of the snake. Nizāmī introduces the idea that the frog is playing a dangerous game in trying to trick (*dar-i hīla gushādan*) a learned person (*dānā*).

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In the story of the crow and the snake (b. 5), which illustrates that what cannot be attained through force can be done by list, Nizāmī changes the point of view as well as the lesson.

مخور در خانه کس هیچ زنهار                      که با تو آن کند کان زاغ با مار

He advises against acting as does the snake (while in the fable, the story is told from the point of view of the crow) and he introduces the idea of violating hospitality (*dar khāna-yi kasī zinhār khurdan*), while there is never any mention of this in the original fable, as crow and snake are neighbours, not host and guest.

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\* \*

In other cases, Nizāmī takes a secondary element of the fables and presents it as the point of the story. So, in b. 11 Nizāmī refers to the story of the tortoise (*kashaf*) and the two ducks (*buttān*) and chooses to mention only the ostensible pretext used in the story-line: “Many a head which was buried because of [its] tongue!”, or the danger of being too talkative.

بس سر کز زبان زیر زمین رفت                      کشف را با بطن فصلی چنین رفت

He ignores the weightier point of the tale, which is about the dangers of not following friends’ informed advice. So also in b. 38, where he refers to the traveler (*sayāh*)’s reward for his kindness towards the dangerous snake and carries the point of doing good (*nīkī*) and not to fear the bloodthirsty enemy (*khasm-i khūnkh‘ār*). The original fable in fact advises to select as objects of generosity and favour only those who are honorable, but also advises against despising man or beast before having examined their utility.

تو نیکی کن مترس از خصم خونخوار                      به نیکی برد جان سیاح از آن مار

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\* \*

In b. 18 which refers to the story of the Ringdove in the fowler’s trap, Nizāmī changes several elements:

چو آن مرغ نگارین رست ز آن دام

به دانائی توان رستن ز ایام

It is indeed at first through learning or rather wisdom (*dānā'ī*) that the ring-dove finds a way to escape: commanding to all the birds caught in the net to fly together in the same direction rather than struggle in all directions individually. Subsequently however, it is the friendship the ringdove has previously inspired to a rat that will make the rat agree to free all the birds from the net. Surprisingly, Nizāmī's point is that it is through learning/wisdom that one manages to escape from time/life (*ayyām*), "as the beloved/beautiful bird escaped from the net." The question remains whether this is an encouragement to escape from reality for example through books, or, as an extreme interpretation, that wisdom encourages one to escape from life, i.e. to suicide?

In b. 20, Nizāmī introduces the concept of injustice (*bīdād*), while the fable is meant to teach one to notice arrogant behaviour which must be based on a hidden strength, as when the rat eats the left-overs from the saint's barley.

که موش از زاهد ارجو برد زر داد

میریک جو ز کشت کس به بیداد

"Don't unjustly take even one grain of barley from someone's harvest", for you will pay for this a thousand-fold! The rat took the saint's barley but had to give up the gold which was inspiring her with tricks and strength. (She nested above a purse of gold. Once the purse was taken away, the rat lost her ability to play tricks.)

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In this bewildering collection of lessons, most of the points voiced by Buzurg-Umīd do not refer to theories of kingship, but concern *akhlāq*, morality, a time-worn, clichéd *akhlāq*, relevant for the ordinary man and not specifically addressing royal duties. As mentioned above, other *nuktas* relate to purely practical attitudes which often lean on unethical advice, such as those which either extol the use of tricks or give pointers on how to elude tricksters. Some, however, are part of the typical advice found in the Mirrors. So, for example the injunction not to act without carefully thinking it over, illustrated by the story of the male dove who kills his female in b. 34 (this is one of the *nuktas* which Nizāmī has not tampered with), which is what we find in Ghazālī's anecdote about Anūshīrvān who declares he "never issue[s] orders thoughtlessly".<sup>35</sup> I detect in only a few other cases the surprising twist given to the fables, which might be Nizāmī's own advice directed specifically at a monarch. Let us for instance return to b. 7, which refers to the mistake the lion-usurer makes in relinquishing his terrifying hold over the animals in exchange for daily

“payments in kind” and thus practicing usury. This is a direct reference to regal foresight and wisdom, not to rely on a covenant which the emboldened subjects might forget once the ruler is too weak to fight back. This is however not the usual interpretation of the fable<sup>36</sup> where no mention is made of usury. Again, in b. 27, Nizāmī appears to directly address the monarch, by the introduction of the term *nāvard* (combat): If there is a combat, you can escape from your adversaries (*khusmānat*), like that pious man (*pārsā mard*) escaped from the *dīv* and the thief: by causing dispute and division between two threatening foes. *Divide et impera!*

رہی چون باشد از خصمانت ناورد      چنان کز دیو و دزد آن پارسا مرد

The story of the fox and the drum, whose moral is that a mighty mass often is nothing but wind, that nothing arises from sound and bulk, is transformed by Nizāmī, (b. 3) through his introduction of the term *talbīs*, which means fraud, and which will induce us to face the same ills as those which the fox experienced because of the drum.

بتلبیس آن توانی خورد ازین راه      کزان طبل دریده خورد رویاه

Nothing in the original fable refers to fraud. The fable reflects on appearances which can give a wrong impression, and, as far as kingly politics is concerned, advises that a king should not balk at appearances. By going one step further, by inferring that these appearances actually are imposture, that life, by presenting wrong appearances is fraudulent, Nizāmī here transposes the debate from the kingly search for bravery in facing an apparently redoubtable enemy, into the realm of philosophy.

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The first *bayt* provides a complex instance of transfiguration: an alteration in the traditional point of view, a replacement of the stated moral and a remolding in the interpretation of the fable:

نخستین گفت کز خود بر حذر باش      چو گاو شنزبہ زان شیر جماش

This refers to the frame story of the first book or chapter of the fables. The jackal Dimna introduces the bull Shanzaba into the inner circle of the intimate courtiers of the lion-king. Shanzaba becomes the king's confidant, a post which Dimna coveted. The king and the bull finally become estranged through Dimna's slander and they fight each other to death. The lion-king wins. The official “moral lesson” of the fable is that when two friends accept the services of a person who is notorious for falsehood and deceit, their speedy disunion is the inevitable consequence of their misplaced trust.



But this is not the lesson Nizāmī proposes. He chooses to interpret the episode in the light of Neo-Platonism and Sufism and enjoins us to beware of ourselves (*az khud bar hadhar bāsh*), i.e. of our human passions, our concupiscent nature, represented by the lion, who is qualified as “deceiving”). This nature rules over our soul/intellect (represented by the bull Shanzaba), and ultimately, through deceit, will destroy us.

There is a certain irony in this interpretation by Nizāmī. Indeed, he totally ignores the intervention of the *roué* Dimna, who is the agent of the lion-king’s distrust and final wish to exterminate his former friend the bull. Nizāmī selects the moment in the story when the bull is on his guard (encouraged by Dimna) towards the all-powerful monarch: though he trusts the lion as a friend, he is also aware that honesty and criticism might alienate the goodwill of the king and that close association with the throne might earn him jealous enemies at court.<sup>37</sup> The king-lion in the fable is not deceiving, he is manipulated by Dimna and acts out of a misguided wish for self-protection. Nizāmī’s adjective (*jammāsh*)<sup>38</sup> qualifying the lion, changes the understanding of the episode, showing the point of view of the bull, which is ironically what Buzurg-Umīd wants King Khusraw to identify with.

In conclusion, let us return to the question raised in the title: “What is it that Khusraw learns from the *Kalīla-Dimna*?” Providing an adequate answer is embarrassingly problematical! The majority of Nizāmī’s *nuktas* have but a flimsy correlation with the received morals attached to the fables in the *Kalīla-Dimna* cycle. Few relate to the attitude of the monarch whether private or public. They neither seem to agree with the progression from king *de facto* to monarch *de iure*, as mentioned above, nor do they advance the affairs of love, which we have identified as the *mathnavī*’s main theme. In short, I would go as far as to say that they seem to have no impact on the story of Khusraw and Shīrīn. Apart from the few instances noticed above, that might relate to the attitude of a king in general, I only detect three further aspects targeted by Buzurg-Umīd’s *nuktas*, which might have a direct relation to Khusraw’s life.

First, there is the recurrent advice to use tricks and lists on one’s enemies. This sheds a new light on one of Khusraw’s most criticized actions: the trick he uses to rid himself of Farhād whom he sees as a dangerous rival for Shīrīn’s heart and favours. In the light of the “moral” advice given here, the king was perfectly justified in using this trick against a foe whom he was at a loss to defeat in any other way. It is also striking that it was his wise counselors, who advised him to send the false report of Shīrīn’s death (KS59,14-5).<sup>39</sup>

Second, in this story on love and marriage, there seems to be only one *nukta* that distantly relates to conjugal life (b. 26). The story of the bazari and his estranged wife who was terrorized (*bīm*) by the thief holds an admonition to turn from *fitna* to *vafā*, from disorder to fidelity.

چنان کز بیم دزد آن زن در آن شوی

ز فتنه در وفا کن روی در روی

This might be a direct reference to Khusraw's boisterous life which now ought to change to fidelity. No doubt there is irony again contained in the use of this particular fable to illustrate the point, as Khusraw has to adopt the point of view of the wife of the bazari.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the three occurrences (bb. 8, 35, 36) where the points contain apparent encouragements to suicide, to escape from the cavern and unshackle oneself deserve a special mention. A surprising twist is given to the story of the three fish. Here again (b.8), Nizāmī shifts the point of view as he mentions the second "wise/old fish", who, too late to escape, pretends to be dead in order to be fished out and thrown away, when it can safely make its escape from calamity (*āfat*).

چنانک آن پیرماهی ز آفت شست

به خود کشتن توان زین خاکدان رست

Nizāmī uses this part of the story to illustrate the advantage of suicide (*khud-kushtan*) in order to escape this world which he calls a rubbish-bin (*khākdān*). A similar encouragement to "escape from this cavern," a Platonic allusion to this world, by the use of prudence (*hushyāri*) is given in b. 35, which refers to the story of the rat who frees the cat from the "snare of grief".

چو موش آن گربه را از دام تیمار

به هشیاری رهان خود را از این غار

The same meaning appears in b 36, referring to the story of the bird Qubbara (lark),<sup>41</sup> where Nizāmī advises "to fly outside" so as not to be destroyed within these bonds.

چو مرغ قیره زین قبه چند

برون پر تا نفرسانی درین بند

This latter example is almost certainly a reference to a mystic annihilation, as could also be the case for the two previous passages. In the light of Khusraw's decision to retire to a fire-temple and give up his worldly rule, they might well be the only practical advice given by Buzurg-Umīd which he abides by.

Ultimately, it is Nizāmī's technique which might give us a key to penetrate this puzzling passage. The introduction to the *Kalīla-Dimna* version by Ibn al-Muqaffa', contains the warning that in order to reap the advantages of the work, one must grasp fully the spirit in which it is composed, disengage from its figurative language the truth which it is intended to convey and so seize the exact purport of its fables. Thus, reading the collection of fables without attending to its scope and aims, often lying deep and not

obvious at first glance, is about as unproductive as a nut that has not been cracked.<sup>42</sup> Though it is a bit of a *topos* for the medieval Persian author to warn that the real meaning of his work is hidden and can only be grasped by alert intelligence, it does not follow that we should automatically dismiss this warning. The above injunction to the readers, opens the door to widely contrasting or even contradictory interpretations of the fables and even to considering the stated morals which round off the stories as unrepresentative of the actual aim of the book. The perceptive reader must independently search for the real purport of the fables and not swallow the superficial explanation, stated there for the *hoi poloi*, while the real gems remain hidden.

This gives Nizāmī liberty to interpret or even to twist the fables to fit the *nuktas* he wishes to state. But though a third of the forty *bayts* are “straight” references to the original, we have seen that the major part of the passage is so different from the older text that it may be considered not only an extended allusion but a parody. Not only “a poet’s deliberate incorporation of identifiable elements from other sources”,<sup>43</sup> but an allusion which changes the original text in order to mock both the original and the new text, caricaturing the latter, which is so famous as to be immediately recognized by the audience.<sup>44</sup>

If parody is what Nizāmī is using here, it necessarily strives for comic effect. Indeed, I have above detected more than one humorous note in this passage, probably stemming from the poet’s wish to introduce some entertainment before the tragic end of the tale. Humor is not absent from Nizāmī’s work and reading this passage as parody, with comic relief in mind, somehow helps to explain away the vexing puzzle posed by the changes introduced in the morals of the fables: for, in their new form, they do not acquire a relevance to the protagonist’s previous life and, but for few dubious exceptions, do not impact in any obvious way on his bleak future. This would also explain the absence of relation within the passage to the *mathnavī*’s story-line itself, with its two main themes of kingship and love. Rather than being an indication of the wisdom they contain, Nizāmī’s reference to the tales which ignores or twists their received interpretation, probably constitutes a subversive rewriting. This witticism would be in line with their humorous introduction by Shīrīn and the burlesque of Buzurg-Umīd’s flushed face, and propose what I see as a humorous moment following on the frustration of the failed scientific and philosophical dialogue between the king and his wise counselor. In this interpretation, Shīrīn’s earlier harangue to Khusraw to change his ways, has already provided him with the lesson in kingship he needed. Nizāmī then introduces a pastiche of the traditional question-and-answer sessions between a monarch and the court’s scholars. He follows this up with a witty parody of the famous fables.

The results of the above analysis are an indication that Nizāmī's manipulation is playful, introducing puns, or using the fables' characters as emblems in order to present unexpected twists in the points of view and in the morals applied. The absence of explanation, of variety and systematic novelty in the *nuktas* preclude us from considering that here is an attempted response to Ibn al-Muqaffa's original challenge to make manifest the true but hidden meaning of the fables. Similarly, my failure to detect any systematic relevance in the *nuktas* to act as a Mirror for Khusraw or to help along the story-line of the *mathnavī*, makes it difficult to consider that this extended allusion to the animal fables was meant to have any impact on Nizāmī's characters and their actions. Thus, an anti-climactic conclusion presents itself to us: to all appearances, this passage might well be nothing weightier than a literary tour-de-force introduced for the intellectual recreation of Nizāmī's cultured audience.

### Appendix: The passage in Nizāmī's *Khusraw u Shūrīn mathnavī*

چهل قصه به چل نکته فرو گفت	برزگ امید چون گلبرگ بشکفت	
چو گاو شنزبه زان شیر جماش	نخستین گفت کز خود بر حذر باش	1
که از بوزینه نجاری نیاید	هوا بشکن کزو یاری نیاید	2
کز آن طبل دریده خورد روباه	بتلبیس آن توانی خورد ازین راه	3
چو زاهد ممسکی در خرقه بازی	مکن تا در غمت ناید درازی	4
که با تو آن کند کان زاغ با مار	مخور در خانه کس هیچ زنهار	5
که ماهی خوار دید از چنگ خرچنگ	همان پاداش بینی وقت نیرنگ	6
که با شیر رباخوار کرد خرگوش	ربا خواری مکن این پند بنیوش	7
چنانک آن پیرماهی زافت شست	به خود کشتن توان زین خاکدان رست	8
که از شخص شتر سرباز کردند	شغال و گرگ و زاغ این ساز کردند	9
چنان کان طیطوی از موج دریا	به چاره کین توان جستن ز اعدا	10
کشف را با بطن فصلی چنین رفت	بسا سر کز زبان زیرزمین رفت	12
که دید آن ساده مرغ از کپپی چند	ز نا اهلان همان بینی در این بند	11
چو بازرگان دانا مال نادان	به حیلت مال مردم خورد نتوان	13
چو غوک مارکش در سر کنی سر	چو بر دانا گشادی حيله را در	14
که موش آهن خورد کودک برد باز	حیل بگذار و مشنو از حیل ساز	15
بدان نقاش چادر سوز مانی	چو نقش حيله بر چادر نشانی	16
علاج از دست نادان زهر گردد	ز دانا تن سلامت بهر گردد	17
چو آن مرغ نگارین رست از آن دام	به دانائی توان رستن ز ایام	18
ز موش دام در زاغ دهن دوز	مکن شوخی وفاداری دراموز	19
که موش از زاهد ارجو برد زر داد	مبریک جو ز کشت کس به بیداد	20
که بر دل چرخ ناگه می زند تیر	مشو مغرور چون گرگ کمان گیر	21
نسازد با خرد چون زاغ با بوم	رها کن حرص کاین محروم	22
ز پیلان بین که خرگوش آب چون برد	مبین از خرد بینی خصم را خرد	23
ز روزه گریه روزی بین که چون یافت	ز حرص و زرق باید روی برنافت	24
نهد داغ سگی بر گوسپندش	کسی کاین گریه باشد نقش بندش	25

چنان کز بیم دزد آن زن در آن شوی	ز فتنه در وفا کن روی در روی	26
چنان کز دیو و دزد آن پارسا مرد	رهی چون باشد از خصمانت ناورد	27
چو نجاری که لوح از زن در آموخت	چه باید چشم دل را تخته بردوخت	28
چنان کان موش نسل آدمی خوار	اگر بد نیستی با بد مشو یار	29
که کپی هم بدین فن زان کشف رست	به وا گشتن توانی زین طرف رست	30
کزین غفلت دل خر خورد روباه	چو خر غافل نباید شد درین راه	31
چو زان حلوای نقد آن مرد درویش	حساب نسیه های کز میندیش	32
که راسوی امین را بیگنه کشت	به ار بر غدر آن زاهد کنی پشت	33
چنان کان نر کبوتر ماده را کشت	مزن بی پیش بینی بر کس انگشت	34
چو موش آن گربه را از دام تیمار	به هشیاری رهان خود را از این غار	35
چو مرغ قیره زین قبه چند	برون پر تا فرسائی درین بند	36
چو آن زاهد شغال از خشم آن شیر	به صدق ایمن توانی شد ز شمشیر	37
به نیکی برد جان سیاح از آن مار	تو نیکی کن مترس از خصم خونخوار	38
ز بازرگان بچه تا شاهزاده	به قدر مرد شد روزی نهاده	39
کز این بی بچه گشت آن شیر خونریز	به خونخواری مکن چنگال را تیر	40

## Notes

- 1 Ghazali (1964) 53.
- 2 Nizāmī mentions Vīs three times in this *mathnavī*, in connection with the dangers of losing one's reputation (Orsatti (2003), n. 37 citing Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs o Ramin, ba moqadamme-ye mabsut* [...], ed. M. J. Mahjub, Tehran, 1337/1959, p. 7-105, 95). See for example KS36,24. For a longer discussion of the relation between the two stories: Meisami (1987) 111-22; Bürgel (1987a) and Nizami-Bürgel (1980) Nachwort, 357-9.
- 3 As far as I am aware, this passage has elicited little interest till now and no such analysis has yet been attempted (I regretably am not aware of and thus have not been able to re-search secondary sources published in Iran which might have approached this topic). Indeed, in his French translation of the *mathnavī*, Massé leaves out these forty lines, commenting dismissively, though correctly, that: "Chacun de ces vers n'est intelligible que précédé de la fable à laquelle il s'adapte – fables qu'on ne peut inserer ici." Nizami-Massé (1970) n. 384, 250. Meisami (1987) n. 23, 196, however, notes about the passage: "His pursuit of wisdom includes a series of dialogues on philosophical questions and the recital of forty tales from the Kalilah wa-Dimnah (...), each one summarized in a one-line moral (*nuktah*)..." Duda (1933), 74, does not relate the *Kalīla-Dimna bayts* to Khusraw, but considers they are only addressed to Shīrīn, whom they strengthen in a noteworthy manner: "Auch Shirin wollte nun die Weisheit des Buzurgumid hören, der ihr auch Anspielungen auf vierzig Erzählungen und vierzig Sentenzen aus "Kalila und Dimna" darbot. Buzurgumid's Worte bestärkten Shirin in ihrem Streben nach Gerechtigkeit. (Shīrīn also wished now to hear Buzurgumid's wisdom, which he offers as references to forty stories and forty morals from the Kalila and Dimna. *Buzurgumid's words strengthen Shīrīn in her search for justice*. [I underline])." Unfortunately, the editor Vahid Dastgirdi gives no explanatory note on his understanding of the passage's relevance (Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372)). Neither does Bürgel (Nizami-Bürgel (1980) Nachwort, who, however has included an excellent and witty German rendition of the passage in his translation of the work. The fact that this latter experienced translator has chosen to strike an amusing note in his translation of the passage agrees with the conclusion I will reach at the end of this article. Nizāmī might also have alluded to *Kalīla-Dimna* elsewhere in his work, in comparisons or illustrations of particular thoughts, though there is no other passage

- referring to the fables as explicitly as this one. Bürgel (1998: n. 6, 82), mentions that story 14 of the *Makhzan al-Asrār* might be inspired by the frame-story of *Kalīla-Dimna*.
- 4 See my study on Shīrīn's personality and on her relationship with Khusraw as presented by Firdawsī: van Ruymbeke (2006).
  - 5 See for example Gnoli (1999). Lambton (1971) 425, remarks that for Ghazālī this was a compound quality consisting of virtues and certain mental and physical attributes, not unlike the qualities demanded by al-Farabī of the head of the virtuous city.
  - 6 Meisami (1987) 182-3.
  - 7 Meisami (1987) 197. Nizami-Bürgel (1980) 361-4, stresses the experience of love and Neo-Platonism in the *mathnavī*. See also Orsatti (2003) 165, who remarks that, rather than a 'Mirror for Princes', Nizāmī's *mathnavī* might revolve around the idea of the individual morality of the king, seen through the important experience of love. The difference between the attainments in kingship of Khusraw and of Iskandar in Nizāmī's *Iqbāl-Nāma* are striking, the latter being depicted as the ideal conqueror-philosopher-prophet of al-Fārābī's *al-madīna al-fadhīla* (Bürgel (1995)). In Iskandar's case, contrary to what Khusraw experiences with Buzurg-Umīd, his 'abstruse scientific (see below)' questions receive answers and help him become a king-philosopher.
  - 8 Nizami-Bürgel (1980) 364.
  - 9 Meisami (1987) 156-7 n. 23: "'O king' Shirin entreated, bowing low,/ 'From song towards wisdom turn your efforts now./ 'Long have you striven pleasure's joy to gain; strive now the heart's fulfillment to attain...". See Meisami's insightful comment: "Shīrīn's warning to Khusraw constitutes an exemplary counsel to kings."
  - 10 Meisami (1987) 156-7 n. 23: "'How many a mirror held by kings, to black/ has turned, as men cry out at justice's lack./ When kingly power turns its face away/ from the right path, his deeds as well will stray.../ ...Oppression, tyranny are evils twain;/ 'twere best with love your subjects' trust to gain..." Lambton (1971) 421-2: "[in the Sasanian theory of kingship], the king, the representative of God upon earth, was concerned with orderly and just government...Religion was identified with the social order; prosperity and virtue were two facets of a unitary system. Justice, as conceived of in this theory, had little to do with legal justice, or indeed natural justice. In practice it was concerned primarily with the maintenance of the social order."
  - 11 Meisami (1987) 156-7 n.23: "'Towards your salvation in the next world strive,/ remembering that this station you must leave./ He who amasses gold and silver: say,/ how shall he then dispose for Judgment Day?/ Retain it, and your wealth will prove your bane;/ but it will guard your path, if it's well given."
  - 12 This shows Nizāmī's interest for the question of the value of dreams and prophecy. See Marlow (2008).
  - 13 Nizam al-Mulk (1978) 60.
  - 14 Nizam al-Mulk (1978)12. See also Ghazali (1964) 46.
  - 15 See above n. 3, on Duda's failure to notice this.
  - 16 The fables, however fail to be included in studies on "weightier" Mirror for Princes, such as Lambton (1971).
  - 17 See above n. 3.
  - 18 See for example Brockelmann (1978).
  - 19 See also de Blois (1990).
  - 20 See Bürgel's translation in German of this passage: Nizami-Bürgel (1980) 309-12.
  - 21 We do not know which literary version Nizāmī might have consulted. See next point.
  - 22 It is possible to form an idea of how famous the tales are from illustrated manuscripts. This was made possible by comparing *Appendix B, Subjects of Illustrations Including Spaces Left in Uncompleted Manuscripts in Kalīla and Dimna Manuscripts to 1400* in O'Kane (2003) 295-319, with *Appendix III, Subject Index of the Illustrations of Episodes*

- in Kalilah wa Dimnah Manuscripts and Derived Texts*, in the thorough article by Grube (1991) 301-481.
- 23 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372) proposes a very helpful identification of each of the fables.
  - 24 de Blois (1990) 3.
  - 25 Ibn al-Muqaffa'-Knatchbull (1819); Ibn al-Muqaffa'-Miquel (1980); Ibn al-Muqaffa'-Khawam (1985).
  - 26 Ibn al-Muqaffa'-Miquel (1980) 99. Knatchbull's and Khawam's translations don't mention the story.
  - 27 See Asadi Tusi-Horn (1897). De Blois (2004) 192, mentions that he has identified the location in the *Kalīla- Dimna* text of about 50 extant Rūdakī verses. Though de Blois's results are still unpublished, I have not attempted to duplicate this exhaustive research but considered only three examples.
  - 28 Bukhari (1369). There are no reasons to believe that this is the same Bukhārī which Nizāmī mentions in the Prologue to the *Haft Paykar* (HP4,28) and who is traditionally identified as the collector of *hadīths* who died in 870 AD (Nizami-Meisami (1995), 276. Nasrullah Munshi-Minovi (1343). See also Nasrullah Munshi-Najmabadi (1996).
  - 29 See Bukhari (1369) introduction by Khanlari, 22.
  - 30 B. 14 with the story of the snake-eating frog, which is not present in the Arabic versions, is also interesting for the change in animals: Nizāmī mentions the frog *ghūk*, while Bukhari has a tortoise *sang-pushht*. In b. 18, Nizāmī calls the bird who leads the others the "beloved bird" مرغ نگارین *murgh-i nigārīn*, while Nasrullah Munshi mentions a کیوتر متوغه *kiūtar-i mutavvaghā* and Bukhari a کبوتر حمایل *kabūtar-i hamāyil*. Other instances in b. 19 and 22 زاغ *zāgh*/ کلاغ *kullāgh*; b. 20 زاهد *zāhid*/ مرد عبید *mard-i 'ibād*.
  - 31 Asadi Tusi-Salimi (1979) 193, 80 and 245: چون گشفت انبوه غوغالی بدید... and شب زمستان بود. کپی سرد یافت. These findings are unfortunately tempered by a third Rūdakī passage I was able to identify, which relates to the story of the rat and his gold, where Nizāmī uses the term *zāhid* (b. 20), while Rūdakī mentions a مرد دینی *mard-i dīnī*, thus a counter-example!
  - 32 Thus, b. 9 referring to the story of the Lion, the Jackal, the Wolf, the Crow and the Camel; b. 10 the story of the Titawi and the Spirit of the Sea; b. 12 the story of the Bird and the Monkeys and the Firefly; b. 13 the story of the Wise Bazari and the Stupid one; b. 15 the tale of the Iron-eating Mice and Child-abducting Falcon; b. 17 the tale of the False Physician who mistook poison for a cure; b. 19 referring to the stories of the Rat who agrees to cut the net for the Ringdove and that of the Crow who saves the Rat by catching it by the tale; b. 24 the story of the Hypocritical Cat followed by b. 25 the tale of the Monk who believes his Kid is a Dog; b. 26 the story of the Woman who turns towards her Husband as she is frightened by a Thief; b. 28 the story of the Carpenter and his Unfaithful Wife; b. 32 the story of the Dervish and the Halva; b. 34 the story of the Male Dove who kills his Female; b. 37 the story of the Lion and the Ascetic Jackal; b. 39 the story of the Prince and his Friends; the final b. 40 the story of the Lioness loosing her Cubs.
  - 33 It is unlikely that an author would re-write or manipulate an original regarded as a perfect masterpiece by himself and by the target audience. See Lefevere (1992) 87-98. This opens questions on the possibility of different attitudes towards Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma* in the course of the centuries: in particular here, did Nizāmī re-write the episodes of Khusraw and Shīrīn, of Bahrām Gūr and of Iskandar out of admiration for his original or because he felt Firdawsī's poem was imperfect and open to correction? (see van Ruymbeke (forthcoming 2).
  - 34 For a detailed analysis of this story as it appears in the first book of Rūmī's *Mathnavī*, compared to its contents in the original cycle of fables, see my forthcoming article "The Kalile o Dimne and Rumi. That was the husk and this is the kernel." (van Ruymbeke (forthcoming 2).
  - 35 Ghazali (1964) 73.



- 36 See Nasrullah Munshi-Minovi (1343) 86-8; Bukhari (1369) 93-5; Lambton (1971) 425, referring to Ghazālī's point that if the sultan was weak, universal ruin would befall religion and the world.
- 37 Mention of the perils of service to an arrogant despot are a topos in medieval *andarz* literature, while the ruler is told that his most important qualities ought to be generosity and compassion. See for example Lambton (1971) 425-6, and Bagley's Introduction in Ghazali (1964). See also b. 37, the story of the lion and the ascetic jackal, which again presents how advisable it is to stay away from the monarch.
- 38 The metre demands two long syllables, although Steingass (1892), 370, gives "*jamāsh*, ... a deceiver, cheat;..." and "*jammāsh*, an amorous glance."
- 39 This somewhat tempers Meisami's (1987) 156, analysis of the king's action: "Khusraw's subsequent action – when, learning that Farhad inspired by love is near success, he sends the false report of Shirin's death which causes Farhad to die of grief – lacks even the technical justification that Maubad's (i.e. the old king and husband in Gurgani's Vis o Ramin romance) acts of violence against the adulterous lovers might claim; and his mocking letter of condolence to the innocent Shirin further emphasizes the baseness of his motives. Khusraw's triumph over his rival reflects no "code of honour", which must, willy-nilly, be observed but demonstrates his own lack of honor." Rather in the light of the fable here, Khusraw has followed the amoral advice from his counsellors (who in turn follow age-old political wisdom)... and soon regrets his act, although he still writes his cruel letter to Shīrīn. This dastardly act by Khusraw is embarrassing for all commentators of the romance. See also Nizami-Bürgel (1980), 352 and Bürgel (1998), 70.
- 40 Considering Shīrīn's exemplary love, Buzurg-Umīd has no reason to address the lessons of this fable to her, unless it were a long-overdue reference to the trick she played on the drunken king on their wedding night?
- 41 This is the story of the King and the Bird Fanzah in Nasrullah Munshi-Minovi (1343), 282-303.
- 42 Ibn al-Muqaffā'-Khawam (1985) 45. On the hermeneutical problem of the text, see Bürgel (1999), 189-204.
- 43 Preminger (1993) "Allusion", 38-9. This modern definition of allusion is different from the more restricted Medieval Persian understanding of the figure, as defined by Shams-i Qays (1338) 377. He explains the allusion, تلميح *talmih*, in the following manner: "when a small number of words refers to a lot of meanings, which are immediately identifiable, without the possibility of error; also when the poet tries to express with few words a complex thought..."
- 44 I am not taking 'Parody' in the strict rhetorical sense as defined in Preminger (1993) 881-3, but, follow the definition given by Bacry (1992) 257, which refers to either or both style and contents: "la parodie [...] procède à un détournement de l'oeuvre dont elle s'inspire... le comique résulte de la distorsion entre ce cadre connu et le contenu nouveau qu'il enserre".



## 8 The “Wasteland” and Alexander, the Righteous King, in Nizāmī’s *Iqbāl Nāma*

*Carlo Saccone*

Many episodes of Nizāmī’s *Iqbāl Nāma*<sup>1</sup> single out the figure of Alexander as the prophet-king and the philosopher-king who brings the message of monotheism to the four corners of the earth. Several of these episodes have been the object of much-deserved attention: for example, the opening scene, where the king talks to the seven philosophers in the audience room;<sup>2</sup> or the enigmatic one, where Alexander meets a perfect community, during the last northward journey of his expedition to the Orient.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I will take a close look at yet another episode, which seldom attracted scholarly attention but which I deem essential in order to understand the true character of Alexander’s kingship and, in a more general way, Nizāmī’s vision of sovereignty: the episode of the abandoned land or “wasteland”, which Alexander discovers during the journey that takes him and his army southwards, the second of his four journeys (in chronological order: westward, southward, eastward and northward). The geographical identification of this southern region is problematic: is it the African land? Or is it some place in India?<sup>4</sup> It is this last hypothesis which seems the most likely, if we consider that Iran is the ideal centre of Alexander’s journeys, or, at least, that the place he must always pass through or where he must always return to, is Iran, which, as we know, covered a much larger territory than it does nowadays and was located more eastward.

Let us consider what occurs just before the episode we will analyse, which takes place towards the end of the southward journey. It immediately follows three episodes that we now briefly recall. During this second expedition, Alexander first meets people devoted to strange idolatrous cults, who keep their unfortunate prisoners in jars full of oil for forty days, then behead them and worship their skulls, with which they decorate their houses. Alexander destroys the jars and the skulls, thus converting all these idolaters to monotheism. Next, he crosses a mountain with stones so hard they break his army’s horseshoe bats and, while searching for a solution to this problem, he happens upon a river full of diamonds guarded by snakes. By a clever trick, he takes possession of the diamonds (there is a similar story in the Arabic cycle of Sindbād the Sailor).<sup>5</sup> These two episodes are dominated by adventure and fantastic elements. The Greek king is above

all an explorer egged on by curiosity, while his religious mission remains in the background. With the third episode, come to the fore the sapiential-religious aspects<sup>6</sup> which are certainly prominent in this *mathnavī* and in Nizāmī's poetry in general. A detailed description of the episode will prove useful. Reaching a place, comforting to his soldiers' eyes and hearts after the wearing and endless march through mountains and deserts, Alexander meets a young peasant:

در آن زر عگه کشتزاری شگرف  
نوازش گرفته زباران و برف  
ز سیزی و تری و تابندگی  
بر او جان و دل را شتابندگی

(IN25,87-8)

*[it was] a land of wonderful cultivated fields, caressed by rain and snow. The brilliance of those fresh, verdant fields caused a great excitement in the heart and soul of the king...*

Alexander stops in front of a young toiling peasant. Impressed by the youth's beauty and graceful figure, at odds with his labourer's toil, the king softly invites the boy to approach and asks him:

جوانی و خوبی و بیدار مغز  
نه کار تو شد بیل برداشتن  
بدین فراخی گوهری تابناک  
بیا تا ترا پادشاهی دهم  
که خوی تو با خاک چون گشت جفت  
ز نغزان نباید بجز کار نغز  
به ویرانه ای دانه ای کاشتن  
نه فرخ بود هم ترازوی خاک  
ز پیگار خاکت رهائی دهم

(IN25,94b-8)

*Why did you adapt to working in the fields? You are young, handsome and smart, and those who are outstanding should do but excellent jobs! Your fate should not be that of holding a spade, planting seeds in places forlorn. Such a shiny pearl can not weigh, on the balance, as much as a vile clod of earth. Then come with me, because I want to entrust you with royal tasks and free you, in this way, from your slavery to the soil.*

This is a *topos* in Persian poetry: the meeting between the prince and the wise man, who in this version takes the aspect of a young peasant revealing himself endowed with great wisdom. The meeting, in the same *mathnavī*, between Alexander and a wise man who has chosen to live as a hermit and reveals himself to be Socrates is another version of the same *topos*. Alexander tries in vain to convince the philosopher to abandon his miserable state and to accept the comforts of life at court, that is, a standard of living fitting for a man who has earned such fame for his wisdom:

تمنا چه داری تو ای نیکخواه

دگر باره شه گفت کز مال و جاه

(IN17,95)

*Tell me – he entreats him – you that seek the good, what offices and honours do you desire.*

To this, Socrates's answer is full of contempt:

که با چون منی بر مینبار جور  
که تو بیش خواری من اندک خورم  
نه ای سیر دل هم ز خوانی چنین  
گرانستی ارنیستی گرم و سرد  
طلبکاری من کجا کار تست

من از تو به همت توانگرترم  
تو با اینکه داری جهانی چنین  
مرا این یکی ژنده سالخورد  
تو با این گرانی که دربار تست

(IN17,96b-100)

*Do not oppress me with the weight of such things. I am stronger than you because of my spiritual ambition (himmat) while you eat more than I do. On the contrary, although you possess the entire world, you can never satiate your heart, not even with feasts! I have but this poor rag clothing me, which is many years old, and even this would bother me, if cold and heat did not exist. But you, loaded with the weight of your kingdom, you come here in search of me: don't you have anything better to do?*

Socrates even goes as far as humiliating the king, telling him that the difference between them lies in the fact that, in spite of appearances, it is Socrates who gives orders and Alexander who obeys. He explains all this through a sort of syllogism:

دل من بدان بنده فرمان روا  
پرستار ما را پرستنده ای

مرا بنده ای هست نامش هوا  
تو آنی که آن بنده را بنده ای

(IN17,105-6)

*Well, I have a servant whose name is "lust", and my heart always gives orders to this servant. Instead, [you, the king,] you are the one who is servant to this servant, you obey the one who obeys me, [therefore...]*

Note, *en passant*, a very similar episode, whose main characters are a king and a beggar *sufi*, contained in the *Mantiq al-tayr*, by Nizāmī's contemporary, 'Attār. In this episode, the beggar *sufi* compares passion to a donkey and says to the king: "while I ride the donkey of passion, this donkey rides

you, therefore I, who am riding the animal that rides you, am infinitely better than you are.”<sup>7</sup>

Alexander’s meeting with the young peasant is an evident repetition of this episode. The king invites the youth to give up his work in the fields and to accept a royal office or dignity. As was the case with Socrates, the peasant’s refusal is inevitable and firm:

همه توسنان از تو آموزگار	چنین گفت که ای رایض روزگار
که در خلقتش ناید اندیشه ای	چنان مان بهر پیشه ور پیشه ای
به من پادشاهی سزاوار نیست	بجز دانه کاری مرا کار نیست
چو نرمی ببیند شود کوژپشت	کشاورز را جای باشد درشت
هلاک درشتان بود جای نرم	تنم در درشتی گرفتست چرم

(IN25,100-5)

*Oh shepherd of this time, oh you that tame all yet untamed animals! It is better that everyone devotes himself to his job, without thinking too much about one’s nature. I do but plant seeds, I’m not up to royal charges. The peasant must be happy with a hard life, since he softens in the lap of luxury. My body hardened with the hard life in the fields, a comfortable life is the ruin of those who are used to hardships.*

Naturally, the peasant does not even approach that utmost contempt to which Socrates treated the Greek king. The philosopher publicly challenged Alexander’s sovereignty, while the young peasant remains humble and declares himself the king’s subject. However, like Socrates, he claims the dignity of a simple, frugal life and, most of all, the independence of a choice that does not waver, even before the mirage of life at court. Alexander listens to the young peasant’s answer in admiration and questions him once more:

کز اینسان ترا کیست پروردگار	که شد پاسدار تو در خفت و خیز
پناهت کجا کرد بازار تیز	کرا می پرستی کرا بنده ای
نظر بر کدامین ره افکنده ای؟	

(IN25,107b-9)

*Who is the one that feeds you? And who is the one that preserves you while you sleep or while you are awake? Who is the one you seek for shelter during famine? And who is the one you adore, who is the one you serve? What is the path you look at?*

Alexander, remembering his mission, uses these questions in order to ascertain the young man’s faith. The peasant answers:

به پیغمبری خلق را رهنمای ...  
نگارنده کوه و صحرا و رود  
نهم چند ره روی خود برزمین  
کزینسان به من داد ناخواسته  
که از هر یکم هست صد گونه سود  
بر آنکس که او باشد ایزدشناس  
پذیرفتم از راه دین پروری

(IN25,110 and 112-7)

جوانمرد گفت ای ز گیتی خدای  
بر آورنده آسمان کبود  
شب و روز پیش جهان آفرین  
بدین چشم و ابروی آراسته  
بدیگر کرمها که با من نمود  
سپاسش برم واجب آید سپاس  
ترا کامدستی به پیغمبری

*Oh lord of the world, oh guide and prophet of people ...to Him who raised for us this blue sky, to Him who has painted mountains, rivers and deserts, to Him who created the world, night and day I bow my head to the ground several times. Gifted with eyes and eyebrows I didn't ask for, which He however wanted to offer me, and gratified by the other gifts he wanted to give me, taking advantage of each of them a hundred times, what should I do but thank Him? Thanking is a duty for those who have learnt to know God. And you that came here with a prophetic mission, I accept you with all my heart, devotedly.*

He subtly and indirectly compares God's gifts to those Alexander would like to offer him, implicitly declaring that he is happier with the former. Alexander is obviously convinced of the perfect monotheistic orthodoxy of the young man's faith and does not question him any longer. He kisses him on his forehead, gives him a formal dress and

که هم سرخ گل بود و هم سبز شاخ  
سبکتر شد از خستگیهای راه

(IN25,125-6)

در آن مرز و آن مرزار فراخ  
شبانروزی آسود شه با سپاه

*At that point, in those happy lands where purple roses and green boughs were growing, the king rested for a whole day and night along with his soldiers, in order to relieve themselves of the journey's weariness.*

Alexander has found real wisdom in the young peasant, who has taught him a lesson: the glitter and comforts of the court, which the king flashes before his eyes, are meaningless to the servants of God and His decree. The peasant shows himself to be a perfect *ante-litteram* Muslim, totally devoted to the will of God. Facing this sincere monotheist, Alexander finds nothing to do, to teach, nor to preach. Furthermore – and this is remarkable – he has not even anything to offer which may be attractive to the young man, neither can he convince him of abandoning his life in the fields.

Before this peasant, who has chosen God as his only king, Alexander is powerless. The peasant, though not with the contempt and sarcasm used by Socrates, has equally called into question the Greek king's sovereignty: to him there is only one king worth this title and this is the King of Heavens. This episode, in the light thrown by the others that we are going to analyse, acquires an overriding ideological value, not only with regard to the royal figure of Alexander but in a more general way, also with regard to the Islamic theory of sovereignty.

Let us examine now the episode of the "wasteland", that is, the land abandoned by men and animals, which we will focus on in the analysis of Alexander's second, southward, expedition. The Greek king reaches

زمینهای وی جمله بی گاو و کشت عمارتهگی درخور خسروان	فروزنده مرزی چو روشن بهشت درخت و گل و سبزه آب روان
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(IN25,130-1)

*A land that shines like a new paradise, but where the fields have neither animals nor plants; instead, there were plenty of trees and flowers and streams, which made it a place for princes.*

Alexander is perplexed, amazed, he wonders whether a sudden and unpredictable natural disaster, maybe a fire or a flood has made men and animals flee that place, as it lacks nothing, it is fertile and rich in water:

سر و سرور این بروم کیست کجا در چنین ده کند گاو هو	ببرسید کاین مرز را نام چیست کشاورز و گاوآهن و گاو کو
--	---

(IN25,133-4)

*How is this land called – he asks around – and who is the lord of such a place? And where are the animals, the peasants and the ploughs? And where is it, around here, that you can hear the bellowing of a cow?*

A local notable appears at this point, who, after having paid appropriate tribute to the king, answers his anxious questions:

حوالی بسی دارد از بهر ورز یکی زو هزار آورد بلکه بیش نگردد کس از دخل او بهره مند ده آباد بودی و در ده کسی	که اقصای این دلگشاینده مرز دراو هر چه کاری بهنگام خویش ولیکن ز بیداد یابد گزند اگر داد بودی و داور بسی
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(IN25, 136-9)

*Oh king, this land that conquers the heart has many prosperous and tillable provinces, where anything you plant in the appropriate*

*time grows more than one thousand times as much. But these provinces suffer from the oppression of injustice, therefore nobody can profit of them. If there was justice here, and if there were judges enough, this village would be prosperous and inhabited.*

Not only does this local notable inform the Greek king of the reasons why that land has been abandoned, but he also reveals himself as a sort of wise man who draws a universally valid moral from the present situation. A moral in which one can easily perceive the author's strong and most Islamic personality, particularly sensitive to the theme of justice. This wise notable continues:

تباهی پذیرد ز بیدادگر	به انصاف و داد آرد این خاک بر
بسوزد ز گرمی بیوسد ز نم	چو از دخل او گردد انصاف کم

(IN25,140-1)

*Oh king, only through justice and equity will this land be fruitful, but there will be nothing but ruin and abandonment here as long as the unjust dominate! Since there is no justice in sharing out the harvest, may the fields burn under the sun or rot in the dampness of the night.*

These great and simple words – if you allow me to return to the present time for a moment – could still be the subject matter of profitable meditation for the world's leaders of today! These are the precise words of a great sage of our time, Pope John Paul II, who repeated: "*There can be no peace without justice.*"

The wise notable finishes his speech according to the Islamic faith in God's final justice:

جو و گندمش را برد باد و سیل	به یک جو که در مالش آرند میل
که گردد به یک جو ترازوی او	سبک منجیقست بازوی او

(IN25,142-3)

*Thus, while everybody is fighting even for a grain of wheat, wind and floods sweep the whole harvest away. But the arm of God is a quick catapult, and His scale will weigh everything up to the last grain!*

This contains a subtle allusion to the Qur'anic passage (XCIX, 7-8) which says, with regard to the day of the final statement ( *yawm al-hasāb* ), that is the Judgement day: "*those who have done even just a grain of evil, they will see it and those who have done even just a little grain of good, they will see it.*"<sup>8</sup> These verses must have impressed Muhammad's

public who, according to a well-known *hadīth*, had significantly commented: “*These are the most terrible verses of the Koran!*” However, the wise notable also implicitly invites Alexander to find a remedy for the disaster provoked by injustice, something which is part, *naturaliter*, of the spirit of the famous Qur’anic passage (III, 110) where Allah addresses Muhammad and his followers with these words: “*You are the best nation that ever sprang: promote justice, forbid injustice and believe in God!*”

Having listened to the wise notable’s speech, Alexander doesn’t lose an hour: “Informed that tyrants’ injustice had caused the ruin of those lands, he decided to build there a barrier of justice (سدی از عدل بنیاد کرد) (*saddī az ‘adl bunyād kard*) and to call that place “Iskandarabad” (Alexander’s City). To make it more prosperous, he ordered that all must give their due to those who worked for them and pay alms for the poor and also that nobody could be given a warrant for pillaging and that such abuses would not be tolerated, so that so righteous a king was praised a thousand times.”

ز بیداد بیدادگر شد خراب همان نامش اسکندر آباد کرد که هر کس دهد حق مزد ور خویش بتاراجشان کس نیارد برات هزار آفرین بر چنان داوری	چو خسرو خبر یافت کان خاک و آب در او سدی از عدل بنیاد کرد بآبادیش داد منشور خویش دهد هر کس مال خود را زکات در او ره نیارد برات آوری
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(IN25,144-8)

This, then, is the essence of Nizāmī’s work. Let us consider, now, the placing of these episodes in relation to the structure of the poem which, as we know, is built as a sort of great *mandala*.<sup>9</sup> The core are Alexander’s four expeditions (westward, southward, eastward and northward), preceded by the aforementioned long episode of the discussions between the king and the seven philosophers and followed by the episode of the king’s death and the same philosophers’ lamentations upon his grave. This refined structural symmetry is found at various levels: in the general structure of the work, in that of its single parts, and also, more subtly, at the level of the message structure. The two episodes we have briefly described provide an excellent example of this structure.

If we analyse the poem considering its symmetry, it is easy to find two episodes which, placed according to a mirror symmetry in the fourth and last journey (the northward one), are the equivalent of the stories of the peasant and of the “wasteland”. These are two famous episodes: the first is that of Alexander’s arrival in the lands threatened by Gog and Magog,<sup>10</sup> where he builds the famous barrier to protect the endangered peoples; the second is the episode immediately following upon it (already mentioned above and equally well-known) where Alexander meets a community of Perfect Men, which has been seen as echoing political doctrines and utopias outlined by various authors, from Plato to al-Fārābī.<sup>11</sup>



Some perfectly symmetrical elements are immediately detectable. In the northward journey, the episode of the protective barrier against Gog and Magog corresponds to the episode of the construction of "a barrier of justice" (سدی از عدل) *saddī az 'adl* in the southward journey, which must protect the land abandoned by men and animals because of injustice. In the North, Alexander built a physical barrier against Gog and Magog (which, as we know, closely follows a precise Qur'anic starting point: XVIII, 83-98). In the South, against unjust tyrants, he builds a symbolical "barrier of justice", made of laws and new and fairer rules to divide the harvest. In one case, injustice comes from outside society, an external enemy, i.e. from the terrible tribes of Gog and Magog; in the other case, injustice is due to an internal enemy, i.e. perverse social inner tendencies, in an unfair society dominated by tyrants. In both cases, Alexander's sovereignty concretely and actively reveals itself, through the construction of "barriers", be it physical or ideal. Construction, whether real or symbolic, is here a synonym of civilization, of the raising of a divine *nomos* as barrier against injustice and human barbarity.

Let us now consider the other symmetrically located couple of episodes. In the northward journey, after having met the community of Perfect Men and having verified that they live and act in total accordance with the will of God, Alexander declares:

جهان هست ازین نیکمردان بجای	همانا که پیش جهان آزمای
که اوتاد عالم شدند این گروه ...	بدیشان گرفتست عالم شکوه
بدان بود تا باید اینجا گذشت	فرستادن ما به دریا و دشت
در آموزم آیین این بخردان	مگر سیر کردم ز خوی ددان
به گرد جهان برنگردیدی	گر این قوم را پیش از این دیدمی
به ایزد پرستی میان بستی	به کنجی در از کوه بنشستی
جز این دین نبودى دگر دین من	ازین رسم نگزشتی آیین من

(IN27,163-4 and 166-70)

*Before him, who explored the whole world, there is the world of these virtuous men; thanks to them, the universe shines, because they are the spiritual pillars of the universe (...) Our mission through mountains and deserts was conceived because, tired of men's brutal behaviour, we could come here to learn these wise men's law. If I had known these people before, maybe I would not have wandered through the world. I would have retired to a secluded corner on a mountain in order to devote myself only to God's adoration, my customs would not have been different from their laws, nor would my faith have been different from their faith!*

Alexander recognises that he doesn't need to impose his law because of the superiority of that particular community's law. These wise men had

taught him a lesson. We cannot but notice a strain of self-criticism in this Alexander. He is a tired prophet-warrior at the end of his journeys, confronted with the peace that reigns in this perfect community. Had he met them earlier on, he admits, *my customs would not have been different from their laws*.

One acknowledges the perfect parallelism between this episode and that of the meeting with the young peasant, described above. In this episode too, Alexander first wants to test the young man's faith and, having verified his thorough orthodoxy, he admits he has nothing to teach him; on the contrary, the young man gives him a lesson of most pious subjection to the divine decrees by firmly refusing the offices and honours the king offers him. He evidently perceives Alexander's invitation to accept an assignment at court as a violation of the divine plan, which destined him to humbly work in the fields: by refusing, he shows that before being subject to the earthly king's laws he is first subject to the laws of God. Here too, we can detect an implicit underlying critique: the king's generosity is the other side of a typically earthly greed, which the pious peasant rejects.

There is also another, more subtle aspect, which Nizāmī implicitly underlines in the comparison between the two episodes. There is nothing the Greek king needs to do, either for the pious peasant or for the perfect community: he does not need to build barriers, either real or symbolical, he has neither to give laws nor protection against anything. Alexander's sovereignty is, so to say, "suspended", maybe even humbled: the peasant turns his back on his offer, the community of the Perfect Men is clearly a "world apart" where the Greek king has no power at all, either good or bad.

This situation of "suspension" of sovereignty is the exact opposite of that which occurs in the other couple of episodes, those of Gog and Magog and the "Wasteland". Here, Alexander's sovereignty is exercised to its utmost, he must act as legislator and protector, as *defensor fidei* and *defensor civitatis*, he builds, as we have seen, both real and ideal "barriers."

These four episodes, symmetrically organized in equivalent couples, show how, in the *Iqbāl Nāma*, Nizāmī deliberately wanted to focus on the question of sovereignty, or better, on the issue of the *limits* of sovereignty.<sup>12</sup> A complex issue, which, as we know, was considered very delicate in the medieval Islamic debate on Power and Sovereignty, and which, for certain aspects, is also relevant nowadays. It is a delicate issue because it is concerned with theological and generally religious aspects, and not only with historical and political issues.

As a point of departure, we observe that the couple of episodes Gog and Magog – "Wasteland" typify the case of the imperfect city, or even the utmost grade of unfair city or City of Injustice, which is the exact opposite of the case typified by the other couple of episodes. The community of the Perfect Men represents an ideal perfect city or City of Justice, which has its foundation in that spiritual "city of justice" every citizen has realised in

himself, an issue foreshadowed by the young peasant's figure who, thoroughly pious and satisfied in his own condition, accepts the divine justice and decrees.

From the point of view of the Nizamian *Weltanschauung*, these four episodes are constructed on a pregnant double opposition: *city of justice* vs. *city of injustice* and *suspended sovereignty* vs. *effective sovereignty*. Alexander's sovereignty is exercised to its utmost degree of justice where the perfection of the earthly city plummets to bottom level. On the contrary, it tends to lessen, or even to extinguish, where the earthly city has reached perfection in its total submission to God.

Nizāmī, then, did not simply offer us four stories among the many we can ascribe to Alexander's Islamic Vulgate.<sup>13</sup> Skilfully playing with subtle structural symmetries, he suggested, through these four episodes, a precise vision of power and sovereignty, which may also be defined as a complete political philosophy. In order to briefly re-construct the outline of this political ideology, we should say that, according to Nizāmī, prior to Alexander's power and always in dialectical opposition to it, there is the other power, the power which is above all others, the power of God. As far as human sovereignty is concerned, Alexander's power is justified and *effective* only as far as the other sovereignty, God's sovereignty and Law, is not acknowledged or respected. Before those who acknowledge and thoroughly respect the divine decrees, Alexander has nothing to do, he is aimless, almost powerless. Actually, this Alexander seems a prefiguration of the future Islamic caliph, the ideal caliph, whose task it is to universally enforce the triumph of Allah's Law, i.e. the will of the only real sovereign, the only king worthy of this name. Alexander's power, as well as that of the future caliph, is justified in the form of a "vicarious power."<sup>14</sup> not in the form of an absolute power: it is *suspended* in those places where only God's Law reigns. This is confirmed by the fact that when Alexander reaches the city of the Perfect Men, he does not find any city authority, any established human power and – and this is a decisive detail – he does not think of claiming this role as sovereign.

In the city of the Perfect Men an anarchic-religious utopia is realised, whose presuppositions are all already present in the *Qur'an* (V, 43-50), in the famous verses on sovereignty (*hakīmiyya*) which we here recall. In a long speech, God is said once more to have given every human community a Law to judge human questions, the *Pentateuch* to the Jews, the *Gospel* to the Christians and the *Qur'an* to the Muslim' *umma*. Then, the speech continues with verse (V, 50), which polemically refers to those among the Meccans, who persist in refusing the revelation. In Arberry's translation:

*Is it the judgment (حکم hukm) of pagandom then/ that they are seeking? Yet who is fairer/ in judgment than God, for a people/ having sure faith? (V, 50).*

Ahmed Ali's translation, which takes into account other aspects, goes:

*Do they seek a judgement of the days of pagan ignorance? And who could be a better judge than God, for those who are firm in their faith?*<sup>15</sup>

It is useful here to recall that the Arabic term *hukm*, usually translated as “judgement”, has a very large semantic spectrum, which certainly draws on the kings' ancient privilege to exercise both political and judicial power. The term, therefore, conveys an idea of “judgement” which spreads from the political area to the judicial one, and which makes it a synonym of “power” in a very broad sense. Another traditional expression, often quoted, both rightly and wrongly, is the *lā hukm illā-lillāh* ( لا حكم إلا لله ) that is “There is no power/judgement except God's one”.<sup>16</sup> This idea that *the sovereign power is only God's power* is so rooted in the Islamic sensitivity that, as we know, Muhammad and the caliphs who succeeded him as guides of the community, always refused the title “king”. As we may recall, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, for example, simply wanted to be called *khalīfa rasūl Allāh* (“deputy of God's messenger”). With the Umayyad dynasty, caliphs define themselves as *khalīfat Allāh*, that is “God's deputy” (a title used for the Qur'anic Adam too), also implying that only Allah is the king or sovereign worthy of this name. A further evidence of this situation where sovereignty, as an earthly human institution, is fundamentally de-legitimized, is the way the *Qur'an* deals with the figure of Pharaoh, in the episode where he opposes to Moses as God's prophet. The key-episode (X, 90) is at the end of the chase of the Jews, escaping through the Red Sea:

*We brought the people of Israel across the sea but the Pharaoh and his army pursued them wickedly and maliciously till he was on the point of drowning, and he said: “I believe that there is no God but He in whom the people of Israel believe, and I submit to Him.”*<sup>17</sup>

The Qur'anic Pharaoh's impiety – who only when dying repents and thoroughly acknowledges God's sovereignty – becomes a sort of anathema on all human claims to *al-hukm* the power/judgement, which is perceived as the Heavenly King's prerogative.

Coming back to Nizāmī, it seems clear that these ideas form the background to his construction of Alexander's sovereignty. The pattern of human society, though governed by a pious and ardent monotheist king like Alexander, is infinitely inferior to the ideal city, the community of the Perfect Men, which is exclusively subject to God's decrees and which therefore does not need Alexander or any other earthly king. Where Allah's sovereignty (*hakīmiyya*) is thoroughly acknowledged, the presence of an earthly king is intolerable or, better, has become superfluous.

Alexander's task is well-summarized in the salutation the young peasant addresses him with: "*Oh shepherd of this time, oh you that tame all still untamed animals!*" He is "shepherd" and guide, the one who received from God the charge to bring His Law throughout the world; he is a "tamer" whose task it is to lessen every human appetite, the appetite of a human race that forgot God's sovereignty. Rather than establishing a universal kingdom, his mission, which clearly prefigures that of Muhammad and of the Islamic caliphs, is that of taking the divine *nomos* to those peoples who ignore it. He doesn't bring *his* law, he brings the law of a Heavenly King. In the performance of his task, he will resort to all the earthly and non-earthly wisdom at his disposal, and thanks to God's assistance he will be *infallible*.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, his sovereignty has only a relative power, "vicarious", not absolute. And for this reason, he doesn't claim any sovereignty at all before those who already know God's law. Those who live in the City of the Perfect Men, the City of Justice – says Alexander – appear to him as "the spiritual pillars of the world" and, furthermore, "thanks to them, the world shines in its light."

Paradoxically, God's sovereignty is most perfectly realized in the form of an accomplished *holy anarchy*: the City of the Perfect Men has no earthly authority and will never need it.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Nizāmī's Alexander contemplates a utopian city, the City of Justice, an ideal – if I may say – still valid nowadays.

Alexander's justice is then clearly realized not only in his building "barriers of justice", but most of all, in his renouncing to exercise his sovereignty on those who are already completely subject to the Heavenly King. The "righteous king" exercises, as is his duty, his sovereignty in the City of Injustice, in the "Wasteland". Before those who acknowledge God's kingship and put into practice God's laws however, he thoroughly gives up his royal prerogatives, he *suspends* his sovereignty.

## Notes

- 1 European translations: Nizami-Bürgel (1991) and Nizami-Saccone (1997).
- 2 Bausani (1977).
- 3 Bertotti (1989).
- 4 My introduction "La leggenda islamica di Alessandro" Nizami-Saccone (1997) 5-61.
- 5 Saccone (1999c).
- 6 Nizami-Bürgel (1991), *Nachwort*, 585-630; Bausani (1977).
- 7 'Attar-Maskur (1353) Maqala xxi, 129-30; also Saccone (2005) 279-311.
- 8 Also al-Qur'an (2001) VII,8-9.
- 9 Saccone (1999c) 215ss. On this interesting structure of many Persian *mathnavīs*, Saccone (2006) 27-58.
- 10 See also the article by van den Berg in this volume.
- 11 Nizami-Bürgel (1991) *Nachwort*; Bürgel (1995) 65-78.
- 12 Saccone (2002) 33-64; Bridges/Bürgel (1996); Nizami-Bürgel (1991).
- 13 Saccone (1999c); Casari (1999).

- 14 Saccone (2002).
- 15 The Koran (1998) and Al-Qur'an (2001).
- 16 This is an ancient motto of the kharijites, also popular today among some Islamic fundamentalists. On the concept of *hakimiyya*, also in connection with Islamic fundamentalism, cf. Nasr (2002) 143-67; Bürgel (1991b) 21-95.
- 17 Al-Qur'an (2001).
- 18 Saccone (1999b).
- 19 Compare this 'holy anarchy' with classical anarchical theories discussed in Nozick (1974).

## 9 A Mystical Reading of Nizāmī's Use of Nature in the *Haft Paykar*

*Asghar Seyed-Gohrab*

چون بدانجا رسی که نتوانی  
کز طبیعت عنان بگردانی  
(HP26,290)

*When you come to the point that you cannot [go further]  
You will turn the reins from nature.*

Scholarly research on Nizāmī's view of nature has generally focussed on his animated descriptions of flora and fauna, gardens and deserts, starry nights and similar natural phenomena. Contrary to Arabic poetry in which nature is treated differently,<sup>1</sup> in the studies on Nizāmī, 'nature' in its literal sense is not the main subject: the discussions revolve around Nizāmī's matchless poetic technique and his use of metaphors (as in Ritter's indispensable analysis of Nizāmī's nature imagery), around his narrative use of nature (as in several of Meisami's studies), around his scientific knowledge of flora (as in a recent study by van Ruymbeke), or around the use of nature as an allegory of the human condition and as a narrative device indicating time and setting.<sup>2</sup> To my knowledge, there is no study available discussing Nizāmī's view of nature as, on the one hand, an object of reflection that reveals the divine rational order by which man can achieve sublimation, and, on the other hand, as a crypt from which man is supposed to escape.

In other words, there are two different aspects of nature expressed in Nizāmī's romances. Can nature be seen as a spiritual force, a vehicle through which man may achieve the Truth? What does a classical Persian poet mean when he uses the word 'nature' or 'natural'? In short, what is the main function of nature in Nizāmī's romances, and particularly in his *Haft Paykar*?

A close look at the usage of this word in the works of classical Persian poets shows that they are not merely referring to gardens, birds, the sun and the moon, etc., but are often referring to their essence or quality: the colour, smell, light, heat, etc. These essential parts of things form the ontological basis that is independent of our subjective beliefs and view of the world. The medieval Persian poet's idea of nature is essentially based on a

Hellenistic worldview, found in several treatises by Islamic scholars. Amongst these, the famous ‘Brethren of Purity’ (*Ikhwān as-Safā’*) from Basra propose a Neoplatonic definition of nature in the chapter delineating its essence:

*Those among the sages and philosophers who used to talk about cosmic phenomena occurring in the sublunar realm attributed all natural events and processes to tabi’a (...) Know, O my brother, (...) that tabi’a is only one of the potentialities of the Universal Soul, a potentiality spreading through all sublunar bodies, flowing through each of their parts.<sup>3</sup>*

In this philosophy, nature as a force is subordinated to the Universal Soul on whose behalf it operates. In another passage, the Brethren write that nature consists of a group of angels, who are appointed by God in order to protect the natural world. This idea refers to the Neoplatonic emanation theory in which nature is presented as an emanation issuing forth from the First Cause. According to the Brethren, the Universal Soul and Reason play an intermediary role in the creation of the natural world. In this doctrine, the role of God as the supreme creator is indirect: He regulates the matters of the world through his angels. Nature, which is indicated in Arabic and Persian by the word طَبِيعَت *tabī’at* forms just one group of angels: “طَبِيعَت is only one of God’s angels, His supporters and His obedient slaves, doing whatever they are commanded to do.”<sup>4</sup>

According to this theory, every created entity is made of four ‘temperaments’ (طَبِيع, pl. *taba’i*): dry, hot, humid, and cold, which are the pure entities (المفردات *al-mufradāt*). The Four Elements (المركبات *al-murakkabāt*, fire, air, water, and earth) are each compounded of two of these pure entities. As the essential substance of all material existence, the entire material world belongs to the realm of nature (طَبِيعَت). It is also in this context that the word ‘nature’ appears in classical Persian poetry: anything created by the Four Elements belongs to nature. Phrases and compound words such as چهار طَبِيعَت *chahār tabī’at* literally ‘four natures’, occur frequently, pointing to the Four Elements or to the four humours. Thus, poetic allusions to nature do not point to natural phenomena such as flora and fauna, sunset or sunrise, and so forth, with which nature is associated nowadays. The word ‘nature’ is usually associated with concepts such as ‘divine essence’ (ذات *dhāt*), ‘creation’ (خلق *khalq*), and ‘the existence’ (كون *kawn*).

It is no wonder that the word has these connotations in Islamic literatures. If we select the word طَبِيعَت in Persian poetry, we discover a gnostic worldview in which the material world is trapped in the web of fate and man is advised to emancipate from material existence.

The great fourteenth-century lyricist Hāfiz alludes to this term only twice. In both cases he refers to the material world. In the following verse,



he distinguishes between the material and the spiritual worlds by placing the word طبیعت over against طریقت *tarīqat*:

تو کز سرای طبیعت نمی روی بیرون      کجا به کوی طریقت گذر توانی کرد

*You who cannot go outside the house of طبیعت / How can you possibly traverse the street of طریقت?*<sup>5</sup>

By emphasising the contrast between the two worlds, the poet is suggesting here that the first requirement to tread on the spiritual path (طریقت *tarīqat*) is to abandon the 'house of nature.' But what is this house of nature that man has to leave behind? In these types of verses, the poets allude to the four elements and to man's dispositions based on the four humours, as in the following instance by Rūmī:

چار طبیعت چو چار گردن حمال دان      همچو جنازه مباح بر سر چارم طواف

*Consider the four 'natures' as the necks of four carriers / Be not like a dead body, walk around the head of the fourth element.*<sup>6</sup>

In the following couplet by the same poet, the immaterial soul is contrasted to man's body made of Four Elements:

این چار طبیعت ار بسوزد      غم نیست تو جان هر چهری

*If these 'four natures' burn / Why be sorrowful, since you are the soul of the four.*<sup>7</sup>

This gnostic worldview is prominently present from the beginnings of Persian poetry. Man is depicted as being 'nailed' in the world of dust by the four elements. The world itself is presented as the deep pit of nature (چاه طبیعت *chāh-i tabī'at*) from which man has to climb:

هر کی در چاه طبیعت مانده ست      چاره اش نبود ز فکر چون رسن

*Whoever is stuck in the pit of nature/ has no remedy but to think of a rope.*<sup>8</sup>

There are numerous other allusions in Persian poetry in which the reader is advised to free himself from طبیعت. For instance, in the last chapter of his *Salāmān and Absāl*, in which 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī reveals the symbolic meanings of the characters in the story, he twice refers to the term. In his first reference, Absāl stands for lust, following the decrees of nature:

کیست افسال این تن شهوت پرست      زیر احکام طبیعت گشته پست

*Who is Absāl? This lust-adoring body/ debased under Nature's decrees.<sup>9</sup>*

A few couplets later, Jāmī states that fire, which is referred to in the poem as a means to kill Absāl, actually symbolizes hard ascetic training; the fire is required to annihilate natural inclinations (میل *mayl*, Pl. امیال *amyāl*) and desires:

چیست آن آتش ریاضتهای سخت      تا طبیعت را زنده آتش برخت

*What is that fire? It is the strict ascetic disciplines/ to set fire to Nature in the outward form.<sup>10</sup>*

Nizāmī also associates nature with lust, and suggests asceticism as an alternative:

پرده دری پیشه دوران بود      بارکشی کار صبوران بود  
بارکش زهد شو ار تر نه ای      بار طبیعت مکش ار خر نه ای

(MA36, 60-1)

*The purpose of the world is to tear away the veils/ Those who have fortitude bear the burdens.*

*If you are not lustful, bear the burden of asceticism/ Do not bear the burden of nature, unless you are an ass.*

The depiction of nature in these poetic allusions is quite different from the one we have learned to appreciate in modern societies. Is this negative picture of nature what a Persian poet wants us to understand? The answer is twofold: on the one hand, nature is a philosophical principle and belongs to the rational order of the Divine manifestation, and man is expected to free himself from it. On the other hand, nature is an object of visual delight, an object on which we can meditate and come to appreciate God's handiwork. The words of Sa'dī are most fitting here:

برگ درختان سبز پیش خداوند هوش      هر ورقی دفتر است معرفت کردگار

*To the eyes of an intelligent person, the leaves of green trees/ are each a book, [unfolding] the knowledge of God.<sup>11</sup>*

Nature as an icon of meditation is not exclusively Islamic or Persian: in sixteenth-century Dutch paintings, especially in Pieter Bruegel's (ca. 1528-

1569) famous Series of the Seasons, natural scenes are used as a meditation on the Divine. As Falkenburg's excellent analysis shows, there is always a symbol, an image in the paintings, which functions as a key to interpret the entire scene.<sup>12</sup> Nasr suggests that "Nature may be studied as a book of symbols or as an icon to be contemplated at a certain stage of the spiritual journey and a crypt from which the Gnostic must escape in order to reach ultimate liberation and illumination (...)."<sup>13</sup> This is one of the most important functions of nature in Persian poetry.

In what follows, I will first demonstrate how nature is used in the *Haft Paykar* as a self-contained aesthetic entity, but most importantly as a set of icons to be contemplated during the stages of the protagonist's (spiritual) journey. Secondly, I will show why nature is a crypt from which the traveller must escape. My intention is not to dismiss other secular interpretations of this complex romance, because a secular reading is necessary and the poem's erotic and entertaining aspects are indispensable. In fact, the question is why Nizāmī used so many symbols to narrate the life of the Sasanian king Bahrām Gūr (r. 420-38 AD) and how we are entitled to interpret these symbols. A learned and mystically minded poet such as Nizāmī must have had something deeper in mind than eroticism and entertainment when writing his narrative. He warns in the epilogue of the romance that his poem has at least two layers of interpretation:

وز درونش درونیان را مغز  
وز عبارت کلید پر دارد

پیش بیرونیان برونش نغز  
حقه ای بسته پر ز در دارد

(HP38,25-6)

*In the eyes of those who look at its outer appearance, the outside is fine/ While for those who have an eye for the inside, it has a core.  
The poem contains a closed case full of pearls/ The key to which is a poetical expression.*

The "outer appearance" refers here to the factual story of Bahrām, including his journeys, hunting, and erotic escapades, but his story has another layer of meaning, which is wrapped in a constellation of metaphors and symbols. In the same way that we have to find the key to understand the inner meaning of Pieter Bruegel's paintings, in Nizāmī's romance, the key is a metaphor.

Nizāmī's use of nature as a set of icons for meditation, in the *Haft Paykar*, is by no means new. He had already used this technique in his other poems, notably in the *Makhzan al-Asrār* and in *Laylī u Majnūn*. I will cite only one example from each of these epics and will then concentrate on the *Haft Paykar*. In the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, Nizāmī gives several dazzling descriptions of the night before he describes the narrator's spiritual development, achieved by journeying through all the compartments of

one's own heart.<sup>14</sup> For a Persian poet, the heart is the seat of the human soul, the essence of man connecting him to his divine origin and offering him the prospect of eternal life. The narrator in the *Makhzan al-Asrār* embarks on a journey into the heart after withdrawing to meditate on the beauty of night in absolute solitude. While beholding this beauty, the narrator hears a voice (هاتف *hātif*) whispering to him the mysterious qualities of the heart, reminding him that the heart is his trainer (رايض *rāyiz*), and that he can unfold hidden parts of the heart through ascetic training. The voice urges him on an internal journey to develop his potential qualities, to become a better human being, and ideally a perfect man. The exquisite nocturnal descriptions are not merely decorative pieces to embellish this mystical poem, they are natural and religious symbols reminding man of his unique position in the rational order of the divine.

In *Laylī u Majnūn*, Nizāmī depicts several fantastic natural scenes. Several of these descriptions are narrative devices indicating time and setting, transitions between chapters, and symbolic emblems of a protagonist's unexpressed feelings, but one description of night clearly functions as a meditation. This is the scene where Majnūn hears of his father's passing away. From this time onwards, he radically avoids the community of men and chooses to live among the beasts of the desert. In this beautiful description of the starry night, Majnūn prays to the planets Venus and Jupiter to change his ill-fortune, but later realises that these planets and stars are icons of the divine power. Meditating on these objects in nature, Majnūn realises that he has to turn to God and asks him for redemption.<sup>15</sup>

Meditating on nature brings man to a realisation of the divine and helps him to develop his human potential for union with his Creator. Man has to cut all his bonds to nature in order to achieve his goal. Matelda leads to, and gives way to, Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy*, and in Eliot's *Ash Wednesday, the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene / the broadbacked figure drest in blue and green, who enchanted the maytime with an antique flute* becomes a distraction and is left behind, *fading, fading ... climbing the third stair*. In these three poems, we distinguish between the turning away from nature, and a gnostic rejection of nature. For Nizāmī, Dante, and Eliot, the meaning of nature lies outside nature, and since nature is nothing without its meaning, one must turn away from nature to find that which will redeem nature (or 'redeem time' in Eliot). In Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar* too, after the episode of the seven princesses, Bahrām returns to his kingdom and redeems it, setting it in order and preventing the Chinese invasion. Yet ultimately, he disappears into a cave, leaving the material world behind, as all mortals must. So we move from the world as moral educator, to turning from the world, to returning to the world and redeeming it, and ultimately to leaving the world: a far more complex scheme than that found in gnostic literatures.

This process of seeing, gaining insight into nature, and finally renouncing the material world is strongly expressed in the 'seven princesses' section of the *Haft Paykar*, in which nature is represented by different symbols, the most important of which are the seven princesses themselves. They are the lovers, and educators, of king Bahrām. They stand for the seven planets, which rule over all earthly events; thence symbolising the seven basic colours, seven days of the week, seven regions of the world, etc. The central theme of the poem revolves around the development of human potentials to perfection, how to gain self-knowledge, to act justly and to become an exemplum of the perfect human being (نمودار آدمیت *namudār-i ādamiyyat*).<sup>16</sup> The perfect man is a mediator between God and his creation: in a religious context, this function is fulfilled by the Prophet Muhammad but in the secular context of this poem, it is king Bahrām who is the mediator.

At one level, the episodes of the seven princesses are erotic and entertaining, but they are understood as allegories when we examine these seven princesses and their love relationship with Bahrām. The conspicuous aspect of these beauties is that, unlike Nizāmī's other female protagonists, the description of their physical forms and character traits is minimal. The narrator mentions their names only once (HP 13, 10-16). Their physique is overshadowed by several sets of seven concepts: seven planets, colours, days of the week, etc. Nizāmī emphasizes their fundamental nature, their essence, from which they are created: their colours and dispositions. In fact, if we desire to know more about the princesses' physical and moral characteristics, we should examine their congruity with astrological signs and other elements referred to in the stories they tell Bahrām. For the sake of convenience, I give a diagram of the signs associated with these princesses:

	Planets	Princess	Colour	Day	Humour	Temperament
1	Saturn	Furak	Black	Saturday	Black bile	Melancholic
2	Sun	Yaghma-Naz	Yellow	Sunday	Yellow bile	Choleric
3	Moon	Naz-Pari	Green	Monday	Phlegm	Phlegmatic
4	Mars	Nasrin-Nush	Red	Tuesday	Blood	Sanguine
5	Mercury	Azaryun	Turquoise	Wednesday		
6	Jupiter	Humay	Sandalwood	Thursday		
7	Venus	Durusti <sup>17</sup>	White	Friday		

Furthermore, their personal contacts with Bahrām are barely mentioned. At the beginning of each episode, each princess welcomes Bahrām to her pavilion and immediately starts to tell a sensual but didactic story; the narrator ignores their feelings for one another. Instead of their personalities or their relationships with Bahrām, the stories and their symbolism come to the foreground. The narrator ends each episode by focusing on the

significance of the colour corresponding to the princess.<sup>18</sup> Why does Nizāmī, who usually describes the psychological subtleties of his characters, neglect the feelings of Bahrām and the princesses?

The absence of physical, emotional and psychological depictions of these princesses sharply contrasts with the treatment of Bahrām's favourite slave girl, Fitna, whose elaborate description comprises more than ten couplets (HP 20, 12-17; HP 21, 46-58). The end of Fitna's episode, which is followed by a war against China, is the beginning of the section of the seven princesses. Why is this episode placed before the seven princesses stories? The answer should be sought in the poem's structure. Bahrām's life is divided into three periods, the first extending from his birth to the end of his experience with Fitna. He is sent to Yemen where he is educated by Nu'man, a vassal of the Persian king. Nu'man trains Bahrām in many virtues so that he may become Persia's rightful king. This first period stands for the material world. The second period comprises his stay with the seven princesses, representing the astral world. The third period – the world of universals – is epitomised by his disappearance into a cave while hunting a wild ass.<sup>19</sup> This order symbolises the three stages in the progress of the human soul.

In showing how Bahrām frees himself from the world, how he becomes a perfect man through love, reason and justice, and his union with the divine, symbolised by his disappearance in a cave, Nizāmī uses patterns offered by previous poets, particularly 'Uthmān Mukhtarī (d. ca. 1118-21) and Hakīm Majd ad-Dīn Sanā'ī (d. 1131). Since Nizāmī explicitly states in his introduction (HP4,24b) that he will "thread the half-pierced pearl" (سفته را سفتم *gawhar-i nīm sufta rā suftam*) left unfinished by Firdawsī, scholars have usually turned to this latter poet as a main source of Nizāmī's epic. Although there are a number of overlaps between Firdawsī's episode of Bahrām and Nizāmī's story, in Nizāmī's retelling, the exploits of Bahrām are significantly different. At the surface level, Nizāmī follows the epic tradition he inherits from Firdawsī, but at another – symbolic and didactic – level, Nizāmī is recounting a mystico-ethical story based on a different genre and tradition, whose characteristics are visible not only in the formal presentation of the poem but also in the poem's contents. Nizāmī's choice of metre is significant since a metre commonly establishes the genre in Persian poetry.<sup>20</sup> Nizāmī is one of the originators of this tradition and he will inspire a large number of followers. The choice of metre thus gives clues for classifying and interpreting a poem.

Why should the choice of metre matter in a discussion of Nizāmī's mystical view on nature? The answer lies in the fact that in poems written in this metre before Nizāmī, a neat depiction of the natural order, the search for a specimen of human perfection, and an escape from the forces of nature lie centrally. The *Haft Paykar* is couched in the *khafif* meter. One of the earliest *mathnavī* poems written in this metre is the *Hunar Nāma* of

‘Uthmān Mukhtārī.<sup>21</sup> There are several similarities between this poem and the *Haft Paykar*: the most obvious being the detailed description of heavenly bodies, the depiction of the three kingdoms of creation (mineral, vegetal and animal), the important role of astrology and the attributes of a perfect man, treated through riddles.<sup>22</sup>

Another poet who used the *khafīf* metre is Hakīm Sanā‘ī. Nizāmī knew Sanā‘ī’s poetry well and refers to him for the first time at the beginning of his *Makhzan al-Asrār*, a poem written in the same metre and following the example of Sanā‘ī’s *Hadīqāt al-haqīqa*. In the *Haft Paykar*, there are several indications that Nizāmī is imitating Sanā‘ī’s allegorical poem *Sayr al-‘ibād ila ‘l-ma‘ad* (The Journey of the Faithful to the Place of Return). The central theme of this poem revolves around the development of human potentials to those of a perfect man. The poet uses detailed descriptions of the natural order of the world as symbols to remind mankind that his goal in this world is to untie his bonds with nature. De Bruijn’s characterisation of how to read the *Sayr al-‘ibād* equally applies to the *Haft Paykar*: the text is “to be read as a Gnostic tale, as the description of the development of a human mind towards the understanding of the symbols presented to him by the natural world.”<sup>23</sup> This latter is introduced as the seven fathers (*aba ‘i ‘ulwi*, ‘sublime fathers’), and the ‘four mothers’ (*ummahat-i arba‘a*), a reference to the seven planets and four elements.<sup>24</sup> In both poems, the development depends on deciphering elements from the natural world, which are both the key symbols and the vehicles to bring mankind to Gnostic knowledge.

As in the *Sayr al-‘ibād*, some of the geographical names – also mentioned in the *Haft Paykar* – are chosen for metaphorical values and are incorrect according to the geographical knowledge of the time. Overlooking the symbolism of names such as Yemen, commentators and scholars have thought that Nizāmī had little geographical knowledge when he located the castle of Khavarnaq and its ruler Nu‘man in Yemen rather than in Iraq. But al-Awadhi, in her recent monograph on the *Haft Paykar*, refers to Yemen’s symbolic values in mystical literature and claims that this placement was intentional. Yemen, she concludes, is the “rightful place of the exiled soul.” Bahrām’s stay in Yemen, where he completes his education and sees the portraits of the seven princesses for the first time, has a similar symbolic weight. The Arabic ruler Nu‘man is Bahrām’s spiritual guide and is a symbol of Islam.<sup>25</sup>

Another similarity between the *Sayr al-‘ibād* and the *Haft Paykar* is the theme of travelling. In the *Sayr al-‘ibād*, the human embryo travels through the three kingdoms of the creation: mineral, vegetal and animal. Later, when he is born, the novice traveller meets a guide, who accompanies him on a journey through the natural world, showing him the hidden and the apparent significance of the universe, especially the seven planets. In both poems, there is a horizontal and a vertical journey. Bahrām’s

successive visits to the princesses on each day of the week can also be interpreted as a gradual ascent from the lowest to the highest region, from darkness to absolute illumination. Although at first sight the journey in the *Sayr al-'ibād* appears to have a horizontal trajectory, a large part of the journey actually takes place in the domain of the fixed stars and beyond. It is an ascending journey through the spheres, resembling in many ways the Prophet's Ascension (معراج *mi'rāj*). Both the traveller and his guide go beyond time and place, and reach the "highest realm of being" where only pure light exists.<sup>26</sup> In both *Haft Paykar* and *Sayr al-'ibād*, descriptions of natural order and the development of the protagonists are based on Hellenistic natural philosophy, showing how to free oneself from the world of nature. De Bruijn's lucid delineation of this order in respect to *Sayr al-'ibād*, can be applied seamlessly to *Haft Paykar*: the order of the cosmological system "is presented as an analogy of the structure of the universe. The three main divisions of the latter – viz. the material world, the astral world and the world of the universals– symbolize the three levels on which the human souls may be."<sup>27</sup> Considering the number of similarities between the poems, we may surmise that Nizāmī was inspired by the ascension theme Sanā'ī used in both *Hadīqāt al-Haqīqa* and the *Sayr al-'ibād*.

Nizāmī is the first to place the description of the Prophet's ascension in an epic romance and he has been imitated by dozens of other poets. The main narrative function of such a religious story in a romantic epic is to foreground the poem's didactic, mystic and ethical dimensions, indicating the possibility of several layers of interpretations. Some scholars consider Nizāmī's introduction of the Prophet's ascension in a pre-Islamic and Persian narrative plot as a flaw in Nizāmī's poem, but it is a device that reconciles the Persian tradition with the values of the new faith. In both *Haft Paykar* and *Sayr al-'ibād*, the ascension is a model for a universal journey, showing how an individual can reach the supernatural, beyond time and place, when he escapes from the dictates of nature.

In the *Haft Paykar*, there are several symmetries between Bahrām's and the Prophet's journey. In the same way that the Prophet leaves his material existence to pass through seven stages that are symbolised by the seven planets, Bahrām's visit to each of the princesses shows his gradual progress. Each pavilion corresponds in colour, and appearance with a planet. As de Fouchécour has shown, the Prophet's journey can also be divided into seven stages:<sup>28</sup>

- 1 ll. 1-22 Gabriel invites the Prophet to accompany him, while waiting with the miraculous mount Burāq;
- 2 ll. 23-29 The Prophet accepts the invitation;
- 3 ll. 30-39 The Prophet mounts Burāq and starts his journey;
- 4 ll. 40-49 The Prophet journeys to the seven planets;



- 5 ll. 50-60 He reaches the highest sphere where he leaves behind Gabriel and Burāq;  
 6 ll. 61-71 He meets God in a place beyond time and place;  
 7 ll. 72-75 He achieves his goal: to redeem his people from their sins.

As we can see in the excerpt below, at each stage during his passage through the spheres of the planets, the Prophet leaves behind one aspect of his material being even as he offers something to the planets, until he has totally divested himself of all worldly entity. Likewise, Bahrām's visit to the seven pavilions is vertical. He starts his visit with the princess from India in the black pavilion on Saturday, and ends his visit in the white pavilion on Friday with the princess Durustī ('Rightness') from Persia. The Prophet, first bestows his "own verdant nature" upon the moon; then, with his silvery hand, he offers a "bluish shade of leaden glaze" to Mercury. Afterwards he goes to Venus to which he offers the white veil taken from the moonlight. When he approaches the sun, he crowns the sun with gold made of the dust raised from his path. To Mars he offers red colour and when seeing Jupiter's head in pain, he treats it with sandalwood; and finally he wraps the flag of Saturn in black ambergris:

<p>در نیشت این صحیفه را اوراق          دوری از دور آسمان برداشت          شاهراهی به شهپیر ملکی          داد سر سبزی از شمایل خویش          رنگی از کوره رصاصی بست          برقی بر کشید سیمایی          تاج زرین نهاد بر سر مهر          سرخ پوشی گذاشت بر بهرام          در دسر دید و گشت صندل سای          در سواد عبیر شد علمش</p>	<p>چون محمد به رقص پای براق          راه دروازه جهان برداشت          می برید از منازل فلکی          ماه را در خط حمایل خویش          بر عطارد ز نقره کاری دست          زهره را از فروغ مهتابی          گرد راهش به ترکتاز سپهر          سبز پوشید چون خلیفه شام          مشتری را ز فرق سر تا پای          تاج کیوان چو بوسه زد قدمش</p>
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(HP3,40-9)

*When he with Burāq's dancing feet / inscribed that volume, sheet by sheet,*

*He left behind the worldly road / and far above the heavens soared;  
 Cut through the station of the sky / with angel's wings, a broad highway.*

*From his own verdant nature, he / gave to the moon new verdancy.  
 His silver-work to Mercury gave / the bluish shade of leaden glaze.  
 O'er Venus, from the moon's bright light / he drew a veil of silvery white.*

*His dust, as he attacked the heavens, / set on the sun a golden crown.*

*Green-robed like Caliph of the West, / red garments bright to Mars*

*he left;  
And, finding **Jupiter** consumed / by pain, rubbed **sandalwood** there-  
on.  
when **Saturn**'s crown his feet had kissed, / he placed its **flag** in  
ambergris.<sup>29</sup>*

This *mi'rāj* story is unique. It is usually the heavenly bodies which offer their attributes to the Prophet, not the reverse. In the *Sayr al-'ibād*, the traveller's journey through the heavenly bodies is also described as a process of detachment from the natural world. During his visit to each of the planets, the Prophet leaves behind one aspect of his humanity at each planet. He passes beyond the world of nature, which is made of the Four Elements, until he reaches the world of pure spirit. In this respect, Nizāmī's poem comes close to Sana'ī's poem. The Prophet passes through the Lotus Tree, which marks the boundary between the material and spiritual worlds. Even angels are unable to reach this place, which the Prophet is allowed to enter. He experiences a "sea of selflessness," in which the six directions and all dimensions are gone. Here, there is no other reality than God, Who becomes the Prophet's cupbearer, pouring knowledge in his cup of bliss. Nizāmī then describes how the Prophet, after long prayers, descends and shares his knowledge with his friends. Although Nizāmī is referring here to Gnostic knowledge, the passage implicitly points to another category of knowledge: knowledge of each and every object of nature, which is one rung of the ladder used to climb out of the pit of nature. Nizāmī's message is clear: knowledge of the world and of oneself is the key to escape from the confines of nature and to return to man's original spiritual place.

## Notes

- 1 Several studies are available on nature in Arabic literature. Von Grünebaum (1945) gives a negative appraisal: "If now we compare the part accorded to feeling for nature in Arabic poetry down to about A.D. 1000 – and, therewith, indirectly the part played by an aesthetical or sentimental response to nature in the Arab's spiritual economy – with the part accorded it in Western poetry since the Renaissance, it becomes evident that, on the whole, nature means considerably less to the Arab than to the occidental artist, both as source and as object of his inspiration." He concludes that "the poesy of nature does not, in the realm of Arab literature, hold the importance it attained in the literatures of the west." Meisami (2003) 347 ff. has responded. Bürgel (1983) gives the background of the humanization of nature in Arabic literature.
- 2 Ritter (1927); Meisami (1995) and Meisami (1985); van Ruymbeke (2000) and (2007); Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 311-36; Würsch (2005a) 39-42, 54 and 190 in which it is stated how the Prophet journeys beyond the phenomenal world.
- 3 As cited by Pingree (2000).
- 4 Ibidem.

- 5 Hafiz-Khanlari (1362) 290, gh. 137, l. 7 and 844, gh. 414, l. 7 for the second reference of the term.
- 6 Rumi-Furuzanfar (1336) III-130, gh. 1305, l. 13812. The phrase "walk around the head of the fourth element" is a difficult allusion which in my opinion refers to the fourth element (fire): the mystic lover should leave behind all material existence represented by the four elements. Another possible allusion is چہار تکبیر or an absolute renunciation of the world.
- 7 Rumi-Furuzanfar (1336) IX-82, gh. 2747, l. 29204.
- 8 Rumi-Furuzanfar (1336) IV-236, gh. 2012, l. 21260.
- 9 Jami-Gilani (1366) 363.
- 10 Jami-Gilani (1366) 364.
- 11 Sa'di-Iranparast (1356) 408, gh. 299, l. 4.
- 12 Falkenburg (2001) 253-76.
- 13 Nasr (1993) 2.
- 14 Würsch (2005a), chapter 5.3, especially 207-14.
- 15 Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 177-8.
- 16 Armaldez (1971).
- 17 The word can be read both as Durustī and Dur-sitī on the metre, and Nizāmī must have had both these readings in mind.
- 18 Black: HP26, 515-20; yellow: HP27,226-9; green: HP28,250-3; red: HP29,301-5; blue: HP30,442-6; sandalwood: HP31,355; white: HP32320-2.
- 19 Bürgel (1989) 1-11.
- 20 I am aware that a metre such as *mutaqārib* is used for heroic, romantic and mystical epics, but as de Bruijn (1994) 37 has rightly pointed out, the choice of a metre is "part of the formula for a *nazīra*, the 'emulation through imitation' of a great classic."
- 21 Mukhtari (1962) 699-745.
- 22 It is beyond the scope of the present study to compare the function of riddles in Mukhtari's and Nizāmī's poems. See the excellent study of Krotkoff (1984) 106-7 on colour and number symbolism in *Haft Paykar*, which shows that the key to the complex structure of the romance is in the central story, the story of the Slavonic princess in the red pavilion, who confronts the prince with several riddles. See also Piemontese's contribution to the present volume.
- 23 de Bruijn (1983) 201 and 65, where he states that 500 distichs out of the total 800 present "a didactical allegory illustrating the doctrine of man's vocation to develop his potential qualities to the full during his lifetime."
- 24 Kubra-Meier (1957) 67-75.
- 25 Al-Awadhi (2001) 75.
- 26 de Bruijn (1983) 205.
- 27 Ibidem.
- 28 de Fouchécour (1989) 99-108; English translation: de Fouchécour (2000) 179-88.
- 29 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 8, ll. 38-47.



## 10 The Nizāmī Manuscript of Shāh Tahmāsp: A Reconstructed History

*Priscilla Soucek, Muhammad Isa Waley*

This essay will focus on a single manuscript of Nizāmī's *Khamsa* and will present the historical, literary, and artistic issues which arise from its study and examination.<sup>1</sup> In conformity with the aims of this publication, comments will be made about the implications of these findings for the reception of Nizāmī's poetry in Safavid Iran. That manuscript, Or. 2265, in the British Library, is justly famous as one of the most beautiful in the library's rich collection.<sup>2</sup> Its seventeen illustrations are the principal source of this high reputation. These have been published and republished to the point that they are among the most widely known specimens of Safavid painting. Scholarly attention has been directed principally toward their attribution to particular painters.<sup>3</sup>

A question which has been raised several times is whether five single-page pictures, now in various public and private collections, were intended for inclusion in Or. 2265. Four closely resemble its sixteenth-century paintings and a fifth has close ties with its mid-seventeenth century ones. One carries no text but is believed to illustrate a theme connected with the story of Laylī and Majnūn; another is inscribed with verses from Nizāmī's *Khusraw u Shīrīn*. A drawing in a closely related style illustrates an episode from the *Haft Paykar*, and a fourth painting showing an urban setting has also sometimes been connected with Or. 2265.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a painting signed by Muhammad Zamān and dated to 1085/1676 which depicts "Majnūn in the Wilderness" bears a strong resemblance to the three paintings of the same date in Or. 2265, two of which also bear his signature. A. Welch has suggested that Muhammad Zamān produced these paintings for a seventeenth-century refurbishment of Or. 2265 during which the sixteenth-century single-page paintings mentioned above were removed from the manuscript.<sup>5</sup> Another aspect of Or. 2265 which has attracted attention is its lacquer-painted binding bearing a depiction of the Qajar ruler, Fath Alī Shāh and his sons at the hunt. This painted binding is believed to have been produced ca. 1825.<sup>6</sup>

To date, most studies of Or. 2265's paintings have been conducted without reference to their connection with the remainder of the manuscript to which they belong. This circumstance has prevented a clear understanding

of the various questions which arise from a study of the place of those pictures within the manuscript as a whole. Also, the book's Safavid and Qajar phases have been considered in isolation from each other without reference to their interconnected roles in its historical formation.

Study of this manuscript's fourteen paintings from the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp (r. 1525-75) has been based on the assumption that the manuscript as presently constituted is a single artistic entity, and that it is to be identified with a Nizāmī manuscript prepared for Shāh Tahmāsp by Aqā Mirak and Mir Musavvīr which is mentioned by Dūst Muhammad in an album preface composed in 951/1544.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the dates given in its text colophons, 946-9/1539-43, have been assumed to apply equally to those paintings. Although text colophons are normally a useful indicator of the date and origin of a manuscript's paintings, in the case of Or. 2265 this assumption is flawed. Furthermore, the presumed linkage of illustrations and text colophons has led to a neglect of other aspects of this manuscript's history that have a bearing on the interpretation of those paintings. The hypothesis advanced by Welch concerning the relationship of Or. 2265 and the various paintings and drawings with which it has been associated is plausible but does not take full account of the physical and codicological evidence provided by the book itself.

This essay summarizes an investigation into the origin and history of Or. 2265 based upon an examination of the manuscript itself as well as upon photographs made of it by the British Library. Its goals are to understand the book as it exists today; to make a detailed inventory of its contents, not just the paintings, but also its text folios, section headings and marginal paintings and to use that data to reconstruct a history of Or. 2265's creation.

The information provided by this study has several potential uses. The paintings of Or. 2265 are among the most accomplished examples of manuscript illustration from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a better understanding of their origin and historical significance has ramifications for the study of the pictorial arts of Iran during these centuries. This manuscript's connection with patrons belonging to both the Safavid and Qajar dynasties gives it importance for an investigation of the significance of royal patronage for the illustration of Nizāmī's text. The special meaning that the text and illustrations of Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma* had for Iran's rulers has been examined on several occasions, but to date much less attention has been devoted to the possible association of Nizāmī's poems with the theory and practice of royal power.<sup>8</sup> From the point of view of the British Library, a better understanding of this manuscript's contents and history is useful in determining the appropriate way to care for, display and make available for study this key example of the book arts of Iran.

A manuscript as elaborate as Or. 2265 was normally produced by a group of people with the specialized skills required for its transcription,

decoration, illustration and binding.<sup>9</sup> The fact that many manuscripts' illuminations or illustrations were left incomplete demonstrates that interruptions in production were not unusual. Not infrequently, tasks left unfinished by a project's originators were completed at a later moment and in a different place. What makes Or. 2265 unusual is the nature and the scope of the transformations that it has sustained.

It is useful to review the steps needed to produce a luxury manuscript before examining Or. 2265 in more detail. Prior to the transcription of a text, sheets of paper were prepared for the entire manuscript. Some elaborately produced Safavid manuscripts have composite pages in which separate sheets of paper are used for the text and its margins.<sup>10</sup> This structure recalls the construction of an album in which each page is an independent physical unit. The format of Or. 2265, was, however, more traditional. One sheet of paper was used for both zones of the page but the area reserved for the text block was first lightly dusted with flecks of gold and then impressed with fine lines to guide the scribe in his transcription. Initially, the pages' marginal zone was undecorated.<sup>11</sup> After the text had been inscribed work began on the decoration of each text page's marginal zone. These paintings or drawings in shades of gold with touches of silver occur on almost every one of its pages.

The basic text layout of Or. 2265 has four columns of twenty-one lines, which means that the maximum number of *bayts* on a single page is forty-two. Due to the frequent insertion of section headings the number of forty *bayts* per page is a more useful figure for calculating the length of a normal/average text page. In Safavid court manuscripts it was common to embellish pages which preceded illustrations or colophons by writing some *bayts* on the diagonal thereby providing space for the introduction of decorative panels and also reducing the number of verses transcribed on a given page, sometimes by as much as one-half.<sup>12</sup>

The gold lines demarcating text columns or framing diagonal text panels were added only after the text had been copied.<sup>13</sup> The reasons why portions of a poem were copied on the diagonal has been debated. At times the use of pages with a variety of layouts may have served an aesthetic purpose; the embellishment of the page or pages that precede an illustration alerts the reader that a picture is to follow.<sup>14</sup> This procedure also ensured that a painting was properly located within a text and appropriately situated on a manuscript page.

The placement of illustrations within a manuscript was normally established by the scribe as he copied its pages. The space left blank was usually bounded by a portion of the text which served as the physical and conceptual frame for the intended picture. In particular, the words immediately before or after an image established its theme. In a luxury book, images are often centered and framed above and below by text panels. When the placement and shape of an illustration was of critical importance to the

design of a manuscript it is likely that the transcription of verses on the surrounding pages was calculated in advance to ensure that the text flanking a picture was appropriate to its theme.

Although images tied to a specific textual passage are often considered normative, there were situations in which pictures had a more independent identity. As early as the fourteenth century some painters created picture-models that could be inserted into manuscripts as needed. Most surviving examples carry no text and it is often difficult to establish their exact subject or where they were intended to be used.<sup>15</sup> The rise in popularity of *muraqqa*'s or albums appears to have encouraged the creation of pictures not tied to a specific text although they might reflect a recognizable literary theme.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes the boundary between a manuscript illustration and an independent image was not precise. This is particularly true when pictures were painted on a sheet of paper which had one blank side and lacked any accompanying text.

Pictures of this type could be either added to an album or inserted into a manuscript as desired. If a single-page painting was destined for use in a manuscript it could be glued to another page which bore a text only on one side. If such a picture had internal text panels they would be inscribed only after the picture had been integrated with a manuscript, a procedure that ensured that the text on the picture was continuous with that on the preceding and following pages. The best documented instance of this procedure whereby pictures were created separately and then integrated into a manuscript is the *Haft Awrang* of Jāmī made for the Safavid Prince Ibrāhīm Mīrzā.<sup>17</sup>

In manuscripts with elaborate decorative programs, pages set aside for illustration were treated differently from ones devoted to the text. In order to allow a painter to develop his picture more freely, rulings separating text columns might be omitted. Frequently, a page's marginal zone remained undecorated until after its illustration had been completed; this permitted a picture to expand beyond the confines of the text-block into the surrounding area.

## ■ The History of Or. 2265

The key element for reconstructing Or. 2265's history is not the paintings which have been the subject of such intense scrutiny, but rather the manner in which Nizāmī's text was transcribed onto its paper. One conclusion of our study is that Or. 2265 contains pages which appear to be of four different origins. In other words, this manuscript is a composite creation rather than the unified entity upon which previous discussions of its importance have been predicated. The evidence to support this new interpretation of Or. 2265 is largely contained within the book itself and it is beyond the scope of the present essay to document and illustrate every facet of this



newly complicated understanding of its production. Why, where, when and by whom these diverse materials were assembled into the present configuration are also questions which can not yet be answered in detail. Here, the principal aim of establishing the manuscript's phases will be to suggest how these transformations are linked to the paintings it contains.

The essential fact about Or. 2265 is that its components range in date from the first quarter of the sixteenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Its two principal ingredients, the text copied by Shāh Mahmūd al-Nīshāpūrī and the sixteenth-century paintings now joined to it, each have clear and documented connections to Shāh Tahmāsp but the principal finding of this study is that this text and its illustrations were not originally intended to be combined and, in fact, derive from two different copies of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*. These two manuscripts will be referred to here as "Tahmasp A" denoting the text copied by Shāh Mahmūd, and "Tahmasp B" which consists of the manuscript's opening folios (2b-3a) and its fourteen full page illustrations from the sixteenth century.<sup>18</sup> (figs. 1 and 2)

The text pages which link "Tahmasp A" and "Tahmasp B" to each other are physically distinctive and belong neither to Shāh Mahmūd's manuscript nor to the pages of "Tahmasp B" and are here designated "replacement pages." (fig. 3) The time and place of their creation and insertion into Or. 2265 is at present unknown although many "replacement pages" have a distinctive type of intra-textual illumination as well as a particular variety of marginal landscape painting. If the history of both types of decoration were better known this evidence could be used to establish when and where Or. 2265 assumed its present configuration. The marginal paintings found on "replacement pages" contain landscape features that are widely used in the paintings of Rizā 'Abbāsī and his followers, suggesting that they were produced in Iran during the middle decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup>

There is a fourth, more limited, series of pages which occur only in the *Haft Paykar* section of Or. 2265.<sup>20</sup> These differ from the main series of "replacement pages" in their paper, calligraphy and decorative embellishment. The paper on which they are written is a stark, white color and is much thinner than that used for either Shāh Mahmūd's text or the main "replacement pages." Another distinctive feature of these pages is the framing of their text in gold, a form of embellishment used in some Persian manuscripts from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.<sup>21</sup> Gold panels of this type also surround the texts inscribed on two of Or. 2265's mid-seventeenth-century paintings.<sup>22</sup> (fig. 4) Thus, this second type of "replacement page" appears to represent a distinct phase in the refurbishment of Or. 2265. The *terminus ante quem* for their insertion into Or. 2265 is provided by the date of 1086/1676 inscribed on two of the paintings by Muhammad Zamān. The damage which these paintings have sustained, particularly to their upper sections, suggests that the Muhammad Zamān paintings were forcibly removed from another setting in order to combine them with the rest of Or. 2265 (fig. 5).

This circumstance and the survival of a fourth closely related single page painting of “Majnūn in the Wilderness” suggests that the Muhammad Zamān pictures and their associated text pages had had an independent life before they were joined to Or. 2265.<sup>23</sup>

The manner in which the three Muhammad Zamān paintings were added to Or. 2265 is different from the way the paintings of “Tahmasp B” were joined to the text of “Tahmasp A” so that the insertion of the two sets of pictures must have occurred independently. The folios to which the Muhammad Zamān paintings have been added appear to have two layers but the resulting pages are still supple and lack the cardboard-like thickness of the folios bearing sixteenth-century paintings. The date of the insertion of the Muhammad Zamān paintings is unknown but the present manuscript was part of the Qajar royal collection circa 1825, the approximate date of its lacquer painted binding. The addition of this binding provides the *terminus ante quem* for the various additions to Or. 2265. Shortly thereafter, in 1243/1827-8, Fath Alī Shāh decreed that the manuscript be given to one of his wives named Tāj al-Dawla, a transfer recorded in a note on fol. 348b.<sup>24</sup> (fig. 6) Subsequently, Or. 2265 entered the collection of the British Library and during the 1880’s was catalogued in a preliminary fashion by Rieu.<sup>25</sup>

### ■ Shāh Mahmūd’s Contribution to Or. 2265

The most important text pages of Or. 2265, and by far the most numerous, are those copied by Shāh Mahmūd al-Nīshāpūrī, here designated as “Tahmasp A”. Since his pages constitute the core of Or. 2265, they will be considered first. The scheme which he established for its transcription with four columns of twenty-one lines per page was also used for all the subsequent additions to Or. 2265. Because he signed the colophons belonging to each of the five books of Nizāmī’s text, he must have completed its transcription. Their dates range from the beginning of Jumada II 946/ October 14, 1535 at the end of *Makhzan al-Asrār* to the 20<sup>th</sup> of Dhu’l Hijja 949/28 March 1543 at the conclusion of the *Iskandar Nāma*. The fact that his signature in these two colophons includes the epithet *al-shāhī* is indicative of his personal and professional affiliation with Shāh Tahmāsp and carries with it the presumption that this copy of the *Khamsa* was a royal commission, although that ruler’s name is not specifically mentioned in any of its colophons.

Despite this evidence that Shāh Mahmūd must have completed the transcription of Nizāmī’s text, a significant number of his pages were subsequently lost. Most of *Makhzan al-Asrār* belongs to his copy, but much less of his work is preserved in the text’s later sections such as the *Haft Paykar* or the *Iskandar Nāma*. An appreciation for Shāh Mahmūd’s manuscript and a desire to obtain a complete copy of Nizāmī’s text appear to have been two of the factors which stimulated the reconstruction of Or. 2265. It

is, therefore, necessary to establish his manuscript's original appearance, to the extent that it is now possible.

His copy of Nizāmī's *Khamsa* exemplified the highest standards of book production at the court of Shāh Tahmāsp and was notable for its lavishly decorated marginal paintings executed in shades of gold with touches of black and silver. His copying of the text and the execution of marginal decoration on those pages appear to have proceeded in tandem and to have preceded the creation of rubrics describing sections of the text. Many of the text folios written by him also have marginal paintings in various shades of gold highlighted by silver, which are similar in theme and execution. Some pages feature repeating patterns that show pairs of birds in schematic foliage or a series of intersecting cartouches similar to those employed in the design of Safavid rugs and textiles, but most are landscapes.<sup>26</sup> Someone turning the pages of Or. 2265 enters a woodland punctuated by pools and waterfalls and inhabited by a variety of animals and birds. Creatures inhabiting the margins of Shah Mahmud's pages include birds such as herons, ducks, pheasants and peacocks as well as a range of quadrupeds. Among these are various predators: leopards, lions and tigers as well as foxes and wolves. Along with these are the animals which formed their prey including deer, gazelles, goats and rabbits. In addition, there were other creatures which we would view as imaginary or at least supernatural, particularly the composite bird-like creature known as the "simurgh," as well as dragons and kylins.

Conflicts between predator and prey are a chief theme of these marginal paintings. Usually these combats involve two creatures of different species such as felines attacking deer, gazelles, wild asses or goats. There are also combats between and among various fantastic creatures such as dragons, simurghs, or kylins. Some of the marginal landscapes depict gentler, more pastoral, themes such as animals grazing on vegetation, drinking from streams or pools, at rest under trees or even nursing their young. The creatures inhabiting the margins of Shāh Mahmūd's pages belong to the distinctive repertoire of what has been called "decoral painting," and the manner in which these creatures were drawn reveals their roots in the artistic repertoire of East Asian, particularly Chinese art.<sup>27</sup>

His manuscript was also to have been illustrated but none of its intended paintings appear to have survived. Two types of evidence can be used to reconstruct the original illustrative cycle of Shāh Mahmūd's manuscript. The clearest evidence consists of the two pages in which a space reserved for a painting was left blank, but in other sections of the manuscript a sequence of pages with reduced verse counts and diagonal text panels appear to mark the location of a missing illustration.

The two pages where an illustration was planned but not executed are in *Khusraw u Shīrīn* and the *Haft Paykar*.<sup>28</sup> In each case the picture space was framed on top and bottom by inscribed verses which conform to the

spacing of this manuscript's normal text block. In the page from *Khusraw u Shīrīn* the inscribed verses recount the story of Shīrīn's visit to the Milk Channel that was under construction by Farhād, an incident that is frequently illustrated<sup>29</sup> (fig. 7). Instead of a painting, this page has illuminated panels and a marginal painting in gold. The margins of this page are decorated with landscapes executed in gold which conform to those found on the "replacement pages." This demonstrates that in the manuscript's initial production they had been left blank, presumably to give the painter more freedom in designing his image.

The second example of a page on which a space set aside for a painting was never completed comes in the *Haft Paykar* (fig. 8). Once again the painting would have been centered on the page and framed by verses above and below. This time its subject would have been Bahrām Gūr's visit to the Black Pavilion, the episode which opens the cycle of his visit to the Seven Princesses, an event that was frequently illustrated.<sup>30</sup> This page also carries a note in a cursive hand that is possibly of Qajar date.

In addition to these two spaces set aside for paintings, Shāh Mahmūd's text contains other clues that allow for a partial reconstruction of the themes which had been selected for illustration. The best index of those missing pictures is the inclusion of pages with diagonal text panels, which often precede the space set aside for a painting. A number of the replacement pages also appear to mark the site where an illustration was intended. This evidence is admittedly incomplete, but among the subjects that may have been planned for Shah Mahmud's text are the meeting of "Farīdūn and the Gazelle" in *Makhzan al-Asrār*, and "Khusraw's Hunting Expedition" from *Khusraw u Shīrīn*. In each case the illustration's place is taken by a "replacement page" in which the text has been arranged as if to fill the space left for a picture.<sup>31</sup> A complete census of such places where images may have been intended has not yet been undertaken.

## ■ The Contents of "Tahmasp B"

Although evidence concerning the intended illustrations of Shāh Mahmūd's manuscript is incomplete, it is even harder to form a general impression of the other parts of Or. 2265 which belong to the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp, a collection of pages described here as "Tahmasp B." These include the manuscript's opening text illumination, folios 2b-3a and its fourteen illustrations.<sup>32</sup> Although it has not been subjected to close analysis, the paper on which the opening folios are transcribed appears to be similar to that employed in the manuscript's sixteenth-century illustrations and distinct from that used for Shāh Mahmūd's codex. Another indication that the pages of "Tahmasp B" are distinct from the text folios copied by Shāh Mahmūd or "Tahmasp A" is that their union was effected by use of special pages different in color, size and calligraphy from those of folios

connected with Shāh Tahmāsp (fig.3). These pages, here designated as “replacement pages” appear to have had two principal functions. Some are used to replace missing sections of Nizāmī’s text, and others are used to link the text of “Tahmasp A” with the pictures of “Tahmasp B.” For example, Shāh Mahmūd’s copy begins only on the fifth folio of the *Makhzan al-Asrār*. The two opening illuminated pages (folios 2b-3a) are joined to the remainder of the manuscript by three “replacement pages” (folios 3b, 4a, 4b) (fig. 9). Otherwise, most of the folios in *Makhzan al-Asrār* belong to Shāh Mahmūd’s copy, “Tahmasp A.”<sup>33</sup>

From the time of Or. 2265’s initial description by Rieu, it has been assumed that its fourteen paintings from the sixteenth century were made for the manuscript copied by Shāh Mahmūd between 946/1539 and 949/1543. Therefore, these dates have been presumed to apply also to the paintings. There is no doubt that the sixteenth-century paintings for which Or. 2265 is famous were made for Shāh Tahmāsp. His name and titles are included in the painting which celebrates Khusraw’s accession to the throne.<sup>34</sup> Several of the paintings have a youthful prince as their main protagonist and they depict the splendour of a royal court or the prowess of a royal hunter.<sup>35</sup>

One of the primary conclusions of this project, however, is that the paintings preserved in Or. 2265 do not belong to Shāh Mahmūd’s manuscript; there is physical, codicological and literary evidence that these pictures were originally intended for another purpose. Although an individual observation may seem inconclusive, in our view, they are mutually reinforcing, each lending weight to the other.

All of the sixteenth-century paintings of Or. 2265 have sustained physical damage, particularly to their upper sections, which suggests that they were forcibly removed from another support by someone working from top to bottom. In many cases the pictures appear to have been trimmed on the bottom, top and both vertical sides. It is impossible to determine the original dimensions of the illustrations of “Tahmasp B” but two of the isolated paintings which have strong stylistic ties with Or. 2265, a painting in Edinburgh and a drawing in Boston, are too large to fit into Or. 2265.<sup>36</sup>

The paintings of “Tahmasp B” appear to have been executed as single-page pictures because they currently lack a text on their reverse side. This is evident when the paintings are illuminated from the back, a procedure carried out in the Book Conservation Laboratory of the British Library.<sup>37</sup> The text panels within the pictures also present various anomalies. Examples of such situations will be given below in the discussion of individual pictures.

An examination of Or. 2265 reveals how the sixteenth-century illustrations were inserted into Shāh Mahmūd’s text. After the paintings had been cut down, they were mounted on separate pages, the margins of which were then decorated in gold with scenes of birds and animals in an

abbreviated landscape. Although in two cases the pages on which the paintings have been mounted appear to be of mid-sixteenth-century date, most have marginal landscapes in the same seventeenth-century style used on the borders of the “replacement pages.”<sup>38</sup> These remounted pictures were then joined to Shāh Mahmūd’s text by being pasted onto a text page, in most cases, a seventeenth-century “replacement page.” As a result of these layers of paper, pasted one upon the other, folios with paintings on one side have a thick, cardboard-like consistency which is very different from the supple pages of Shāh Mahmūd’s original text.

Although the trimming of the sixteenth-century paintings and their union with newly transcribed text pages may appear crude, those responsible were at pains to create a complete copy of Nizāmī’s text. The “replacement pages” were inscribed with as much text as was needed to link a given picture with the adjacent folios of Shāh Mahmūd’s text. In some cases, a painting was easily integrated into its new setting but at times two or even three “replacement pages” were required to link the sixteenth-century pictures or “Tahmasp B” with Shāh Mahmūd’s portion of Or. 2265, here designated as “Tahmasp A.”<sup>39</sup>

This textual exactitude came, however, at a price. In some cases the text panels on paintings may have been cut down to eliminate unneeded verses.<sup>40</sup> In many cases the text was added after the painting had been completed and possibly even after they had been integrated into Or. 2265. In two cases, visual evidence suggests the illustrations of Or. 2265 are wrongly situated in Nizāmī’s text as they do not depict the subject indicated by their text.<sup>41</sup> The most instructive case is one in which the original subject of a painting was deliberately concealed by covering its inscribed text and substituting for it another passage from Nizāmī’s poem. It has long been recognized that a painting situated in the text of *Khusraw u Shīrīn* depicts a well-known subject from the *Iskandar Nāma* in which Iskandar was confronted with his own portrait by Nūshāba, but the full implications of this anomaly have not been explored (fig. 10). Text panels obscured by gold paint but still faintly visible in the painting’s upper left corner probably contain the relevant passage from the *Iskandar Nāma*.<sup>42</sup> Verses from *Khusraw u Shīrīn* have been crowded into panels along the page’s lower section and in some cases their letters extend over its painted surface. These verses describe how Shāpūr made portraits of Khusraw Parvīz to show to Shīrīn and they are continuous with the text of the preceding page, which is a “replacement page.” That page in turn continues the text from the preceding page, which belongs to Shāh Mahmūd’s manuscript, so that the insertion of an inappropriate picture was “corrected” by inscribing it with verses that link it to Shāh Mahmūd’s manuscript by means of an extra text page.<sup>43</sup>

There are other anomalies in the juncture of text and image in Or. 2265. A painting known as the “Feast of Khusraw” carries text panels in which the writing extends over the painted surface. The text in question describes

how Shāpūr reported to Khusraw on his visit to Shīrīn in which he prepared portraits for her to see.<sup>44</sup> This rather obscure passage was only rarely illustrated, and the picture in Or. 2265 does not depict its principal event – Shāpūr reporting to Khusraw. What it does illustrate is a princely entertainment in the country-side, a scene that would have been appropriate for other contexts in Nizāmī’s poem or even as an embellishment for an album or another text altogether.

The justly famous painting of “Khusraw Enthroned,” which contains a building adorned with the name and titles of Shāh Tahmāsp, also has sustained considerable damage to its upper zone and been mended by pasting it to a new sheet of gold-painted paper.<sup>45</sup> The fact that this painting has been substantially cut down is suggested by its asymmetrical composition which truncates the left side of the building where the ruler is enthroned. At present, the picture has incomplete compositional elements such as a bouquet of flowers which has lost its vase next to a pool along the painting’s lower left border (fig. 11). In these cases, however, whatever the incongruities in the juncture of text and image, Nizāmī’s verses flow without interruption from the text of Shāh Mahmūd to the replacement pages and their associated pictures and back again to the Shāh Mahmūd’s text. This combination suggests that whenever and where ever the paintings of “Tahmasp B” were added to the text of “Tahmasp A,” textual completeness was more important than pictorial accuracy.

The union of the manuscript “Tahmasp A,” with the paintings of “Tahmasp B” was facilitated by the fact that Shāh Mahmūd’s text was, itself, to have been illustrated but as was mentioned above, those paintings were either never executed or were removed from the manuscript to make room for the addition of the large and impressive paintings which it now contains. In some cases the present illustrations may well be similar in theme to the paintings originally intended for the manuscript.

There are also cases in which the pictures fit into Shāh Mahmūd’s text so easily that it is probable that his manuscript would have contained the same illustrations. One curious example comes from the *Haft Paykar*.<sup>46</sup> The often reproduced page of a youthful prince pinning the hoof of a *gūr* or wild ass to its ear on fol. 210a, has sustained damage to its upper section and is framed by and backed with a “replacement page” but the preceding page, fol. 209 b which belongs to Shāh Mahmūd’s text has beautifully executed marginal landscapes occupied by wild asses in various poses. The most poignant is situated in the page’s lower left corner where there is a *gūr* drawn with its head caught in a bow (fig. 12).

## ■ The Replacement Pages of Or. 2265

Although Shāh Mahmūd’s signature at the end of each of the books of the *Khamsa* indicates that he had completed its transcription by the end of



March in 1543, subsequently portions of that text must have been damaged, lost or removed and a decision made to fill these gaps by the addition of newly transcribed pages. The location and design of such pages in Or. 2265 suggest that their primary purpose was to create a complete copy of Nizāmī's text by linking together the surviving pages copied by Shāh Mahmūd. As was discussed above, they also served to connect that text with the fourteen paintings of "Tahmasp B." In that respect, the addition of these replacement pages had the goal of conserving two valuable heirlooms, a group of paintings made for Shāh Tahmāsp and the text copied by Shāh Mahmūd. The high prestige attached to his calligraphy by subsequent generations is also signaled by the restoration project carried out on another manuscript copied by him which is also in the British Library, Add 1578. Its colophon describes how a nineteenth-century calligrapher completed and restored a sixteenth-century manuscript.<sup>47</sup>

Although the "replacement pages" of Or. 2265 maintain the general arrangement of Shāh Mahmūd's text with four columns of twenty-one lines each, the two sets of pages are consistently and visibly different from each other. The newer pages use a different kind of paper, which is darker in color than that of the original manuscript. The text block of these pages was also slightly larger in size than that of Shāh Mahmūd's pages and differs from it in such details as the widths of the text columns and of the inter-columnar spaces.<sup>48</sup> The manuscript's sixth colophon which is located on fol. 348a at the end of the first section of the *Iskandar Nāma* bears neither signature nor date and is written on one of the "replacement pages." Its insertion created a division between the two sections of the *Iskandar Nāma* which had not been present in Shāh Mahmūd's original manuscript and provided the opportunity to add a section heading for the second section of the *Iskandar Nāma* on folio 349b. It is this added heading which bears the signature of a certain "Salih ibn Fadl Allāh" (fig. 13). The opening illumination of the first book of the *Iskandar Nāma* on folio 260b also appears to be his work (fig. 14). These two headings are strikingly similar in design and color scheme to the intra-textual illumination found on many of the "replacement pages," a circumstance which suggests that all were added in a single campaign.

Although the general vocabulary of the "Salih ibn Fadl Allāh" illumination employs the same ingredients of floral and arabesque scrolls that are common in the illumination of earlier periods, it is distinctive for its vibrant palette and for the way in which strongly opposed colors are juxtaposed. This approach contrasts with the more limited and sedate colors employed in the illumination of the sixteenth-century sections of the manuscript. Where the Tahmāsp period illumination relies heavily on blue, gold and red, the "Salih ibn Fadl Allāh" pages use strong shades of yellow, green, mauve, orange and pink.<sup>49</sup>



## ■ The Decoration of Or. 2265

As might be expected from the evidence presented so far about the composite nature of this manuscript it is not surprising that its decoration also is neither of one type nor of one date. There appear to be two major types of intra-textual and marginal paintings, those on the pages written by Shāh Mahmūd and those belonging to the main group of “replacement pages.” Within each set of marginal illustrations there are several variants which may reflect the work of specific painters. These rich and varied paintings deserve a separate study but will be mentioned here primarily in conjunction with the current project’s objective of determining Or. 2265’s historical evolution.

As was mentioned above, the “replacement pages” differ from those copied by Shāh Mahmūd in the larger dimensions of their written surface and the darker color of their paper.<sup>50</sup> Even more striking is their distinctive type of intra-textual illumination and their particular repertoire of marginal landscape painting. The components of these marginal paintings on the “replacement pages” and the manner in which they are used to create landscapes bear a strong resemblance to a style used by Rizā ‘Abbāsī in his early seventeenth-century manuscript paintings and album leaves (fig. 3). This mode of landscape depiction continued to be used by his successors and imitators such as Afzāl al-Husaynī and Mu‘in Mūsavvīr into the middle decades of that century, and its popularity may well have continued until the end of the Safavid era.<sup>51</sup>

A pair of detached paintings inscribed with the date of 1020/1612, now in the Hermitage Museum, that may have been intended as the frontispiece to a manuscript or album, provide a well-articulated example of this mode of landscape painting in both its principal images and their marginal landscapes.<sup>52</sup> Diagnostic features of this style include flame-like clouds, and a simplified rendition of trees with pentagonal leaves or feathery, plume-like branches. All forms, whether of plants or of animals are reduced to silhouettes with little indication of space and volume. Although in this respect the landscapes are simplified, the creatures and plants represented belong to the world of everyday experience. They include lions, goats, gazelles, rabbits and various birds rather than the exotic creatures which are so prominent in the borders of Shāh Mahmūd’s original manuscript. The marginal paintings on the “replacement pages” of Or. 2265 exhibit different levels of execution but, in general, they are rendered in a simpler and more summary fashion than is true of the early seventeenth-century paintings by Rizā ‘Abbāsī.

## Conclusions

If the findings presented here are correct, then Or. 2265 now contains portions of four distinct entities. One is the text copied by Shāh Mahmūd; the second is comprised of pictures linked to Shāh Tahmāsp, which were originally destined for a different purpose, most probably for inclusion in another copy of Nizāmī's text; the third is a series of "replacement pages" created sometime in the middle of the seventeenth century to fill any textual lacunae resulting from the merger of these two heirlooms. This finding raises new questions about the fate of those pictures between their creation in the sixteenth century and their insertion into Or. 2265, more than a hundred years later. It also suggests that the question of their date is not established by the colophon dates of Shāh Mahmūd's text. Furthermore the ascription of individual paintings to particular painters should be given new scrutiny because many of those attributions are inscribed on the marginal zones of those paintings and are therefore contemporary with the introduction of "replacement pages" some time in the middle of the seventeenth century. The fourth component consists of pages illustrating themes in Nizāmī's poems prepared by Muhammad Zamān ca. 1086/1676, perhaps for inclusion in an album, perhaps for yet another copy of Nizāmī's poem. These pages were united with the composite sixteenth-seventeenth-century manuscript at a later moment, in part through the addition of another group of "replacement pages." Although the time and place of this reconstruction is difficult to establish, one possible context would have been in the first decades of the nineteenth century when Or. 2265 was rebound at the court of Fath 'Alī Shāh.

## Notes

- 1 The authors had use of a series of transparencies of the manuscript's individual folios prepared by the British Library's photographic service and would like to thank the staff for permission to examine these materials. Direct study of the manuscript's pages was carried out in the Conservation Laboratory of the British Library and the authors would like to thank Mr. Martyn Jones, Senior Conservator, for his assistance in this project.
- 2 Rieu (1966), vol. 3, 1072-3.
- 3 First publication of the paintings: Binyon (1928); for the attribution of paintings to specific painters see Stehoukine (1959) no. 20, 69-75; Welch (1979) 134-75, Dickson (1981) vol. I, *passim*.
- 4 Robinson (1967) nos. 39, 40 and 42, 55-6; Welch (1979) 176-83; Grabar (2001b).
- 5 Welch (1973) no 71, 102, 117; Soudavar (1992) no. 151, 374-5.
- 6 Diba (1989) fig. 7; Diba (1998) fig. 14, 58, 179-80.
- 7 Thackston (2001) 4, 15-6; Binyon (1933) 113-6, 186.
- 8 For a variety of interpretative approaches concerning the use of Firdawsī' text see Welch (1972); Grabar (1980); Hillenbrand (2004).
- 9 For a description of the processes involved: Shreve Simpson (1982); Shreve Simpson (1993).
- 10 Shreve Simpson (1997) 40-2.

- 11 Or. 2265 f.35b, the reverse of the page bearing the colophon for *Makhzan al-Asrār* exemplifies the manner in which the pages were prepared for transcription with impressed lines and a gold-sprinkled textblock.
- 12 Shreve Simpson (1997) figs. 27, 41, 42, 43, 46, 163.
- 13 Ibidem, 44-5.
- 14 Ibidem, 57-61.
- 15 For examples of such models see Ipşiroğlu (1964).
- 16 For a discussion of the development of *muraqqa*'s see Roxburgh (2005).
- 17 Shreve Simpson (1997) 70-3.
- 18 For references to these pictures see note 3, the pair of illuminated medallions with which Or. 2265 opens may derive from yet another source; illustrated in Welch (1979) 134-5.
- 19 Compare Binyon (1928) pl. II and Canby (1996) cat. no. 55, pls. 100-1.
- 20 The British Library's photographic documentation of the *Haft Paykar* section of Or. 2265 is incomplete, so that no definitive list of such pages can be compiled. They include folios 200a, 224a, 225a.
- 21 The text on fol. 200b is outlined in gold.
- 22 Fol. 203b, "Bahrām Gūr and the Dragon" and fol. 213a "Fitna carries the Ox."
- 23 Soudavar (1992) 364, 374-5. The damage to "Bahrām Gūr at a Night Entertainment," fol. 221b, is particularly striking.
- 24 The authors would like to thank Dr. Maryam Ekhtiar for assistance in making this identification. This note on fol. 348b comes between the two halves of the *Iskandar Nāma*.
- 25 Rieu (1966) vol. 3, 1072-3.
- 26 For a typical marginal landscape see Welch (1979) 144-5; repeating patterns probably created with a stencil are found on Or 2265, fols. 17a,b; 22a,b.
- 27 Dickson (1981) vol. 1, 262-5, for the treatment of these themes in Chinese art see Rawson (1984).
- 28 Or. 2265 fol. 83a. and fol. 218a.
- 29 KS52,79-80 (*bihishtī-paykar āmad...* and *chinān pandāsh t-k-ān...*) over the picture space; KS52,81-82 under the picture space. Manuscripts in which this subject is illustrated include John Rylands University Library Ms. 36 and Topkapi Saray Library Hazine 754 and Hazine 1008.
- 30 HP26,1-2 (*chūnkih Bahrām shud nishāt...* and *ruz-i shanba...*) above the picture space and HP26,3-4 below it.
- 31 Or. 2265 fols. 21a and b, 44 a and b.
- 32 For the illumination and the illustrations see Welch (1979) 136-7, and 138-175. The two blank medallions on folios 1b and 2a appear to derive from yet another source.
- 33 Replacement pages in *Makhzan al-Asrār* are 3b, 4a-b, 16a, 18b, 21a-b, 27a-b, 28a-b and 29a-b.
- 34 Or. 2265, fol. 60b, Welch (1979) 154-5.
- 35 Or. 2265, fols. 57b, 60b, 66b, 77b, 202b, 211b; Welch (1979) 152-61, 172-81.
- 36 The folio size of Or. 2265 is 36 x 25 cm; the Edinburgh page is 36 x 25 cm and the Boston drawing is 45 x 29.5 cm.
- 37 The authors would like to thank Mr. Martyn Jones, Senior Conservator at the British Library for his assistance in carrying out this examination.
- 38 Two of the paintings, "Anushirwan and the Vizier", fol. 15b and the "Mi'raj," fol. 195a, are surrounded by sixteenth-century borders but both have sustained damage to their upper zone and in both cases the text appears to have been added after the picture has been painted; Welch (1979), 138-41. Both paintings and their adjacent folios have been framed for exhibition, making it impossible to conduct an examination of those pages.
- 39 For example, the painting on fol. 18a is backed by a replacement page (18b); that on 26b is followed by "replacement pages," 27a & b, 28a & b, 29a; the painting on 48b is

- preceded by a “replacement page,” 48a; the painting on 53b is preceded by a replacement page, 53a.
- 40 Pages where the text has been trimmed or cut down: 60b, 66b, 166a, 211a.
  - 41 The wrongly placed pictures are on fols. 48b and 57b.
  - 42 Or. 2265, fol. 48b; Welch (1979) 148-9.
  - 43 The text of Or. 2265, 47b ends with KS20,9-10; fol. 48a contains 20 *bayts*: KS20,11-30 and 48b: KS20,31-2.
  - 44 Or 2265, fol. 57b; Welch (1979) 152-3; The text of fol. 57a ends with KS29,37, the text inscribed on the top of the painting is KS29,38-40 and that on the bottom is KS29,41-42.
  - 45 Or. 2264, fol. 60b; Welch (1979) 154-5; The section of Or. 2265 between fol. 57 and fol. 61 shows signs of alterations and repairs. The illustration on fol. 57b is followed by a “replacement page” and that on 60b is both preceded and followed by “replacement pages” on fols. 60a and 61a/b. Despite these changes Nizami’s text appears to be complete. The last verses on fol. 60a are contiguous with those on 60b (KS32,2-3).
  - 46 Or. 2265, fol. 210a, Welch (1979) 174-5.
  - 47 Rieu (1966) 574.
  - 48 The text block of Shāh Mahmūd’s pages measures 217 by 132 mm, whereas the replacement pages measure 220 by 117 mm. The text columns of Shāh Mahmūd’s pages are 29 mm in width, whereas in the replacement pages the outer columns of text are wider than those in the center (32-34 mm on the outside and 29-29 mm for the inner columns).
  - 49 For comparable illumination from the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp, see Thompson (2003) pls. 3.15 and 6.15, 60-1, 174-5. For illumination comparable to that signed by Salih ibn Fadl Allāh, see Binyon (1928) pl.II.
  - 50 The written surface of Shāh Mahmūd’s manuscript measures 21.7 x 13.2 cm and that of the replacement pages measures 22 x 13.5.
  - 51 Stchoukine (1964) pls. XXXII left, XXXIII right, XXXIV right, XXXVIII-XXXIX, LXXII, LXXVI; Canby (1996) cat. nos. 7, 10, 232, 39, 55, 57, 65, pp. 3, 37, 57, 70-71, 100-101, 105, 113, and passim.
  - 52 Adamova (1996a) no. 15, 208-11, Canby (1996) no. 55, 99-102.

## 11 Nizāmī Ganjavī, the Wordsmith: The Concept of *sakhun* in Classical Persian Poetry

*Kamran Talattof*

The word *sakhun* or *sukhun* (سخن), contemporarily pronounced *sakhun*, abounds in the pages of Nizāmī Ganjavī's five *mathnavīs*, known collectively as the *Panj Ganj* (Five Treasures), as well as in his collection of odes and lyric poems. سخن literally means "parole", "speech", "words", or "حرف *harf*".<sup>1</sup> *Sakhun guftan* (سخن گفتن) means "to speak" and *sakhunrānī kardan* (سخنرانی کردن) means "to lecture."<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, I have argued that for Nizāmī the term *sakhun* refers to a more significant concept beyond its literal meaning: it has a rather broader meaning and implication, that might be understood in terms of eloquent rhetoric, a quality he has demonstrated in his poetry, and that became synonymous with poetry and literature itself.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, I have shown that because of this centrality of *sakhun*, Nizāmī offers a consistent concept of love and a favorable characterization of women, derived by literary exigencies rather than ideological prejudice.<sup>4</sup> In substantiating my arguments, I demonstrated how different Nizāmī is from Firdawsī and Jāmī in their portrayal of the female.

In this essay, I will elaborate on Nizāmī's concept of *sakhun* for whom, I maintain, the term is synonymous with "literature", "literary work", and "poetry". Comparing the Nizamian concept of *sakhun* with the use of the word in the works of Rūmī (d. 1273), Sa'dī (d. 1291), and Hāfiz (d. 1389/90) who have also used the word frequently, I further maintain that for these latter poets, *sakhun* is closer to its contemporary usage, meaning "parole", "speech" or "talk", or simply *harf*. I will also try to explain why Nizāmī holds a high opinion of the concept of *sakhun*, particularly its poetic forms to the extent that it becomes an independent, discernable theme in his work, and a connecting motif that holds his poetry together. Realizing the centrality of the role of *sakhun* in Nizāmī's work enables a better understanding of his use of so many different themes including scientific, philosophical, romantic, and religious motifs and thereby his literary representation.

Scholars have tried to explain the significance of words in the realm of human intellectual activities on the basis of the religious significance that the act of articulation has earned.<sup>5</sup> Dabashi stresses the importance of

language and the concept of *sukhan* in Nizāmī's work believing that these provided Nizāmī with an identity. He states that, for Nizāmī, "being" is conceived by *sukhan* and it is used "not only to convey meaning but also create,"<sup>6</sup> as they did in *Genesis*. Meskub makes a similar attempt as he explains the role of *sukhan* in the *Shāh Nāma*. He starts his analysis by citing the creation story of *Genesis* and the first verse of the *Book of John* that reads "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and finding similar concepts in the *Qur'an* and in the words of Zoroaster in the *Avesta*. The latter, he believes created a tradition which Firdawsī adopted. Meskub believes that *sukhan* for Firdawsī is similar to the concept of the spoken word presented in the religious books and it is the embodiment of ideas and above all, the idea of creation, man, and the truth of his transcendental world.<sup>7</sup> However, the author sheds a more pertinent light on the topic when he states that Firdawsī, like other poets such as Hāfiz, perceived *sukhan* as a structure, a design that resulted in the writing of the *Shāh Nāma*. I should first mention that the *Shāh Nāma* presents epic and love stories based on material from mythical, heroic, and historical periods of Iranian history, versified in lucid language that uses nearly exclusively Persian vocabulary. Firdawsī remains quite faithful to his historical sources and to the logic of the epic stories he versifies. The genre rather than the holiness of the words carries out the labor.

Moreover, to explain in terms of biblical exegeses the significance of certain terms in Persian poetry is moot, if only because it cannot fully demonstrate the variety of meanings contained in the concept of *sakhun* in different authors' works. Indeed, a comparative study of classical Persian poetry reveals that each of these poets takes a different position in the realm of language philosophy, that may go beyond the biblical notion, the Platonic *doxa* ("opinion"), the Augustan concept of "fleshly" speech (words produced by the mouth for the ears), the Aristotelian concept of the mimetic nature of language and the Aristotelian *logos*-like discourse. For example, while the opposition between living speech and writing does not play out in the works of these classical Persian poets to any significant extent, Nizāmī seems to prefer the written form. In addition, unlike Augustine who advanced writing over speech because of its visual and stable qualities and its similarity to the divine *logos*, Nizāmī prefers the written form that provides more opportunities for embellishment.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, references to fauna and flora in the works of some Persian poets, often acknowledged as part of *sakhun*, have been influenced by mystical schools of thought, in which, the believer is encouraged to come to peace with all creatures. At times, these references serve as reminder to man that he should keep his priority by behaving more peacefully. All these of course may create the opportunity to speak of God. However, as the findings on the use of *sakhun* in Persian poetry show, poets have different, multiple, and even contradictory understandings of the word.

To be sure, in applying the concept of the divine *logos* to Persian poets, one must be careful since such a concept is more in line with the ideology of scholasticism in which a sweeping distinction between medieval Christian philosophers and theologians, and their philosophical exposé and theological writings did not exist. Unlike the great scholastic authors, the Persian poets did not all use their entire rhetoric to justify and elaborate on faith. The closest ideological influence one might detect in Persian poetry are mystical elocutions (more accurately, Sufi poetry by which virtue, familiarity with Islamic ideology was no doubt a prerequisite) for the expression of which, the poet's language demonstrates significant difference from the author of a theological exposé. In mystic poetry, the poet feels much freer in his inward expression, imagination and depiction. For example, even in a highly imaginative, surrealist description of the ascension (معراج *mi'rāj*), and after amazing portrayals of the angelic boundaries, Nizāmī refuses to narrate the words that the Prophet hears from the One. Without such a freedom and imaginative aspiration, the poet would produce a more established and structured form of work, a prayer, or a مناجات *munājāt*, as did Ansārī.<sup>9</sup>

It might therefore be more productive to look for the actual meanings covered by the term *sakhun* in the Persian poets' verses. The works of Rūmī, Sa'dī, and Hāfiz combined, contain hundreds of occurrences of the word *sakhun* whereas Nizāmī's *mathnavīs* alone contain more than seven hundred occurrences. While the works of Rūmī, Sa'dī, and Hāfiz together contain one hundred *misra*'s that start with the term, there are two-hundred and ten of such half verses in the work of Nizāmī. Moreover, there are very few occurrences of the plural or derivative forms of *sakhun* in the works of Rūmī, Sa'dī and Hāfiz, whereas Nizāmī's works are replete with these, many creative derivatives combined with a suffix, a prefix, or with another word.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond these approximate statistics, it is important to illustrate the way these poets have used the term. What does each poet mean by the word, how does he vary in his use of the term? Beyond the similarities in the works of Rūmī, Hāfiz, and Sa'dī in their use of the word (and while they all differ from Nizāmī in his treatment of the word), each one of these poets shows creativity with *sakhun*. Even a study limited to this one single concept requires extensive reading and rendering. However, I hope that this introductory effort will help promote similar studies, especially in regard to the first three poets whom I am only examining for the sake of comparison and as an introduction to the more elaborate study of Nizāmī's notion of *sakhun*.

### ■ *Sakhun* in Rūmī's Work

In both *Mathnavī-yi Ma'navī* (Spiritual Couplets) and *Dīvān-i Shams*, Rūmī's best-known works, the term *sakhun* occurs in hundreds of verses, and occasionally more than once in the same verse:

سخن به نزد سخن دان بزرگوار بود      ز آسمان سخن آمد سخن نه خوار بود

*Speech (sakhun) is exalted for the speech-knower (sakhun-dān)/ It descended from the sky, it is not inferior.*<sup>11</sup>

The use of the word is a way of expressing ideas and feelings. Knowing Rūmī's discourse, the word often refers to the expressions of the amorous, the drunken, and the unusual, those who often speak best. Thus, drink improves speech:

بده آن می رواقی هله ای کنیم ساقی      چو چنان شوم بگویم سخن تو بی محابا

*Give me that stoic wine to advance, Oh Cupbearer!// Once drunk, I will speak of you frankly.*<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, *sakhun* can be the subject of unusual verbs and the theme of strange circumstances. For example, it can have a taste or a bitter consequence (which causes the death of a parrot upon hearing a bad news):

گر سخن خواهی که گویی چون شکر      صبر کن از حرص و این حلوا مخور

*If you want to talk sweet as sugar/ be patient, avoid greed, and do not eat this sweet yet.*<sup>13</sup>

It may be eaten:

این سخن شیرست در پستان جان      بی کشنده خوش نمیگردد روان

*This sakhun is milk in the breast of the soul./ If no-one is suckling, it does not flow well.*<sup>14</sup>

It can function like an arrow:

تن آدمی کمان و نفس و سخن چو تیرش      چو برفت تیر و ترکش عمل کمان نماند

*Man's body is like a bow, words its arrow / Once the arrow is gone, the bow's act is done.*<sup>15</sup>



It may even represent the sound of a fly's wing:

هله می گو که سخن پر زدن آن مگس است      پر زدن نیز نماند چو رود دوغ فرود

*Beware keep quiet, word is that fly's flapping / Flapping is no more once things settle down.*<sup>16</sup>

It may also be uttered in sleep:

در خواب سخن نه بی زبان گویند      در بیداری من آنچنان گویم

*In sleep, they don't speak without their tongue / In wakefulness, I speak in that manner.*<sup>17</sup>

It can express a miracle or a sublime religious moment:

آن نیاز مریمی بودست و درد      که چنان طفلی سخن آغاز کرد

*That was Mary's need and ache / That such a child began to speak.*<sup>18</sup>

It is also the speech of madmen:

بیگانه شوی ز صحبت بیگانه      بشنو سخن راست از این دیوانه  
سخن راست تو از مردم دیوانه شنو      تا نمیریم میندار که مردانه شویم

*A stranger you will become by hearing a stranger's words/ The truth, you hear from this madman.// The truth, you should hear from the madman/ As long as we are not dead, don't consider us men.*<sup>19</sup>

It may be the word of a drunken man, as in the famous Moses and the Shepherd story:

گفت او را محتسب هین آه کن      مست هو هو کرد هنگام سخن

*"The Muhtasib said to him, "Come! Say, 'Ah!' / The drunkard uttered 'Hu-Hu!' when he spoke."*<sup>20</sup>

Even dead ones can understand *sakhun*:

پیش او مردن بهر دم از شکر شیرین تر است      مرده داند این سخن را تو مپرس از زندگان

*Before him, dying is sweeter than sugar/ The dead knows this meaning, do not ask [it] of the living ones.<sup>21</sup>*

Stones can even express it:

چون شنید از سنگها پیر این سخن      پس عصا انداخت آن پیر کهن

*When the old man heard this from the stone/ The old master threw his cane.<sup>22</sup>*

It can be associated with greenery:

نرگس در ماجرا چشمک زد سبزه را      سبزه سخن فهم کرد گفت که فرمان ترا

*Narcissus winked at the meadow in that affair/ The meadow perceived it and said "I am at your command".<sup>23</sup>*

Sometimes, however, the word is a mode of communication that is less effective than connections through feelings, love or the heart:

چو خاموشانه عشقت قوی شد      سخن کوتاه شد این بار ما را ...  
بس کنم این گفتن و خامش کنم      در خمشی به سخن جان افزا

*Since in silence my love for you grew/ words now fail me.  
(...) I shall stop talking and be silent/ In silence, better words invigorate.<sup>24</sup>*

It refers to a mode of communication that is less effective than eye contact:

بر بند دهان از سخن و باده لب نوش      تا قصه کند چشم خمار از ره دیده

*Shut the mouth, away from speech and imbibe the lips with wine/  
So that drunken eyes can tell the tale through their gaze.<sup>25</sup>*

One at times should avoid speech:

شصت فرسنگ از سخن بگریز      که بدام سخن درین شستی

*Run far, sixty farsakhs away from this speech/ Since the speech has trapped you in this garment.<sup>26</sup>*

Nevertheless, *sakhun* must be pronounced by one and heard by another:

جان پیش تو هر ساعت می ریزد و می روید      از بهر یکی جان کس چون با تو سخن گوید

*Before thee the soul is hourly decaying and growing/ And for one soul's sake how should anyone plead with thee?*<sup>27</sup>

Occasionally, Rūmī distorts this convention and the speaker-listener dichotomy:

چندان سخن شنیدم اما دو لب ندیدم      من بر دریچه دل بس گوش جان نهادم

*I laid the spiritual ear at the window of the heart/ I heard much discourse, but the lips I did not see.*<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes *sakhun* has a religious function; the praise of God or even the words of God:

سخن ز پرده برون آید آنگهش بینی      که او صفات خداوند کردگار بود

*Speech once appeared from behind the curtain. You will see/ that it defines the God Almighty.*<sup>29</sup>

Sometimes it has a dramatic effect:

چون آتش می شود عذارش به سخن      خون می چکد از چشم خمارش به سخن

*From words, his face turns red like fire/ from words, he sheds tears as blood from his drunken eyes.*<sup>30</sup>

It can be endless, as expressed in more than forty-five verses starting with *این سخن پایان ندارد* ("This *sakhun* has no end"). For example:

این سخن پایان ندارد لیک ما      باز گویم آن تمامی قصه را

*There is no end to this talk, however we/ shall recite the entire story.*<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, there are passages in which Rūmī seems to prefer silence to *sakhun*. In *Dīvān-i Shams*, he writes:

دیگر سخن مگوی اگر هست اتحاد ...      اکنون ببند دو لب و آن چشم بر گشا  
من بنده آنم که خموشی داند      هر کس هوس سخن فروشی داند

*Close your lips and open those eyes / Say no more if there is unity.  
(...)*

*Everyone desires to sell speech/ I am a slave to the one who knows silence.*<sup>32</sup>

It is indeed a manly habit to be silent:

طفلیست سخن گفتن مردیست خمش کردن      تو رستم چالاکى نی کودک چالیکى

*It is childish to speak, manly to be silent / Be agile like Rustam not playful like an infant.*<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Rūmī displays tremendous ability, creativity and philosophical effort in the use of the term. At times, his repetition of the word is a rhetorical device. The term refers to nothing more than a mode of expression that is often subject or even victim of its circumstances, as for example, in the verses where he decrees silence.

### **Sakhun in Sa'dī's Poetry**

Sa'dī uses the term more than three hundred times. His use of the term as "talk" is more formal than Rūmī's *sakhun* (or Hāfīz's, as we shall see). In the *Gulistān*, he writes:

سخن گفت و دامان گوهر فشاند      به نطقى که هاش آستین بر فشاند

*He spoke, and expanded his skirt of jewels [of speech]/ With such a grace, that the king extended his sleeve [in rapture].*<sup>34</sup>

In this verse, سخن is equated with نطق, meaning "speech"; it is official, and it will be rewarded if it is good. While there is vagueness in the verse about the content of that rewarding speech, the following verse that stand among the contemporary sayings and proverbs, reveal more about the nature of Sa'dī's *sakhun*:

تا مرد سخن نگفته باشد      عیب و هنرش نهفته باشد

*Until a man hath spoken, his defects and his skills are concealed.*<sup>35</sup>

In the section entitled "On Being Silent.", Sa'dī's prose indicates that the terms also means "parole", "talk", "discussion", "harf":

گروهی حکما به حضرت کسری در به مصلحتی سخن همی گفتند. بزرگمهر. ه. مهتر  
ایشان بود خامش. گفتندش چرا با ما در این بحث سخن نگویی. گفت: وزیران بر مثال  
اطبا اند و طبیب دارو ندهد جز سقیم را. پس چو بینم که رای شما بر صواب است مرا  
بر سر سخن گفتن حکمت نباشد

*At the court of Kisra a number of wise men were debating on some affair. When Buzurgmīr who was the best amongst them, remained silent, they asked him why in this debate he did not say anything. He answered, 'Ministers are like physicians, and the physician administers medicine to the sick only; there when I see that your opinions are judicious, it would not be consistent with wisdom for me to add speech.'*<sup>36</sup>

In a further reference we find:

یکی را از دوستان گفتم: امتناع سخن گفتنم به علت آن اختیار آمده است در غالب اوقات که در سخن نیک و بد اتفاق افتد و دیده دشمنان جز بر بدی نمی آید. گفت: دشمن آن به که یکی نبیند

*I said to one of my friends 'I have myself determined to observe silence because in conversation there frequently happens both good and evil, and the eye of an enemy observes only that which is bad.'*  
*He replied, 'O brother, an enemy does not deserve to see the good.'*<sup>37</sup>

Both anecdotes preach the avoidance of unnecessary speech. Sa'dī also advises thoughtful speech:

نگفتم تو را تا یقینم نبود ...	به پندار نتوان سخن گفت زود
نشاید بریدن نینداخته	نباید سخن گفت نا ساخته
چو گفته شود یابد او بر تو دست	سخن تا نگوئی برو دست هست

*When unsure, one cannot quickly speak/ So long as I was uncertain, I spoke not, (...)*  
*One should not speak when unprepared/ What's not spread out cannot be cut,*  
*Words you've not said are still within your hand/ But what's been said may get the upper-hand of you.*<sup>38</sup>

In opposition to Rūmī and Hāfiz, for whom *sakhun* comes from all possible sources, often the heart, Sa'dī's *sakhun* often comes from the head:

سخن گفت با عابدی کله ای ...	شنیدم که یکبار در حله ای
نه در اسب و میدان و چوگان و گوی	سخن در صلاحست و تدبیر و خوی

*I've heard that once by the Tigris stream/ A head addressed a devotee. (...)*  
*Of propriety I speak, good management and character/ Not of horses and playing-fields or polo-sticks and balls!*<sup>39</sup>

The qualities of good management and character are attainable, and will enhance the speaking ability which, according to the first verse of the *Būstān*, was given to man by God:

سرخ گفتن اندر زبان آفرید      به نام خدایی که جان آفرید

*In the name of the God who created life! / The One who created speech-creating for the tongue.<sup>40</sup>*

Sa'dī stresses that *sakhun* is a good quality to possess; it fosters admiration and respect:

سرخ سنج و مقدار مردم شناس      نکو سیرتش دید و روشن قیاس

*[The king] saw his good way of life, and illuminated judgment/ his considerate speech, and capability of man-appraising.<sup>41</sup>*

However, possessing this ability does not entitle one to talk in front of a superior:

که من بعد بی آبرویی مکن      ادب نیست پیش بزرگان سخن

*They would say: 'Henceforth behave not so disgracefully/ It is not mannerly to speak before the great!<sup>42</sup>*

Indeed, gender and class play a role in Sa'dī's conceptualization of *sakhun*:

چو بیچاره گفت این سخن نزد جفت      نگر تا زن او را چه مردانه گفت ...  
به دهقان نا دان چه خوش گفت زن      به دانش سخن گوی یا دم مزن

*Helplessly he uttered this speech to his partner (his wife)/ Behold how like a man she spoke to him! (...)  
How fair to the ignorant yeoman spoke his wife/ Speak knowledgeably or do not breathe a word!<sup>43</sup>*

Like any other utterance or conversation, Sa'dī's *sakhun* can be negative:

شنید این سخن بخت بر گشته دیو      به زاری بر آورد بانگ و غریو ...  
شنید این سخن عابد هوشیار      بر آشفت و گفت ای ملک هوش دار ...  
گر از حاکمان سختت آید سخن      تو بر زیر دستان درشتی مکن ...  
چو دشوارت آمد ز دشمن سخن      نگر تا چه عیب گرفت آن مکن

*Shaytan of overturned fortune heard this speech / In lament, he raised a shout and cry; (...)*

*The prudent and devout man heard these words / Then said, incensed: O king! Have sense; (...)*  
*If the word of rulers be hard to thee / Exercise not harshness towards thy inferiors. (...)*  
*When from the enemy's speech, it comes hard to thee/ See! What defect he takes up, that do not.*<sup>44</sup>

The term is used in the realm of fighting and conflict:

و گرنه مجال سخن تنگ نیست ...	نداند که ما را سر جنگ نیست
جهانی سخن را قلم در کشم	توانم که تیغ زبان بر کشم
سخن چین بدبخت هیزم کشست	میان دو تن جنگ چون آتشت

*Does he not know we have no mind to warfare? / Else, is the scope for utterance not confined? (...)*  
*I too can draw the sword-blade of the tongue/ Or through all mundane utterance draw the pen.*  
*Hostility between two people is like fire/ and the evil fated backbiter supplies fuel.*<sup>45</sup>

Elsewhere, Sa'dī writes:

رفیق این سخن بشنید و به هم بر آمد و روی از حکایت من در هم کشید و سخنهای رنجش آمیز گفتن گرفت. کین چه عقل و کفایت است و فهم و درایت. قول حکما درست آمد که گفته اند دوستان به زندان به کار آیند که بر سر سفره همه دشمنان دوست نمایند

سخن چین بدبخت در یکنفس	خلاف افکند در میان دو کس
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*My friend heard these words, was displeased, looked angry, and began to speak with a degree of asperity saying, 'In all this what is there of wisdom, propriety, intelligence, or penetration? And the words of the sages are verified, namely 'That friends are serviceable in prison, for at a table [all] enemies assume the appearance of friends.*

He concludes that:

*The evil-fated backbiter in one breath/ creates hostility between two people.*<sup>46</sup>

Sa'dī very effectively uses the term سخنچین (today *sukhanchīn*). It is not present in Nizāmī's poetry as a prominent concept. In any case, whether it is positive or negative, whether it is valuable advice or a source of

antagonism, *sakhun* can only be heard through the ears. A number of verses convey this:

برون رفت و بازش کس آنجا ندید ...	همان کاین سخن مرد رهرو شنید
نصیحت نگیرد مگر در خموش	فراوان سخن باشد آکنده گوش
بدو گفت ازین نوع با من مگوی ...	شنید این سخن مرد پاکیزه خوی
بخندید کای یار فرخ نژاد	شنید این سخن مرد نیکو نهاد

*No sooner had the traveler heard these words/ Than, going out, he was never seen again within that place. (...)*

*The man of many words has stuffed-up ears/ counsel will not take except in silence.*

*The man of pure disposition heard these words/ And answered: Say not such things to me. (...)*

*Hearing such words, that goodly natured man/ Smiling said: Colleague, of a line illustrious.<sup>47</sup>*

To be sure, the term is often juxtaposed with or accompanied by the word *dēhan* or *dēhan* (*dihān*, *dihan* mouth). For example:

اول اندیشه کند مرد که عاقل باشد	سخن گفته دگر باز نیاید به دهن
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*The words once spoken do not come back to the mouth// Man would think first if he wishes to be wise.<sup>48</sup>*

Sa'dī begins many of his anecdotes with the phrase "I heard," as exemplified above. Then of course his *sakhun* also requires an audience:

سزاوار تصدیق و تحسین بود	سخن گر چه دلبند و شیرین بود
قوت طبع از متکلم مجوی	فهم سخن چون نکند مستمع
و آنچه دانی که نه نیکوش جوابست مگوی	تا ندانی که سخن عین صوابست مگوی

*Although a discourse be captivating and sweet/ commanding belief and admiration.*

*When the hearer does not understand the discourse/ expect not any effect of genius from the orator.*

*Until you are persuaded that the discourse is strictly proper, speak not;/ and whatever you know will not obtain a favorable answer, ask not.<sup>49</sup>*

*Sakhun* ceases when two people in argument choose to stop all communication:

چه کرده ام که به هجران تو سزاوارم	چه جرم رفت که با ما سخن نمی گویی
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*What crime have I committed that you speak no more/ What acts have I done that I deserve your separation?*

The speaker of *sakhun* should not be interrupted:

یکی را از حکما شنیدم که می گفت: هر گز کسی به جهل خویش اقرار نکرده است  
مگر آنکس که چون دیگری در سخن باشد همچنان، سخن آغاز کند

سخن را سرست ای خردمند و بن                      میاور سخن در میان سخن

*I heard a sage say, that no one confesses his own ignorance, excepting he who begins speaking, whilst another is talking; and before the discourse is ended.*

And:

*O wise man, a discourse hath a commencement and a conclusion.  
Confound not one discourse with another.<sup>50</sup>*

Like many other classical poets, Sa'dī also uses *sakhun* to describe his own orating ability:

زبان در کش از عقل داری و هوش                      چو سعدی سخن گوی ورنه خموش

*Restrain your tongue, if you possess intelligence, good-sense /  
Speak as does Sa'di, or silent remain.<sup>51</sup>*

And he follows this up with the mother of self-compliments!

من دگر شعر نخواهم که نویسم که مگس                      زحمتم می دهد از بس که سخن شیرینست

*I will write no more poetry because the flies/ trouble me for the  
sweetness of my words!<sup>52</sup>*

In all these compliments, the term refers to his wise sayings rather than to his poetic craft. In the final analysis, *sakhun* may be the oral expression of an idea, a feeling. It is most often praise for a beloved or for himself. But in all of those cases, *sakhun* has a didactic mission: Sa'dī maintains that he is conveying useful *sakhun* and asks his readers to listen carefully.

### ■ *Sakhun* in Hāfiz's Poetry

In the *Dīvān* of Hāfiz, portraying the life and historical events in his birth-town Shiraz, I have come across the word *sakhun* more than eighty times. Given the relative small size of Hāfiz's work compared to that of the other poets analyzed here, this is a high incidence of the term. For Hāfiz also, the term often means "harf"; even when used in an allegorical sense, for him "*sakhun guftan*" means "*harf zadan* (to speak)". For example:

گل بخندید که از راست نرنجیم ولی      هیچ عاشق سخن سخت به معشوق نگفت

*The rose laughed and said: "I don't mind hearing the truth, but/ no lover speaks harshly to his beloved."<sup>53</sup>*

از سخن چینان ملالتها پدید آمد ولی      گر میان هم نشینان نا سزایی رفت رفت

*Tale-bearers caused a lot of vexation. However/ If any abuse happened among the companions, let it be.<sup>54</sup>*

مزن ز چون و چرا دم که بنده مقبل      قبول کرد به جان هر سخن که جانان گفت

*Do not try to argue. A fortunate slave [of love]/ accepts with all his heart whatever his beloved says.<sup>55</sup>*

گفتم به باد می دهم باده نام و ننگ      گفتا قبول کن سخن و هر چه باد باد

*I said: "Wine casts my name and fame to the wind"/ He said: "Accept the word and let be whatever will be."<sup>56</sup>*

حدیث دوست نگویم مگر به حضرت دوست      که آشنا سخن آشنا ننگه دارد

*I do not speak about the friend's pain except to the friend/ For only a friend keeps the words of a friend.<sup>57</sup>*

And he has also written:

بیار باده و اول به دست حافظ ده      به شرط آنکه ز مجلس سخن به در نرود

*Bring wine and hand to Hāfiz first/ provided that the word does not leave the assembly.*<sup>58</sup>

In the first half verse of the first line, *rāst* is an adjective for the word *sakhun*, even though this latter term itself is missing. It implies that *sakhun* can be truthful or false, straightforward or vague. The truth or straightforward *sakhun* is harsh and that is why in the second *misra*, Hāfiz advises lovers not to say anything harsh to their beloved. *Sakhun* therefore becomes the subject of human conditions and circumstances. This very concept is creatively portrayed in the verses that follow. The word has the same meaning in the following verse, part of which has become a saying:

با خرابات نشینان ز کرامات ملاف      هر سخن وقتی و هر نکته مکانی دارد

*Do not boast of miraculous powers with tavern-dwellers/ Every word has a time and every remark a place.*<sup>59</sup>

And:

پیران سخن ز تجربه گویند، گفتنت      هان ای پسر که پیر شوی پند گوش کن

*Old people speak from experience, I am telling you. Hey, sonny, until you have become old, listen to advice!*<sup>60</sup>

At other times, Hāfiz uses the word to refer to his own speech:

سرود مجلس است اکنون فلک به رقص آرد      که شعر حافظ شیرین سخن ترانه تست

*The carol of your assembly will bring the sky to dancing/ now that the verse of Hāfiz, sweet of speech, is your song.*<sup>61</sup>

حافظ تو این سخن ز که آموختی که بخت      تعویذ کرد شعر تو را و به زر گرفت

*Hāfiz, who taught you the prayer / that caused Fortune to make an amulet of your poem and wrap it in gold?*<sup>62</sup>

منم آن شاعر ساحر که به افسون سخن      از نی کلک همه قند و شکر می بارم<sup>63</sup>

*I am that magician poet who, with the magic of words / makes the pen of reed pour out sugar and comfit.*

من و سفینه حافظ که جز درین دریا      بضاعت سخن در فشان نمی بینم

*Hāfiz's Dīvān suffices for me, because except in this sea / I do not see any bounty of fascinating speech.*<sup>64</sup>

And:

ز شعر دلکش حافظ کسی بود آگاه      که لطف طبع و سخن گفتن دری داند

*Hāfiz's charming poetry is appreciated by the one/ who knows the grace of the verse and prose of Dari.*<sup>65</sup>

Hāfiz's *sakhun* comes from the heart:

چو بشنوی سخن اهل دل مگو که خطاست      سخن شناس نئی جان من خطا اینجاست

*When you hear the speech of men of heart, don't say it is wrong / The problem is, my dear, you are not an expert in speech.*<sup>66</sup>

بیان شوق چه حاجت که سوز آتش دل      توان شناخت ز سوزی که در سخن باشد

*What need is there to express yearning? For the quality of the heart's fire / can be known from the blaze of words.*<sup>67</sup>

ایش سزا نبود دل حق گزار من      کز غمگسار خود سخن ناسزا شنید

*My grateful heart did not deserve to hear abusive words / from the one who used to remove my sorrow.*<sup>68</sup>

And:

سخن درپرده میگویم چو گل از غنچه بیرون آی      که بیش از پنج روزی نیست حکم میرنوروزی

*I utter these words in veil: Emerge from the bud like the rose! / For the reign of the king of Nawruz is a mere five days away.*<sup>69</sup>

The term also appears in contexts referring to discussion and conversation, making a single conceptualization of Hāfiz's use difficult. Occasionally he refers to his poetry, and to the fact that it is written in Persian. But we can conclude that for Hāfiz, it seems that *sakhun* is a complex issue belonging to the realm of human relations. His speech is often critical of the established social norms.

Thus far, I may conclude that there are similarities in Rūmī's, Sa'dī's, and Hāfiz's use of the term *sakhun*. They understand it to mean "uttered words", "parole", or "harf," which may occasionally be expressed in a poetic form. They also use it to refer to wise sayings that come from either

one's soul, mind, or heart when they strive to explain the content of their *sakhun*. They distinguish between good *sakhun* and bad *sakhun*. Finally, they all use it to refer to their own didactical sayings as an example of good *sakhun*. Other poets beside the three above, have dealt with the *sakhun* in an extensive manner, not only quantitatively but also in terms of the significant place they have given the term in their works. For example, in the poetry of Nasīr Khusraw (1004-ca. 1088), especially in his *qasā'id*, the term occurs frequently to conceptualize a variety of philosophical, didactic, and religious statements.<sup>70</sup> He is amongst those who have been influenced in his metaphysics by Aristotle, through the works of Avicenna and al-Fārābī.<sup>71</sup> Examples are numerous and a separate study would be needed in order to cover all the nuances in his work.<sup>72</sup> However, the word *sakhun* is mostly used in the ways discussed above.<sup>73</sup>

### **Sakhun in Nizāmī's Work**

Ilyas Yūsūf Nizāmī Ganjavī (d. c. 1204) appears to have received an excellent education in several branches of science and learning that informs his portrayals of women, love, and relations between men and women. He brings a progressive and humanistic approach to the portrayals of his female characters such as Shīrīn, Laylī and those ladies in *Haft Paykar*. The term *sakhun* appears more often in his work than in those discussed above. This might be related to the fact that for him, *sakhun* is an art, which he repeatedly claims to possess. Often, and contrary to other poets discussed, Nizāmī uses the term to present the particularities of this art. He determines its boundaries and its different shapes. Poetry is a form of *sakhun* art and he of course considers poets to be creative artists with an almost divine status. *Makhzan al-Asrār* starts with a section entitled سخن آغاز “The Beginning of *sakhun*”, followed by another subsection entitled گفتار در فضیلت سخن “Discourse on the Virtue of *sakhun*”. These indicate the relation between his book of poetry and the word *sakhun*, leaving the possibility that to him they are synonyms. Indeed, he continues to equate the two in many other places. In the “Discourse on the Virtue of *sakhun*”, the term appears thirty-two times. He is not referring to the act of speech, or the act of conversation between two individuals, nor is he making a mystical reference to the holy text. Here, he talks about *sakhun* as the most essential element in existence:

حرف نخستین ز سخن در گرفت  
جلوت اول به سخن ساختند  
جان تن آزاد به گل در نداد  
چشم جهان را به سخن باز کرد  
این هم گفتند و سخن کم نبود  
ما سخنیم این طلال ایوان ماست

جنبش اول که قلم بر گرفت  
پرده خلوت چو بر انداختند  
تا سخن آوازه دل در نداد  
چون قلم آمد شدن آغاز کرد  
بی سخن آوازه عالم نبود  
در لغت عشق سخن جان ماست

بر پر مرغان سخن بسته اند  
 موی شکافی ز سخن نیز تر  
 هم سخنست این سخن اینجا بدار  
 وان دگران آندگرش خوانده اند  
 گه بنگار قلمش در کشند  
 وز قلم اقلیم گشاینده تر  
 پیش پرستنده مثنی خیال  
 مرده او نیم و بدو زنده ایم ...  
 حرف زیادست و زبان نیز هم ...  
 گوی چه به گفت سخن به سخن ...  
 نام نظامی بسخن تازه باد

(MA13, 1-14;18;22;27)

خط هر اندیشه که پیوسته اند  
 نیست درین کهنه نو خیز تر  
 اول اندیشه پسین بر شمار  
 تاجوران تاجورش خوانده اند  
 گه بنوای علمش بر کشند  
 او ز علم فتح نماینده تر  
 گر چه سخن خود ننماید جمال  
 ما که نظر بر سخن افکنده ایم  
 با سخن آنجا که بر آرد علم  
 کز سخن تازه و زر کهن  
 تا سخنست از سخن آوازه باد

*The first movement of the Pen produced the first letter of the Word.  
 When they drew back the curtain of non-existence, the first manifestation was the word.*

*Until the voice of the Heart spoke, the soul did not submit its free self to the clay.*

*When the Pen began to move, it opened the eyes of the world by means of the Word.*

*Without speech, the world has no voice; much has been spoken, but Word has not diminished.*

*In the language of love, speech is our soul. We are speech; these ruins are our palaces.*

*The line of every thought which is written, is bound to the wings of the birds of speech.*

*In this ever changing old world, there is no subtlety finer than speech.*

*The beginning of thought and the final reckoning is speech; remember this word.*

*Kings have thought it worthy of a crown, and others have called it by other names.*

*At times, the voice of speech is raised by banners, at other times it is written with the pen.*

*It wins more victories than banners, and it conquers more empires than the pen.*

*Though speech does not show its beauty to the worshippers of imagination,*

*We have looked upon speech, are its lovers, and by it we live. (...)*

*To such a degree that where the Word raises its banner, language and voice are both silent. (...)*

*Saying: "Tell me, which is better, the new speech, or the old gold?"*

*He answered: "The new speech." (...)*

*So long as the Word exists, may its fame continue; may the name of Nizami be kept fresh by his words.*<sup>74</sup>

In these verses, the poet asserts that the world begins and ends with *sakhun* (which could have been translated as “discourse”, “speech”, “poetry”, or “book”, in addition to “word”). Moreover, words have not only created the world but also the soul. The passage also indicates that the poet wants to establish a relationship between himself, his art, his world, his philosophy, and his career.

In the following subsection, entitled *برتری سخن منظوم از منثور* (“The Advantages of Poetic [linked or versified] *sakhun* over Prose [dispersed] *sakhun*”), Nizāmī provides a short comparison of the two forms, while elaborating on specifications of *sakhun*:

هست بر گوهریان گوهری	چونکه نسخه سخن سرسری
نکته که سنجیده و موزون بود	نکته نگهدار ببین چون بود
گنج دو عالم به سخن در کشند	قافیہ سنجان که سخن بر کشند
زیر زبان مرد سخن سنج راست	خاصه کلیدی که در گنج راست
بختوران را به سخن بخته کرد	آنکه ترازوی سخن سخته کرد
باز چه مانند به آن دیگران	بلبل عرشند سخن پروان

(MA14,1-6)

*Since the ordinary unrhymed speech is as a gem to the jewelers,  
Remember this subtle point, see what a weighed subtlety would be  
when it is measured.*

*Poets who raise their voices, gain the treasure of both worlds by  
their poetry.*

*Especially as the key of the treasury lies under the tongue of the  
poet.*

*He, who made the balance of speech, educated the fortunate ones  
by his words.*

*The poets are the nightingales of heaven; how do they resemble  
others?*<sup>75</sup>

Thus, *sakhun* is an art that can be expressed in poetic or prose form. Can then *sakhun* mean literature? If *sakhun* with قافیہ (*qāfiya* “rhyme”) means “poetry”, and قافیہ سنجان (*qāfiya-sanjān* “the appraisers of rhythm”) means “poets” (he uses the term شعر (*shi’r* “poetry”), several times in the same passage almost as a synonym for *sakhun*), and if سخن منثور *sakhun-i manthur* means “prose”, then what can *sakhun* mean, but “literature” which can be written in the form of poetry as well as prose? Is this then the word that has been missing from the Persian language to mean ادبیات? When did the words ادب *adabiyāt* and ادبیات *adeb* become prevalent? Was it when improvisation, i.e. the recitation of literature by authors or

rhapsodists became less practiced? At such a time, prose and poetry should have possessed approximately the same written value.

Nizāmī assigns the poet a high status in *Laylī u Majnūn* where he once again elaborates on his *sakhun* or literary discourse. He ranks his own verses with the *Qur'an*, a very ambitious aspiration for his time, not to mention that such a claim stands against the religious belief that the *Qur'an* could not and cannot be written or imitated by a human being. On the other hand, he praises the *Book* as a high form of *sakhun*, literature. Finally, he describes *sakhun* as an immortal art, and correctly so:

بنگر از هر چه آفرید خدای      تا ازو جز سخن چه ماند بجای  
یادگاری کز آدمیزاد است      سخن است آن دگر همه باد است

(HP6,7-8)

*Look round: of all that God has made/ What else, save discourse,  
does not fade?*

*The sole memorial of mankind/ is discourse; all the rest is wind.*<sup>76</sup>

چون سخن در سخن مسلسل گشت      بر زبان سخنوری بگذشت

(HP25,53)

*When words had followed words, speech passed/ to one most  
eloquent.*<sup>77</sup>

آنچه او هم نوشت و هم کهن است      سخن است در این سخن سخن است

(HP6,1)

*That which at once is new and old/ is discourse; let its tale be  
told.*<sup>78</sup>

And of course, he is aware of literature in other languages when he mentions Greek, Pahlavi, and Persian.

سخن را نشان جست بر رهبری      ز یونانی و پهلوی و دری

(IN8,6)

From the manner in which he talks about this art, it appears that he is aware of the great literary classics, whether religious or not, but also of the fact that he himself will become immortal through his *sakhun*. In a more worldly sense, he compares himself with kings in the *Sharaf Nāma* (The Book of Honor), considering himself a great poet who is imitated by others. In the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, he makes the wish:



تا سخن از سخن آوازه باد  
 نام نظامی به سخن تازه باد  
 (MA13,27)

*So long as sakhun exists – and may its eminence continue –; may the name of Nizāmī be kept alive by his words.*<sup>79</sup>

He uses the term in varied contexts, often presenting criteria against which the art of *sakhun* may be appraised:

سینه مکن گر گهر آری بدست  
 بهتر از آن جوی که در سینه هست ...  
 تا سخن از دست بلند آوری  
 به که سخن دیر بدست آوری  
 (MA14,47 and 49)

*If thou acquirest a pearl, do not wear it immediately/ seek a better one than thou hast (...) It is better to accept words slowly – so that thou mayest receive them from a sublime hand.*<sup>80</sup>

In *Khusraw u Shīrīn*, he writes:

سخن بسیار داری اندکی کن  
 یکی را صد مکن صد را یکی کن  
 (KS11,11)

*Shorten your work if you have plenty to say, don't make a hundred words out of one, reduce a hundred to one.*<sup>81</sup>

Here the poet is talking about the difficulty of creating original works, expressing ideas in succinct ways, knowing the old stories, being able to give the work some epigrammatic quality, and finally, of acquiring fame. In the same book, Nizāmī continues his deliberations on his art:

سخن باید که با معیار باشد  
 که بر گفتن خزان را بار باشد  
 Words must be written based on criteria/ without which, they are loads for donkeys.<sup>82</sup>

He returns to this topic in the *Iqbāl Nāma*:

سخن گفتن نرم فرز انگیست  
 درشتی نمودن ز دیوانگیست  
 Peaceful speech indicates wisdom, rough *sakhun*, madness.<sup>83</sup>

And he embodies the art in the story of Shīrīn:

حدیث خسرو و شیرین حکایت  
در آن صنعت سخن را داد دادی

(KS103,75-6)

شکر ریزان همی کرد از عنایت  
که گوهر بندی بنیادی نهادی

*He poured sugar generously as he began to narrate the story of Khusraw and Shīrīn / With the story, constructing a jewel foundation, and in it, making sakhun famous.*

In this section, Nizāmī praises Shīrīn, his favorite character, for her power of speech. Nizāmī's women are almost all portrayed favorably and similar qualities are attributed to Laylī.

در نظم سخن فصاحتی داشت  
چون خود همه بیت بکر می گفت

(LM19, 56-7)

لیلی که چنان ملاحتی داشت  
نا سفته دری و در همی سفت

*Laylī, with matchless elegance/ was also blessed with equal eloquence. With her fluency and savor refined/ she composed her fondest original verse.*<sup>84</sup>

In continuation to this passage, Nizāmī states that the two lovers exchange their feelings through poetry, for which he uses the word *sakhun*. He expresses similar ideas in the same *mathnavī*, in the section on the occasion of the compilation of the book, saying that *sakhun* reigns high and art is scripted in the jewel box. He continues to refer to himself as the one capable of magic speech:

در درج هنر قلم کشیده ...  
جادو سخن جهان نظامی

(LM4,6 and 22)

بر اوج سخن علم کشیده  
کای محرم حلقه غلامی

In his description of Laylī, he writes that a message from court requested he compose a poem in memory of Majnūn; the composition had to be as unique as the character of Laylī. The king also mentioned in his message that he was a connoisseur of good writing. This is the section in which Nizāmī expresses his hesitation about composing the poem since the story did not provide much material for creativity:

رانی سخنی چو در مکنون  
بگری دو سه در سخن نشانی ...  
کابیات نواز کهن شناسم

(LM4,25-6 and 31)

خواهم که به یاد عشق مجنون  
چون لیلی بگر اگر توانی  
دانی که من سخن شناسم

The word *bikr* (“virgin” or “original”), not only refers to Laylī’s body, but also to the creativeness of her poems. In order to achieve this, one should be a literary expert and a savant of *sakhun*; just like Nizāmī who claims to be able to distinguish between old and new poetry, between repetitive and genuine poetry. Nevertheless, he continues to compose the poem and in a section on the complaints of those who are jealous of him, he writes that he is so perfect in the magic art of *sakhun* that he is nicknamed the Invisible, or Mysterious Mirror. He claims that his speech is like fire, the way it shines. If you were to lay a critical finger on it, your finger would burn.

در سحر سخن چنان تمام  
حرفم ز تیش چنان فرورد  
کاینه غیب گشت نامم ...  
کانگشت بر او نهی بسوزد

(LM8,6 and 9)

There is no doubt that Nizāmī mostly talks about the written word:

یاران سخن از لغت سرشتند  
ایشان لغتی دگر نوشتند

(LM11, 76)

*Friends created sakhun out of words [لغت] / they wrote a different word [language].*

بی قلم از پوست برون خوان تویی  
گوش سخارا ادب آموز کن  
بی سخن از مغز درون دان تویی  
شمع سخن را نفس افروز کن

(MA9,32 and 11,29)

*Without a pen, you read what is not written on parchment / without words you know the innermost thoughts of the mind.  
Bring discipline to generosity/ inspire the candle of speech.*

The word *qalam* (“pen”) and the verb *nivishtan* (“to write”) indicate the nature of the *sakhun* genre. That is, *sakhun* might be read aloud or recited, but it is always created by the might of the pen. The juxtaposition of *adab* and *sakhun* in the last line of this passage is also curious, as *adab* here does not mean “literature”. Indeed, the word *adab* appears in the *Makhzan al-Asrār* more than twenty-five times and not once does it refer to literature per se.

In the *Sharaf Nāma*, he presents and reemphasizes some of the principles, ideas, and theories that in his opinion shape the art of *sakhun*:

چو می کردم این داستان را بسیج  
بسی در شگفتی نمودن طواف  
سخن راست رو بود و راه پیچ پیچ ...  
عنان سخن را کشد در گزاف

ندارد نوی نامه های کهن  
 که باور توان کردنش در قیاس  
 چو نا باور افتد نماید دروغ

(SN10,16 and 82-5)

و گر بی شگفتی گزارى سخن  
 سخن را به اندازه ای دار پاس  
 سخن گر چه بر آرد فروغ

*When I was preparing this work (the Sharaf Nāma)/ speech was  
 straight-moving (fluent) but the road (of information) ambient. (...)  
 To circulate much about a wonderful matter/ Draws the rein of  
 speech into foolish talking.*

*And if thou should utter speech without some wonder (the subtlety  
 of verse)/ the old books (void of the imagery of verse) would have  
 no freshness.*

*Of speech, keep watch to this extent/ that in imagination one can  
 believe it.*

*Although speech (verse) produces (in the orator's opinion) the  
 splendor of the jewel/ When it is not believed it seems the lie.<sup>85</sup>*

Here, he believes that the art of *sakhun* requires a certain element of surprise by saying that the existence of a certain level of شگفتی (*shigifī* “wonder”, “surprise”) makes the work original. Judging by his writing, his portrayal of his characters, and the intricate stories of the *Haft Paykar*, one may conclude that شگفتی is something similar to the notion of the sublime. This makes sense, considering his advice that one should not remain in a sublime mode too long because that will give *sakhun* an element of exaggeration. He delves into this topic again in the *Iqbāl Nāma*, saying that it is not easy to be creative all the time, and that one needs to be versed in knowledge and prosody, in order to be at ease in the creation of *sakhun*.

کند تازه بپرایه های کهن ...  
 سروشی سرآینده یارگیر است ...  
 که نظم تهییش از سخن بس بود

(IN4,6;15 and 78)<sup>86</sup>

بدینگونه بر نو خطان سخن  
 دلی هرکرا کو سخن گستر است  
 سخن گفتن آسان بر آن کس بود

These passages, which represent a small portion of Nizāmī's writing on the theories of *sakhun*, indicate the importance of literary creativity to him. There is no limit to the themes and topics of Nizamian *sakhun*, which covers such diverse subjects as logic, philosophy, Islam and Islamic jurisprudence, Ash'ari doctrine, Zoroastrianism, culture, nation, love, women's portrayals, *kalam* (speculative theology), geometry, astronomy, geography, history, music, and architecture.<sup>87</sup> In his own words, in the *Iqbāl Nāma*, *sakhun* should indeed have different themes ranging from the divine to nature:

یکی از الهی گره باز کرد

(IN15,8)

یکی از طبیعت سخن ساز کرد

Knowing several languages enabled him to enrich his ideas and knowledge with the borrowings from foreign sources.<sup>88</sup> And, he often points out that to be knowledgeable in these fields is helpful in the creation of *sakhun*, helpful in the enrichment of rhetoric. This makes him a wordsmith. In his own words,

پراکنده از هر دری دانه ای  
بر آراستم چون صنم خانه ای  
(SN10,12)

*Having collected a grain (of information) from every door (of history)/ I adorned (the Sharaf-Nāma) like an idol-house.*<sup>89</sup>

This means that *sakhun* should contain ideas, new ideas, and that it is not all about form. Nevertheless, because of the significance of form, which he also discusses extensively, he offers another theory about the issue of the translation of *sakhun*. He treats *sakhun* as a literary art again when he brings up the question of translation. As a literary critic, he argues that poetry is hardly translatable at all.<sup>90</sup>

Speaking of form, Nizāmī believes that in the art of *sakhun*, as a genre, there is a distinction between form and content; a notion with which present-day literary critics would agree. By including all the above branches of knowledge, he has supposedly taken care of the content, but he also acknowledges the effort and work it takes to write good poetry by pointing out the issues of editing and proofreading.<sup>91</sup> In the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, he writes:

دست بر او مال که دستوریست	هر سخنی کز ادبش دوریست
گر منم آن حرف درو کش قلم	و آنچه نه از علم بر آرد علم
شهر به شهرش نفرستادمی	گر نه درو داد سخن دادی
جمله اطراف مرا زیر دست <sup>92</sup>	این طرفم کرد سخن پای بند

(MA40,10-13)

*Erase any word which lacks courtesy and eloquence/ because this is my wish.*

*Draw the pen through whatsoever raises its banner against knowledge/ even though it were myself.*

*If in it I have not done justice to speech/ I would not have it sent from city to city.*

*Eloquence has shackled me in this place, but all places are under my hand.*

He repeats this point in *Sharaf Nāma*:

سخن به که با صاحب تاج و تخت  
بگویند سخنه نگوینده سخت<sup>93</sup>

*Best, – that with lord of the crown and the throne, – speech –  
Weighed (soft) they should utter; hard, they should not utter.*

But the fact is that Nizāmī makes manifest this idea about literary form and content as he creates his works. With regard to the issue of form in the *Haft Paykar*, Meisami writes that both the story’s character Bahrām, and Nizāmī’s reader learn about the nature of the human design through the medium of “discourse – specifically, structured discourse.” She refers to Nizāmī’s verses where he “calls attention to the importance of his poem’s design,” observing that “design is a recurrent motif throughout the poem, reiterated in the references to building (the palace of Khavarnaq and of the Seven Domes, ultimately transformed into fire-temples (51: 17-52: 10), exemplifying building of this world and building for the next) and to astrology and astronomy, and expressed in terms of number and geometry. Design and number are, indeed, the principles upon which the poem is based.”<sup>94</sup> Khaleghi-Motlagh also emphasizes the importance of form in Nizāmī’s work, noting that his art is not limited to discursive and conceptual design. It includes the creation of the desired structure for his stories.<sup>95</sup> A prime example of such artistic effort, as Ghanoonparvar points out, is the “Story of the Black Dome” in *Haft Paykar*, where Nizāmī presents a very complex design for his poem.<sup>96</sup> His aesthetic games are not limited to his preoccupation with form but are demonstrated in verses as well. The following lines exemplify his artistic ability in that regard:

سخت و ران را به سخن بخته کرد<sup>97</sup>                      آنچه ترازوی سخن سخته کرد

(MA14,5)

*He who weighs the scale of words / Makes the hard workers harder  
with words.*

He skillfully conveys several meanings with only one word. Because he does not place any dots on the first letters of [-]akhtvarān and [-]akhta, these words can be read in eight different ways. Thus, the verse implies that a man of speech can characterize someone as good or bad just by changing a dot. He also often uses words with more than one possible meaning to create multiple readings. Nadirpur aptly states, “Nizami throws his arrows to the neighboring meanings of words instead of targeting the most direct meaning.”<sup>98</sup> I believe this is not aphasia or a shortcoming in the poet’s work. It is a deliberate, creative aspect of his work. Nizāmī does all of this in the name of *sakhun*. This passion for *sakhun*, for words, this adroitness in rhetoric runs through his diverse poetic utterances like an ornamental chain, connecting them all together inter-textually and stylistically.

Such an understanding of the word *sakhun* is consistent with Nizāmī's many compound and derivative forms of the word. In addition to the plural *sakhun-hā*, such forms include *sakhundān* or *sakhunvar* (سخن *sakhun-var* سخنور *sakhun-dān*), meaning a person who demonstrates an oratorical, eloquent, and poetic manner when writing or speaking. Other compound words with similar meanings also appear, such as:

سخن آفرین، سخن پرور، سخنران روان، سخن شناس، سخن گستر، و سخن سنج

This creativity points to an eloquent rhetorician who knows the value of words, an excellent writer, or orator who has made a career of this art. Can we translate some of these words into contemporary Persian terminology as follows?

سخن دان = ادیب؛ سخنور = شاعر؛ سخن پرور = ادب پرور؛ سخن شناس = ادب شناس؛  
سخن گستر = شاعر

If so, then each of these words refers to the terms “poet”, “writer”, or “creative writer”. In addition, there are a great number of verbs compounded with *sakhun*, from the simple سخن گفتن *sakhun guftan* to the complex سخن ساختن *maghz-i sukhan sākhtan*. The following cases are from the *Makhzan al-Asrār* alone:

سخن آفریدن، سخن آغاز کردن، سخن آرایبی کردن، سخن آمیختن، سخن دانستن، سخن افکندن، سخن دارا بودن، سخن داشتن، سخن باز کردن، سخن بخته کردن، سخن افشاندن، سخن بر کشیدن، سخن بستن، سخن پروراندن، سخن پیش بردن، سخن پیش داشتن، سخن تازه کردن، سخن خواندن، سخن خوردن، سخن دادن، سخن دانستن، سخن در کشیدن، سخن بر آمدن، سخن در گرفتن، سخن آرایبی کردن، سخن آوازه کردن، سخن راندن، سخن رستن، سخن زدن، سخن ساختن، سخن سختن، سخن کردن، سخن واگشادن، سخن بدست آوردن

Can we translate these verbs to contemporary Persian as well?

سخن خواندن = شعر خواندن؛ سخن آرایبی کردن = قافیه پردازی کردن؛ سخن آفریدن = خلق ادبیات؛ سخن آرایبی کردن = شعر سرودن

If so, their meanings refer to creative and poetic writing. In any case, by the virtue of the above verbs, we have ascertained that *sakhun* is certainly not simply *harf* or “parole”. If it were, there would be no need for so many compound verbs.

Finally, like many other poets, Nizāmī mentions the word *sakhun* when he praises his own work. Contrary to the belief that for Nizāmī the art is a purely religious matter,<sup>99</sup> these flattering references show that he looks at his art of *sakhun* as a means of achieving prosperity, a means of living, and a life challenge. In his *Dīvān*, he states:

به سخن گنج سعادت به کف آر که سخن      کیمیاست که بر سنگ نهی زر گردد<sup>100</sup>

*Through words gain the treasure of happiness because they/ are al-  
chemy able to turn rocks to gold”*

In *Khusraw u Shīrīn* he writes:

سخن پولادین کن چون سکندر  
بدین سکه درم را سکه می بر<sup>101</sup>  
(KS11,7)

*Make your words as strong as steel just like Alexander/ I did so,  
and through such coinage, I gained coins.*

In the *Sharaf Nāma*, he writes:

چو هاروت و زهره به افسونگری ... کز آن گفتن آوازه گردد بلند ... سخن را منم در جهان یادگار ... بر آن گل ز من ناله چون بلبلی ... به سختی توان زد از راه فکر نه هر کس سزای سخن گفتن است ... که آراست روی سخن چون عروس بسی گفتنیهای نا گفته ماند ... زبان بر گشادم به در دری مگر در سخن نو کنم نامه ای	دلیم با زبان در سخن پروری سخن گفتن آنگه بود سودمند ز چندین سخن گو سخن یاد دار گه از هر سخن بر تراشم گلی بدین دل فریبی سخن های بکر سخن گفتن بکر جان سفتن است سخنگوی پیشینه دانای طوس در آن نامه کان گوهر سفته راند چو در من گرفت آن نصیحت گری نهادم ز هر شیوه هنگامه ای
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(SN5,25; SN7,8; SN7,29; SN7,63; SN7,91-2; SN7,118-9; SN8,38-9)

*My hearth engaged with the tongue, in word-cherishing/ like (the  
angel) Harut and (the woman) Zuhra, in sorcery. (...)*

*It is profitable to utter speech, at that time/ when, from the uttering  
of it, reputation becomes lofty. (...)*

*Of so many eloquent ones (ancient poets)—remember (this my)  
speech/ I am the remembrancer of (their) speech in the world. (...)*

*Save that, with speech, I should chaunt the rose (utter a modulated  
melody)/ should express, over that rose, a (joyous) cry like a night-  
ingale. (...)*

*Virgin (lustrous) words with this heart-enchantingness/ One can  
only with difficulty bring forth by the path of thought.*

*To utter virgin (lustrous) words is to pierce the soul/ Not everyone  
is fit to utter (virgin) speech. (...)*

*The former poet, the sage of Tūs (Firdawsī),/ who (with verse)  
adorned the face of speech, like the bride. (...)*

*In that book (the Shāh Nāma) in which he urged pierced jewels  
(previously uttered subtleties of verse)/ fit to be uttered (of  
Sikandar), much that he left un-uttered. (...)*



*When this counseling took hold on (affected) me,/ I opened my tongue with a pearl of the Dari language.  
I established a great crowd of every subtlety (of verse),/ perhaps, in speech, I may make a new book.<sup>102</sup>*

And, he advocates valuing one's work:

چون سخنت شهید شد ارزان مکن  
شاهد سخن را مگس افشان مکن  
(MA14,38)

*Since thy poetry is as sweet as honey, do not cheapen it; do not let flies contaminate the sweetness of thy poetry.*

Finally, he ends the *Sharaf Nāma* and the *Iqbāl Nāma* by saying:

مرا تا بدینجا سر آید (مد) سخن  
گر اقبال شه باشدم دستگیر  
نظامی که خود را غلام تو کرد  
تو دانی دگر هر چه خواهی بکن ...  
سخن زود گردد گزارش پذیر ...  
سخن را گزارش بنام تو کرد  
(IN41,47; SN62,50; SN63,30)

*Here, I bring my discourse to end/ You know what to do, do what you want.*

*... If the king bestows upon me / My works will be accepted soon.  
Nizāmī who made himself your servant/ Coined his work in your name.*

Without these references in the context of his career, his *sakhun* discourse would have not been complete. Through them, he further emphasizes and theorizes the art of book writing, the question of publishing, the challenges of creating a long-lasting work, and the sublime.

It should also be mentioned that while Nizāmī in his conceptualization of *sakhun* might be considered as an anomaly, the proximity of the meanings of *sakhun* and literature is not foreign to the Persian literary tradition. This notion used by Nizāmī is only unique in the sense that it becomes a constitutive element in his work. Others have occasionally come close to such understanding of the word. Firdawsī for example, as discussed earlier, writes in the beginning of the *Shāh Nāma* that whatever he is about to write has already been uttered by others who have entered the garden of knowledge.

سخن هر چه گویم همه گفته اند  
برو باغ دانش همه رفته اند<sup>103</sup>

Classical authors of literary criticism also discussed this notion of *sakhun*. For example, the eleventh-century author Muhammad ibn Umar al-

Radūyānī talks about the interpretation of eloquence and he offers a notion of the proper structure of *sakhun*, which to him too means poetry and literary prose.<sup>104</sup> For some of these authors, the issue has additional significance as they relate it to the Islamic tradition of knowledge. In the *Qur'an*, for example, on many occasions both knowledge and speech are revered.

To be sure, Nizāmī's description of *sakhun* complies with the description of Nizāmī Arūzī's definition of the art of poetry in which the poet arranges "*imaginary propositions, and adapts the deductions*" and the artist "*must be of tender temperament, profound in thought, sound in genius, clear of vision, and quick of insight. He must be well versed in many diverse sciences, and quick to extract what is best from his environment; for poetry is of advantage in every science, so is every science of advantage in poetry.*" About the notion of the social qualities of a poet, Arūzī continues: "*And the poet must be of pleasing conversation in social gatherings, of cheerful countenance on festive occasions; and his verse must have attained to such a level that it is written on the page of Time and celebrated on the lips and tongues of the noble, and be such that they transcribe it in books and recite it in cities.*"

Nizāmī Ganjavī's description of *sakhun* also complies with Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī's four conditions for the art of poetry: "*Now it should be kept in mind that a poet who fulfils four conditions will be regarded as an absolute master by the far-sighted. First, he should implant the banner of poetry in such a manner that its magnificence impresses others. Second, having the essence of what is important, the style of his verse should be sweet and simple like the (ancient) poets and not like the preachers and Sufis. Third, the components of his writing should be free of errors. Fourth, like the stitcher of leather, he should not prepare a gown of a thousand patches with the rags of (different) people*".<sup>105</sup>

All this explains why, of Nizāmī's approximately thirty-thousand verses, more than two thousand five-hundred deal with issues of language, aesthetics, and rhetoric, representing his effort to explain and elaborate on the concept of *sakhun*. Furthermore, these dealings are expressed in passages and not in sporadic single verses. Contrary to examples from other poets where references to *sakhun* are limited to a verse or two, in Nizāmī, the deliberations on the topic can span a dozen consecutive verses.

This conceptualization of *sakhun* helps us understand how in Nizāmī's work all philosophical as well as religious issues are framed in the language for the sake of the superior goal of creativity. Existence, religious beliefs, holy books, Greek philosophy, and all branches of science are means through which Nizāmī practices his artistic language, and his understanding of the art and the world, and his cherished art of *sakhun*. He is, in a sense, a philologist, in its broad meaning, rather than, as many traditional analyses have portrayed him, a philosopher or even a theologian. That is why, in order to understand Nizamian *sakhun*, one hardly needs outside

referent. His poetic discourse is, in that regard, to a great extent, self-sufficient as he is constructing a notion the subject of which is itself. No other poet of the classical period has ever engaged so extensively in the explanation of the process of *sakhun* creation, *sakhun* structures, *sakhun* forms, and the epitome of *sakhun* thoughts, as has Nizāmī, the wordsmith.

## Notes

- 1 For the translation of poems and passages, when accessible, I have used existing translations and provided the bibliographical information. Some of these I have adapted. For those poems and passages for which I could not find published translations, I present my own literal renditions.
- 2 The Pahlavi pronunciation of the word is *sukhvan*. It was also pronounced as *sakhan*, or in Pahlavi, as *sukhvan* or *sakhvan* (سخون) (See Dihkhudā (1372-73)).
- 3 Talattof (2000).
- 4 Ibidem.
- 5 This approach might of course be different from those who cast a descriptive light on the poets' works. For example, Meisami (1989) aptly acknowledges the importance of *sukhan* in Nizāmī's work. She points to the poet's reference to *sukhan* discourse as a "flawless soul," one that holds "the key to unseen treasure."
- 6 Dabashi (1992).
- 7 Meskub (2004).
- 8 Like other terminology, the word *sakhun* also has additional connotations in Sufi thought. It is safe to assume that when a devout Sufi uses the word in a certain context, he might be referring to God's words.
- 9 See Rypka (1968) 235.
- 10 I collected these figures and verses during my graduate studies. Since then, electronic versions of Persian poetry (both on CD ROMs and online versions) have made keyword search much faster. However, results from such searches differ and I am hesitant to include here my findings on the exact numbers. Generally speaking, other poets in whose work the word *sakhun* appears frequently are: Firdawsī: 843; Nasīr Khusraw: 413; Awhadī Maraghī'ī: 322; 'Attār: 238; Khāqānī: 189; Anvarī: 184; Vahshī: 157; Jāmī: 145; Dihlavī: 115; Sanā'ī: 144; Kāshānī: 141; Khwāju Kirmānī: 106. According to these approximate calculations, the combined works of Rūmī, Nizāmī, Sa'dī, and Hāfiz contain more than one thousand four hundred occurrences of the term.
- 11 Rumi (1996) 378.
- 12 Rumi (1996) 111.
- 13 Rumi (1987) 117.
- 14 Rumi (1987) 153.
- 15 Rumi (1996) 317.
- 16 Rumi (1996) 324.
- 17 Rumi (1996) 590.
- 18 Rumi (1996) 548.
- 19 Rumi (1996) 624.
- 20 Rumi-Wilson (1976) I, 207; Rumi (1987) 332.
- 21 Rumi (1996) 727.
- 22 Rumi (1987) 671.
- 23 Rumi (1996) 126.
- 24 Rumi (1996) 90 and 142.
- 25 Rumi (1996) 871.
- 26 Rumi (1996) 1147.

- 27 Rumi-Nicholson (1898) 75.
- 28 Rumi (1996) 638; Rumi-Nicholson (1898) 129.
- 29 Rumi (1996) 378. The longer passage attributes *sakhun* to God and yet it is the medium through which God can be described.
- 30 Rumi (1996) *Ruba'iyat*, 13.
- 31 Rumi (1987) *Daftār* 1.
- 32 Rumi (1996) 350 and *Ruba'iyat* 7.
- 33 Rumi (1996) 956.
- 34 Based on Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 42; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 46.
- 35 Based on Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 8.
- 36 Based on Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 129; Sa'di-Yusofi (1986) 67.
- 37 Based on Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 325; Sa'di-Forughi (1986) 121.
- 38 Based on Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 42 and Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 178-9; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 154.
- 39 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 43 and 177; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 62.
- 40 Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 34.
- 41 Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 43; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 46.
- 42 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 150; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 134.
- 43 Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 294; Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 179; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 149 and 154.
- 44 Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 49; Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 36; Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 254 and 257; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 49, 57, 132, 133.
- 45 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 153; Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 516; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 136, 162.
- 46 Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 70; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 52 and 162.
- 47 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 122; 134; 135; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 115; 123; 124.
- 48 Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 124.
- 49 Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 330; 158; 464; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 76.
- 50 Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 331; Sa'di-Forughi (1986) 124.
- 51 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 184; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 157.
- 52 Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) *Ghazaliyat*, 87.
- 53 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 98; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 185.
- 54 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 100; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 188.
- 55 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 107; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 198.
- 56 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 118; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 219.
- 57 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 143; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 507.
- 58 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 266; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 263.
- 59 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 147; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 269.
- 60 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 460; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 904.
- 61 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 43; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 85.
- 62 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 103; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 193.
- 63 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 381; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 734.
- 64 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 415; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 811.
- 65 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 212; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 398.
- 66 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 32; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 59.
- 67 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 191; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 358.
- 68 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 287; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 545.
- 69 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 528; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 1035.
- 70 More than four hundred times.
- 71 Rypka (1968) 189.
- 72 Nizāmī's *Iskandar Nāma* is essential in the study of Platonic and Aristotelian influence. See Arbery (1958) 126: "One of the chief topics is the role of philosopher-minister assigned to Aristotle; in treating this motive Nizāmī underlines, as throughout his writings, the need of the just ruler for sound advisers. This was a point to be made again and again by Persian poets, successors to Plato; we are also reminded of the part played in the royal

circle by the vizier, and the control of imperial patronage that he exercised, so that no poet aspiring to the ruler's favour dared neglect to win the sympathy of his chosen minister."

73 These examples include: It is "parole, or *harf*" that requires an audience:

ناجسته به آن چیز که او با تو نماند  
مرد هشیار چه سخن گوید  
ز نادان سخن که نیست صواب

In terms of its religious connotation being God's word, he writes,

سخن ز جمله حیوان به ما رسید، چنانک  
سخن نهان ز ستوران به ما رسید، چو وحی

In that sense, it can perform miracles,

زنده به سخن باید گشتنت از یراک  
گر به فسون زنده کرد مرده مسیحا

And similarly to Sa'di, he too believes that,

آن به که نگوئی چو ندانی سخن ایراک  
ناگفته سخن به بود از گفته رسوا

It can provide an example, a lesson as where he writes,

من این سخن که بگفتم تو را نکومثل است  
چه دهی پند و چه گوئی سخن حکمت و علم  
مثل بسنده بود هوشیار مردان را  
این خران را که چو خر یکسره از پند کردند؟

Perhaps the best simile he ever uses to describe his notion of *sakhun* is where he writes,

جان تو درختی است خرد بار و سخن برگ  
مر شاخ خرد را سخن حکمت برگ است  
وین تیره جسد لیف درشت و خس و خار است  
دریای سخن را سخن پند بخار است  
بشکن به سر بی خردان در به سخن جهل  
شاهی است خرد سخن برو برگ  
زیرا که سخن آب خوش و جهل خمار است  
تخمی است خرد سخن ازو بر

74 Nizami-Darab (1945) 120-2; Nizami-Sarvatyan (1984) 78.

75 Nizami-Darab (1945) 122-3.

76 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 23.

77 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 100.

78 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 22.

79 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1984) 80.

80 Nizami-Darab (1945) 125-6; Nizami-Sarvatyan (1984) 84.

81 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 141.

82 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 332.

83 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 1259.

84 Nizami-Atkinson (1915) vii.

85 Nizami-Clarke (1881) 111 and 123-4.

86 with an alternative reading in Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372).

87 See van Ruymbeke (2000) and Khazrai (2000).

88 He knew Persian, Arabic, Azari, and very likely Pahlavi.

89 Nizami-Clarke (1881) 110.

90 He writes:

لغت همه علمی چو از آن نمت بگردد  
نمتی که شعر دارد چو از آن زبان بگردد  
صلب دگر ببوشد به سیاق معانی  
چه نوشتن آید از وی چه رسد به ترجمانی

91 Occasionally, however, he denies he is concerned with any of them at all: "I know nothing of meaning nor am I aware of form / for meaning and form have left my heart and my eyes."

خبر از معانی و آگاهی از صورت نیست  
که رفت از دل و دیده معانی و صورت  
(Ibid., 201)

92 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 117.

- 93 Nizami-Clarke (1881) 292; Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 934.  
94 Nizami-Meisami (1995) xxv.  
95 Khaleghi Motlagh (1991).  
96 Ghanoonparvar (1991).  
97 Nizami-Sarvatiyan (1984) 81.  
98 Nadirpur (1991).  
99 See Jafari (1991) and Sarvatiyan (1989) 37, 40.  
100 Nizami (1983) 226.  
101 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) KS11, 7, with alternative reading in Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372).  
102 Nizami-Clarke (1881) 48; 64; 67; 72; 76; 77; 81 and 88-9.  
103 Firdawsī, Khaleghi-Motlagh (1987-2005).  
104 Raduyani (1960) 201-12.  
105 Ansari (1975) 171.

## 12 Teucros in Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar*

Ziva Vesel

The Greek author Teucros (first century BC/ first century AD)<sup>1</sup> whose work reached us in fragmentary state, was known in the Islamic world under the name of Tīnkarūs (طینکروس) or Tīnkālūs (طینکلوس)/Tānkālūshā (Persian: تنگلوشا Tangalūshā). He was considered in the Islamic literature, as for instance in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, among others, as the legendary guardian of planets' temples in Babylon<sup>2</sup>.

Nizāmī refers twice to Tangalūshā in his *Haft Paykar*, as was already noticed by Humāyūn-Farrukh in his edition of the Persian translation of the text attributed to Teucros:<sup>3</sup> first when he describes the dome of the Palace of Khavarnaq as a cosmic cupola<sup>4</sup>, where one can see “*a multitude of [hundred thousand(s)] imaginary figures by Tangalūshā*”:

نه فلک را به گرد او گرواز	فلکی پای گرد کرده به ناز
تنگلوشای صد هزار خیال	قطبی از پیکر جنوب و شمال

(HP9,28-9)

He refers to Tangalūshā for a second time, towards the end of the poem, in order to illustrate metaphorically the superiority of man's power compared to that of the sky. This article will not consider this second occurrence of Tangalūshā in the *Haft Paykar* since it concerns a different issue altogether.<sup>5</sup>

To come back to the first mention of Teucros, which is linked to the images of the cosmic cupola in the Palace of Khavarnaq [i.e. the representation of the sky inside the dome], the question which arises in this context is the following: what did the images linked to Teucros and referred to by Nizāmī represent? There could be at least three possibilities, known through texts which are still extant today. On the one hand, these images could be the pictorial description of either the thirty-six decans, or the three hundred and sixty degrees of the ecliptic, both known in the astronomy and astrology of the Islamic world. On the other hand, they could also be a reminiscence of archaic pictorial traditions collected in a book attributed to Teucros and apparently known in Nizāmī's time, containing isolated paintings obviously used for the fabrication of talismans.<sup>6</sup>

The link between Teucros and the question of decans is authentic. The representation of thirty-six decans situated near the ecliptic (a system of

Egyptian origin)<sup>7</sup> and of the stars that rise within each decan exists in Teucros's Greek work, Παράνατελλοντα τοις δεκανοις.<sup>8</sup> His text was translated into Middle Persian<sup>9</sup> and from Middle Persian into Arabic. The complete description of the decans (واجه *vajh*, pl. *vujūh*) in Arabic can be found in *Kitāb al-Madkhal al-kabīr ilā 'ilm ahkām al-nujūm* by Abū Ma'shar (d. 272H/886),<sup>10</sup> as well as in Ibn Hibintā's (d. ca. 317H/929) *Kitāb al-Mughnī fī ahkām al-nujūm*.<sup>11</sup> Both authors appear to refer roughly to the same Arabic translation of the original text by Teucros. Among three different series of decans described in these two Arabic works [one decan corresponds to ten degrees of a Zodiacal sign], the first series named "Persian-Babylonian-Egyptian" (also known as *Sphaera Barbarica*)<sup>12</sup>, is explicitly linked to Teucros and contains mainly imaginary figures which originally represented Egyptian gods. But Abū Ma'shar's and Ibn Hibintā's works only give a verbal description of the decans and we do not possess any painting representing Teucros's decans in the Islamic world.

The only representation of decans known in the East, which comes close to Abū Ma'shar's description, figures on a Central-Asian painting (of Indian tradition) on a scroll datable to the eighth or ninth century AD. This painting is apparently based on a common Iranian prototype, as must have been the one which Abū Ma'shar used for his description (however, Teucros's sphere is not detailed on it).<sup>13</sup> In this context, it is important to underline that the decans which appear in the illustrated fourteenth- and fifteenth-century copies of Abū Ma'shar's *Kitāb al-Mawālīd* (Book of Nativities), do not represent the figures of genuine Teucros decans but only of their decan-lords [planets that govern each decan].<sup>14</sup> It should also be noted that the Arabic text describing Teucros's decans was apparently never translated into Persian.

The second literary genre attributed to Teucros in the Islamic world, the description of three-hundred-and-sixty degrees of the ecliptic/zodiacal belt (*suwar-i daraj-i falak* صور درج فلک, pl. درجات), is more problematic since it is probably apocryphal. Ullmann considers this Arabic text<sup>15</sup> as a tenth-century forgery pertaining to Nabatean literature.<sup>16</sup> Fahd, on the other hand, suggests we ought to view it in a more diachronic manner and give an earlier date for this apocryphal text attributed to Teucros.<sup>17</sup> We do not know of any extant authentic Greek text by Teucros on degrees. It is generally considered that the representation of single degrees originated from the decans of *Sphaera Barbarica*. A recent study should provide us with more information on the origin and evolution of degrees in general.<sup>18</sup> Without raising this complex problem, we will simply list here different series of degrees as known in the Islamic world. Beside this tenth-century Arabic copy of the text on "degrees by Teucros," we possess a late illustrated copy of its Persian translation, dated 1074H/1663-4, probably made for the private library of Shāh 'Abbās II.<sup>19</sup> This Persian version might be based on a supposed twelfth-century Persian translation of the Arabic text,



now lost. This then, is the only illustrated manuscript in the Islamic world that is explicitly linked to Tangalūshā and consequently it is a true rarity. The images corresponding to each zodiacal degree – three hundred and sixty in total – are first described verbally in the text, followed by their pictorial representation [see ill. 1 + 2 ] and also by the astrological specification of the character of the person born under that degree. Interestingly, the technical introduction to the book develops the theory of the influence of celestial bodies and explains how the treatise should be used for talismanic purposes.<sup>20</sup>

Before discussing the third possible text linked to Teucros, let us examine whether Nizāmī might have been thinking about either decans or degrees, when referring to Tangalūshā in the *Haft Paykar* passage cited above. Part of the answer could be the fact that he mentions the images in regard to the North and the South. This seems to point to the description of decans' position on the sphere of the Fixed Stars, position which is variable and has a complicated evolution.<sup>21</sup> (The degrees, being closely linked to the zodiacal belt, would probably not need to be defined in this way.) Nevertheless, what is problematic in this interpretation is that in Nizāmī's time the representation of 'genuine' decans (as described by Teucros) seems no longer to have been known in the Islamic world, contrary to what was the case in the Latin West.<sup>22</sup> Bīrūnī (d. ca. 442H/1050) discusses in detail in his *Taḥḥīm* (composed in Arabic in 1029), under "decans/faces (*vujūh*)" only decan-lords and Indian decans (*dārījān* داریجان). He treats the problem of genuine decans only briefly – and in a negative manner – under "figures (*suwar*)".<sup>23</sup> These genuine decans are not mentioned in *Rawḍhat al-munajjimīn* (The Garden of Astrologers), written between 466H/1073 and 474H/1081 by Shahmardān,<sup>24</sup> neither in two astrological poems, both entitled *Madkhal-i manzūm* because, he says, their meaning/significance was not known in his time anymore. (The Versified Introduction [to Astrology]): the first, dated 616H/1219-20, is written by Khujandī,<sup>25</sup> and the second is a later variant, attributed to Nasīr al-dīn Tūsī (d. 672H/1274).<sup>26</sup> To all appearances then, the genuine Teucros decans were no longer relevant from a scientific point of view in Nizāmī's time. They were also forgotten in the realm of general culture, in spite of the fact that their complete description was available in Abū Ma'shar's *Madhkal* and Ibn Hibintā's *Mughnī*. This might have been due to the fact that their Arabic text – as far as we may judge – was never translated into Persian, contrary to the literature concerning degrees.

Is Nizāmī's poem then referring to the degrees rather than to the decans? Besides Teucros's tradition, several other 'series' of degrees were known in the Islamic world, both in Arabic and in Persian translation. There were amongst others the traditions attributed to Zoroaster,<sup>27</sup> the Indian one (attributed to Tomtom Hendī),<sup>28</sup> and another "Babylonian" one (attributed to Abūdhātīs Bābilī this time, not to Teucros).<sup>29</sup> Fakhr al-dīn Rāzī (d. 606H/

1210) extensively described the latter two series in his Arabic work on Sabean beliefs and practices, *al-Sirr al-maktūm fī mukhātabāt al-nujūm*, written between 1179 and 1210.<sup>30</sup> There were probably more opportunities for Nizāmī to come across an illustrated copy of degrees than an illustrated copy of genuine decans (always supposing the latter ever existed, since no such copy is extant today). Concerning degrees, we possess, beside the already mentioned copy of Teucros's degrees in the Rezā Abbāsī Museum in Tehran (ills. 1 and 2), two additional illustrated Persian copies on degrees in the tradition of Tomtom Hendi, made in India.<sup>31</sup> Even though all three extant Persian copies are late, they might nevertheless indicate that in Nizāmī's time illustrated copies on degrees could have been more frequent than copies of genuine decans (of which we have neither various textual traditions, neither Persian translation from the Arabic, nor extant illustrations, as pointed out above).

Another argument favoring a reference to degrees in Nizāmī's poem is the fact that pre-Islamic Iran was familiar with the sexagesimal system and had a year of three hundred and sixty days.<sup>32</sup> Also, as already pointed out, a Persian translation of the Arabic version of Teucros's "pictorial" degrees must have probably existed precisely in the twelfth century (as inferred by the editor, Humāyūn-Farrukh). On the other hand it must be underlined that even if degrees are mentioned in Khujandī's and Tūsī's poems,<sup>33</sup> in this particular context they have nevertheless no connection with images.

The third possible explanation of Nizāmī's *bayt* on "Tangalūshā's imaginary images" would be a reference to the "illustrated book by Tangalūshā the Great" on talismanic figures, as mentioned by Fakhr al-dīn Rāzī in his *Sirr al-maktūm* in one of the sections on the making of talismans.<sup>34</sup> On the whole, Rāzī doesn't mention genuine Teucros decans in his description of the astronomical and astrological knowledge necessary for the practice of Sabean (Harranean) star-worship. As did Bīrūnī, Shahmardān, Khujandī and Tūsī, he briefly lists only various traditions of decans-lords, including Indian decans (*dārījān*).<sup>35</sup> In the chapter dedicated to degrees, he heavily insists on the precise descriptions of the different series of degrees known in his time, as already indicated above, but only mentions two additional series of degrees, those by Zoroaster and by Teucros, without describing them.<sup>36</sup> He briefly refers to Teucros again in the passage on the talismanic benefit derived from looking towards the Southern Pole and the star Suhayl (Canopus).<sup>37</sup> This contrasts with the long section on the fabrication of talismans,<sup>38</sup> where Rāzī quotes Teucros throughout. This tends to suggest that some aspects of the aforementioned Teucros's *Sphaera Barbarica* or Teucros's degrees of the zodiac might have survived in talismanic literature, as isolated figures. For instance Rāzī describes, for the making of a talisman, the figure of "a two-winged horse ...from the illustrated book by Teucros,"<sup>39</sup> which is precisely the figure present in the depiction of Teucros's degrees in the seventeenth-century

Persian copy (see ill. 2: the horse is depicted in the twenty-first degree of the sign of Capricornus).<sup>40</sup> Several other figures described in this section by Rāzī present similarities with the extant representations of Teucros's degrees in the above-mentioned Safavid copy, though these comparisons still need to be further studied in detail.

This passage of *al-Sirr* furthermore mentions details on the use of pigments and other materials in the fabrication of paper talismans when copying Teucros's figures. Altogether, this talismanic section somehow reflects the fame of the Teucros's legendary illustrated book, sometimes compared to Mānī's *Artang*.<sup>41</sup> Judging from his reference to Teucros in *al-Sirr*, Rāzī's knowledge is in fact limited to the talismanic field. As already mentioned, he wrote this work between 1179 and 1210, which is contemporary with Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar*, composed in 1197. Could this coincidence be sufficient to indicate that Nizāmī's reference to Teucros originated in talismanic literature alone? And thus, that the images on the cupola representing the sky would not be connected in Nizāmī's poem to the scientific literary genres of decans or degrees at all? The question remains open. At this stage, for the passage in *Haft Paykar*, we can suggest on the one hand the necessary detailed comparison between figures of Teucros's decans and degrees with figures in the purely talismanic book of Teucros as described in Rāzī's *al-Sirr*. On the other hand, we may also mention the comparison between the latter and figures in other known talismanic books, as for instance in *The Book of Images/Figures [Kitāb al-suwar al-kabīr]* by Zosimus (third/fourth century AD) containing a description of the constellations of the sky (which would more readily explain Nizāmī's reference to the poles).<sup>42</sup> The book was much appreciated by the author of the magical treatise *Ghayā al-hakīm* (mid-eleventh century AD) who indicates that constellations are highly significant for the interpretation of talismanic figures (*suwar*) – along with decans and degrees.<sup>43</sup> We may conjecture that in the course of time, various talismanic “books of images/figures/forms” of imaginary celestial origin were indifferently attributed to several authors – including Teucros.

Concerning Nizāmī's possible sources in general, it is important to remember that he apparently knew at least one of Abū Ma'shar's works, the *Kitāb al-Ulūf* (The Book of Thousand [Cycles]) which the poet mentions explicitly in the *Iqbāl Nāma*:

ابو کتاب اندر کفاب الوف

دگر گونه گوید جهان فیلسوف

(IN9,9)<sup>44</sup>

This work describes the theory of millenary cycles which determine world history, particularly political and religious events. As Pingree has shown, the explanation of world events depended on the cycles of astral conjunctions, namely of Saturn and Jupiter, of Sasanian origin, combined with the

concept of the “world year.”<sup>45</sup> Transmitted in particular by Abū Ma‘shar, and summarized among others by Sijzī,<sup>46</sup> the astrological history was used by the Abbasids to legitimate their power.<sup>47</sup> Interest for Abū Ma‘shar’s theory of cycles was pursued under Isma‘ilis (possibly in Alamūt),<sup>48</sup> and, as noticed in a recent study, lasted at least as late as the Safavid era.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, it is worth noting that Jalayirids ordered illustrated copies of Abū Ma‘shar’s works towards the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

It is evident that in the passage on the cosmic cupola, Nizāmī refers on purpose to an archaic system of representation of the sky – whether decans or degrees –, or to a famous illustrated book on talismanics. The reference to an ancient author like Teucros undoubtedly suited the poet better in order to characterise Bahrām Gūr’s pre-Islamic Iran, than would have done for instance a reference to the constellations in the Ptolemaic tradition as described in ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sūfī’s astronomical treatise *Suwar al-kawākib* (400H/1009-10).<sup>51</sup> As to the hypothesis of an illustrated Iranian pre-Islamic version of the text on ‘degrees by Tangalūshā,’ it still awaits additional evidence.<sup>52</sup>

In conclusion, it is interesting to remember that Nizāmī truly searched for noble and rare books in order to compose the *Haft Paykar*, as indeed he claims in his introduction to the *mathnavī*.<sup>53</sup>

که پراکنده بود گرد جهان                      باز جستم ز نامه های پنهان

(HP4,27)

This is confirmed by his reference to Teucros/Tangalūshā, a rare author, not only today, but already in Nizāmī’s time.

Ill.1 = Images of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth degree of the zodiacal sign of Leo

Ill.2 = Images of twentieth and twenty-first degree of the zodiacal sign of Capricornus

## Notes

- 1 Panaino (1998) 24; Pingree (1968) 11 n.2; Borissov (1935) 300-5; Sezgin (1979) VII 71-3; Ullmann (1972) 278-9.
- 2 Ibn al-Nadim (1393); Ibn al-Nadim (1970) II. However, Teucros “the Babylonian” stems from Babylon (i.e. Memphis) in Egypt (cf. Ullmann (1972).
- 3 Pseudo-Teucros (2537) 24; new edition: pseudo-Teucros (1383).
- 4 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 38; also Vesel (1995).
- 5 HP37,91; Nizami-Meisami (1995) 262.
- 6 We don’t take into account in this context the existence of treatises on alchemy attributed to Teucros; Monzavi (2000), 2894; also Monzavi (1348) 701.
- 7 For a brief survey: Parker (1970-80).
- 8 *Paranatellonta tois dekanois*. Festugière (1950) I, 114-8.
- 9 Panaino (1978); Nalino (1922).

- 10 Abu Ma'shar (1995-96) III, 6, 372 sqq.
- 11 Ibn Hibinta (1987) 2<sup>nd</sup> Part, 306 sqq.
- 12 The second series is Indian (described also in the Arabic work on magic, *Ghaya al-hakīm* of Pseudo-Majriti (1933), in chap. II, 2 and II, 11; see note 43 below), and the third is Greek.
- 13 Grenet (1997).
- 14 Carboni (1987); Caiozzo (2003) in particular ills. 9-20.
- 15 See for instance Leiden University Library MS Or. 891 (2), fols. 28v-69v.
- 16 Ullmann, (1972) 328-9.
- 17 Fahd (1971) in particular 989, n°3.
- 18 For example Hübner (1995). I thank Professor Paul Kunitzsch for the rich bibliographical information concerning publications on decans and degrees in general.
- 19 The manuscript is kept in the Rezā Abbāsī Museum in Tehran (MS n° 590, 26 x 15 cm). For the two editions of this Persian version see. n. 3.
- 20 Pseudo-Teucros (2537) 259-61; Pseudo-Teucros (1383) 3-6.
- 21 Parker (1970-80) n.7.
- 22 For a brief survey, Murdoch (1984) 254, ill. 230.
- 23 The difference between “decans/faces” (*vajh* pl. *vujūh*) and *darjān* is the order of appearance of ‘decan-lords’ (*arbāb-i vujūh*), i.e. planets governing each decan. Biruni-Wright (1934) 252-63, § 450 and Biruni-Homa'i (1367) 404, gives the following explanation of ‘genuine’ decans: “Concerning ‘figures’ (*Mā al-suwar*). The so-called ‘figures’ are in reality also the faces [*vajh* pl. *vujūh*], but called so [*suwar*] because the Greeks, Hindus and Babylonians associated with each face as it arose, the figure of a personage human or divine, and in the case of the Greeks, the faces were also associated with 48 constellations ascending at the same time [*paranatellonta*]. But this duplication of constellations is mentioned in connection with affairs, designs and undertakings which are peculiar to the country in question, and is used to obtain degrees with regard to these. We shall not undertake to give an account of it both to save space, and because it would be useless, as the astrological books we have are destitute of any instructions for using it.”
- 24 Shahmardan (1382), Index.
- 25 Published with the Persian text by Tangalūshā on degrees (see n. 3 above, Pseudo-Teucros (1383) 156-212), Khujandī's poem concerns subjects studied by astrological science (various divisions of the sky, interconnections of movements of celestial bodies, foretelling techniques like *ikhtiyārāt*, etc.), but it only mentions decan-lords and *dārjān* (188-9). The poem dates from the period of Mongol attacks on East Iranian cities.
- 26 Tusi (1380), 105; also quoted in Mosaffa' (1366), 825.
- 27 Ullmann (1972) 294-5; Pingree (1968) 22; we do not possess the series attributed to “Persians”, mentioned in (Abū Ma'shar's pupil) Shādān's *Mudhākārāt* (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris [BnF]: MS Ar. 6680), unless it is identical with Zoroaster's series (Raffaelli (2001) 36, n. 24).
- 28 Ullmann (1972) 298-9.
- 29 Ullmann (1972) 329, 420; this author is regularly mentioned in Persian medieval sources.
- 30 For the Arabic text, see for instance: BnF: MS Ar. 2645, fols. 123v-141v; for the Persian tr. (made for Iluttmish in 634H/1236): BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fols. 41r-62v.
- 31 Respectively: a) an illustrated copy made for Akbar (end of the sixteenth century) based on the Persian translation of *al-Sirr al-maktūm* [Schmitz (2006) 20-27; pl. 13-19]; b) an astrological compendium from the seventeenth or the eighteenth century [Tourkin (2003)].
- 32 Panaino (1990).
- 33 See notes 25 and 26 above.
- 34 Rāzī, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fols. 113r-133r; this talismanic section is followed by the chapter on ‘proprieties of substances’ (*khawāss*).

- 35 Razi, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Ar. 2645, fol. 117v; BnF: MS Suppl. Persan 384, fol. 48v. The Arabic and Persian versions of the text are roughly similar, as far as scientific content is concerned.
- 36 Rāzī, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fols. 41r-62v. For the knowledge of degrees in the Iranian world, see Vesel (forthcoming).
- 37 Rāzī, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fol. 103r. Teucros is credited of an independant treatise on magic, apparently extant only in Persian [Sezgin (1979) VII, 73] which unfortunately we could not consult.
- 38 See above, n. 35.
- 39 Rāzī, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fol. 113r.
- 40 Interestingly, the image of the horse in this passage is specific, in both verbal description and depiction, and iconographically different from the representation of ‘Salomon’s horse’ or the Pegasus constellation (*al-Faras al-a’zam*).
- 41 Pseudo-Teucros (2537), 26.
- 42 Ullmann (1972) 160-3.
- 43 Pseudo-Majriti (1933) 58 sqq. French transl. by V. Chébir, «le Livre du But du Sage...», Mémoire de Diplôme, Paris, EPHE-IV (dir. P.Lory), 1998, 55-58. I am grateful to Pierre Lory for having informed me of the existence of Chébir’s useful translation of this difficult text. This passage in the *Ghaya* gives some rare information on the talismanic usage of figures of constellations and of genuine decans; it does not specify the usage of figures of degrees, only their relationship with planets. For information on the talismanic use of figures of degrees, Rāzī’s *Sirr* is the best source.
- 44 I owe this reference to Mohsen Ashtiyani.
- 45 Pingree (1968) 21-22; for different theories concerning “the world/cosmic year”, see Panaino (1998) 161-79.
- 46 Pingree (1968) 21-3; Ullmann (1972) 294-5; Sezgin (1979) VII, 224-7.
- 47 Gutas (1998) in particular 45-52.
- 48 Pingree (1968) 25 (BnF: MS Ar. 5968).
- 49 Babayan (2002).
- 50 Carboni (1988); Carboni (1987) (see n. 14)
- 51 The numerous extant illustrated manuscripts of ‘Abd al-Rahman Sūfī’s *Kitāb suwar al-kawākib al-thābita*, either in Arabic original or in Persian translation, testify to its popularity in the Islamic world.
- 52 See the introduction by Homayun-Farrokh (Pseudo-Teucros (2537)) and by Reda-zade Malek (Pseudo-Teucros 1383) to their respective editions of the treatise (cf. n. 3).
- 53 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 11.

### 13 “Let Even a Cat Win your Heart!” Nizāmī on Animal and Man.

Renate Würsch<sup>1</sup>

The command to take even a cat into one’s heart is uttered by Nizāmī in his second *mathnavī*, *Khusraw u Shīrīn*. It appears in the introduction to the work, where the poet outlines the objective of the composition as a whole. Nizāmī touches here on the theme of love and refers to the poet Firdawsī as an earlier editor of the story of *Khusraw u Shīrīn*. Without mentioning the latter by name – he refers to him simply as “the wise one” (*hakīm*)<sup>2</sup> – he alludes to the exclusion of the love story in Firdawsī’s edition and proposes to rectify this omission in his own version. In contrast to the other narratives about the Sassanid ruler, Nizāmī’s will focus on Khusraw’s love story with Shīrīn, and avoid repeating material already known to his readers. Nizāmī feels himself particularly well-qualified for this task, for there is no characteristic (*shī‘ār*) that describes him better than that of love and he declares his refusal to compose any work except through love for the rest of his life.<sup>3</sup>

After this avowal he adds a number of assertions about the nature of love; he praises its cosmic power, and describes the globe as having no other *محراب* (*mīhrāb*) than this. Love transcends the boundaries of religion – it speaks of the Qibla as much as of Lāt (one of the goddesses of Arab paganism), its treasure chest is the Ka’ba and the wine barrel alike. Without the “earth of love” the world would have no water (the elixir of life itself). Love reveals itself in every aspect of the natural world; how, for example, could the magnet draw the iron longingly to itself, if not through its own love for the mineral? Nizāmī challenges his audience or reader to become the slave (*ghulām*) of love. The world is love; all else mere hypocrisy (*zarq-sāzī*) and the man who is empty of love is dead, even if he were to possess one hundred souls. It is in these mental parameters that Nizāmī places the following verses:

اگر خود گریه باشد دل درو بند  
از آن بهتر که با خود شیر باشی

مشو چون خر بخورد و خواب خرسند  
بعشق گریه گر خود چیر باشی

(KS12,8-9)

*Not like the donkey,<sup>4</sup> sated with eating and sleeping be! / If only a  
cat, let your heart be won by she!  
T'is better through love of a cat<sup>5</sup> strong to be / Than without love  
yourself<sup>6</sup> as a lion to see!*

What is the significance of the cat in these two verses? Or rather, what is the author attempting to convey through his reference to the cat here? Before answering this question, a brief overview of the characterisation of the cat in pre-modern Islamic cultural history should be permitted.<sup>7</sup>

It is often mentioned in Arabic and Persian sources that the cat eats her newborn young due to an excess of motherly love, as explained by Nizāmī elsewhere in the *Makhzan al-Asrār*.<sup>8</sup> This motif is already present in ancient Arabic animal descriptions and Sanā'ī, Nizāmī's predecessor, gives examples of its use in Persian poetry. The cat is also frequently portrayed as a thief, as can be seen in the works of the Ikhwān al-Safā',<sup>9</sup> of Sanā'ī,<sup>10</sup> and in the cosmological literature.<sup>11</sup> As such, the cat is not to be trusted and anyone who does so, should not be surprised at the damage incurred as a result. Such practical wisdom was popularly preserved in folk proverbs (based on the thieving nature of the cat), such as the Lebanese saying, *wakkel ʿl-'ott b-ʿl-lahme*, "to entrust the meat to the cat",<sup>12</sup> or the Egyptian proverb, *Massik elqutta muftāh elkerār*, "he let the cat take the key to the pantry".<sup>13</sup>

From the assumption that the cat is not to be trusted, there is only a small step to the more general ascription of a false and deceitful character. The tale of the cat who masqueraded as an ascetic in order to lull potential prey into a false sense of security is a prime literary example of this outlook. The best-known form of this motif appears in *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and is mentioned by Nizāmī in his forty masterful aphorisms relating to the tales of the Indian fable collection, where he uses an elegant play on words to describe how the cat obtained its daily bread (روزی *rūzī*) through fasting (روزه *rūza*).<sup>14</sup> The satirist 'Ubayd-i Zākānī (d. ca. 771/1369-70) also used in his *qasīda Mūsh u gurba* the motif of the pseudo-ascetic, with political implications.

This negative characterisation of the cat stands in contrast to its often quoted efficiency in combatting the mouse plague, where it is of invaluable assistance to man (this will be discussed in more detail shortly). It is not only for this reason that the cat was a cherished as well as a detested figure. According to al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868-69) it is women who are particularly fond of cats.<sup>15</sup> This author continues in more detail that the companionship, familiarity, intimacy and comfort of lying together and sleeping under one blanket that one finds with a cat is not found with a dog, or doves, or chickens, or indeed any other of the animals with which man shares his household (in short, with no other domestic animal). Women kiss cats on the mouth and rhapsodize about how sweet the cat's mouth smells. Their



coats are dyed (*yukhdabu*), they are decorated with earrings and other ear-jewellery, receive gifts and are the subject of much petting and pampering.<sup>16</sup> There is no reason to dismiss al-Jāhiz's account as mere literary fantasy with no basis in reality. According to an – admittedly questionable – *Hadīth* love of cats was even a matter of faith<sup>17</sup> and there are various other traditions which refer to the Prophet Muhammad's particular affection for cats.<sup>18</sup>

Cats were bought and sold for their usefulness as mouse catchers, most likely for a relatively low price on the markets.<sup>19</sup> One problem with the trade in cats appears to have been their tendency to attack the other household animals, especially birds. The cat dealers do not appear to have shied away from using subterfuge as part of their efforts to bring about a deal. Al-Jāhiz relates in another account, this time from an informant referred to as al-Sindī b. Shāhak that some cat dealers would stuff the cat into a wine casket, which they would then roll along the ground until the cat was half-stupefied by dizziness, before placing it in a bird cage. The pitiable state of the cat, which prevented it from causing any harm to the doves, would deceive the potential buyer who would only later discover his cat's true character.<sup>20</sup> Al-Jāhiz records that whilst on the way to visit a friend, he himself overheard an enraged woman venting her fury on a man with the words, "May the leader of armed men stand between you and I! You acted as a middleman when I was buying a cat and [you] claimed that it wouldn't go near the chickens, wouldn't take the top off the saucepans, wouldn't come close to the other animals, and you claimed you knew more about cats than anyone else around! And I followed your so-called expertise and gave you a *dāniq* for your services! And then, when I brought it home, it was a devil that I had with me, for my God, it caused havoc with the neighbours, after it was finished with us! We've been trying to catch it for five days; see, there it is, I've brought it back to you, now give me my *dāniq* back!"<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Qutayba relates the anecdote of a family who brought the man to whom they had given their daughter in marriage before a judge. To the question as to how he made his living, he had answered that he sold animals (*dawābb*); following the wedding however, it emerged that he was a cat dealer. Upon hearing this, the judge said, "Why didn't you ask, "What kind of animals do you sell?"<sup>22</sup> This tale is similar to another anecdote told by al-Jāhiz. Here the object of wrath is not the husband himself, but a bystander who had been asked about the future bridegroom's profession and who justifies himself with the words "I didn't lie – the cat is an animal!"<sup>23</sup> It can be inferred from such tales that cat-dealing was regarded as a profession, but one related to a lower social standing.

Cats were trained for every conceivable purpose, also that of entertainment. Thus the encyclopaedist al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) reveals that wandering street performers (*turuqiyya*) used to train cats to carry mice on their backs for the amusement of their audience.<sup>24</sup> In the Egyptian shadow play,

the Abū l-Qitat who worked with cats and mice was a common feature amongst the actors who trained performing animals.<sup>25</sup> A literary reference to the performing cat is also found in the *Shāh Nāma*: Firdawsī relates that in order to punish the inhabitants of the city of Rayy, the Sassanid king Khusraw Parvīz set a tyrannical governor over them, who subsequently ordered the removal of all roof guttering and the killing of every cat in the city. The inhabitants fled and a state of dilapidation began to set in. Thereupon Gurdiya<sup>26</sup> (who was both the sister of Khusraw's defeated opponent Bahrām Chūbīn and the wife of the king himself) resolved to save the city. She procured a kitten, decorated it with earrings and painted its claws red. Then she put it on a horse, from which it alighted in the king's spring garden. The fantastically adorned cat made the king laugh and he granted Gurdiya a wish. She asked him to give her the city of Rayy and to dismiss the diabolical governor from his post.<sup>27</sup>

Let us turn back to Nizāmī's verses, in which he commands the readers to take even a cat into their hearts. Rather than referring to the negative characteristics mentioned above, in spite of which we should make the cat the object of our affections, the poet most likely used the image of the cat here as an example of an inconspicuous, humble creature which is yet worthy of love. Rules of poetic diction also entailed a reference to another animal, its image harmonising with and completing the reference to the donkey in the first half of the *bayt*. The donkey (and often the cow) appears elsewhere in Nizāmī's work as an example of a creature exclusively interested in the satisfaction of basic needs.<sup>28</sup> This image also occurs frequently in Nāsir-i Khusraw's poetry.<sup>29</sup>

A significant feature of Nizāmī's "cat-verses" is the juxtaposition of cat and lion, which we also find in *Makhzan al-Asrār*.<sup>30</sup> Given the family affiliation shared by both animals and their physical resemblance, this is an obvious comparison documented throughout narrative literature.<sup>31</sup> The lion generally functions as the symbol of strength and courage; to be a lion in one's own eyes must mean here, to be convinced of one's own strength, which is a sure-fire path to vanity and *hubris*. However, this is not the nature of the love that concerns Nizāmī. In contrast to the lion, the cat is unobtrusive and yet beneficial to man and (also because of this latter aspect) worthy of his affection. Not only does it guard the crops from rodents, it also protects people against snakes and scorpions<sup>32</sup> – it was this aspect incidentally, which played a significant role in the domestication of the cat almost five thousand years ago.<sup>33</sup> In accordance with this view, moral approval is bestowed on the decision of a pious man who chose not to keep a cat during a mouse plague, for fear that the mice would then be driven into his neighbour's house and plague him instead. The anecdote is related by al-Ghazālī.<sup>34</sup>

The "benefit" or "harm" with which cats were associated was, incidentally, a central criterion for the attitude adopted towards particular animals

– and not only in the Islamic world. Early Islamic theological discussions on this topic reflect a certain lingering of the Zoroastrian view that the animals which are harmful to man were created by the Devil. Was it more permissible to kill harmful animals than those who contributed to man's well-being? Or, if animals should also be destined to enter Paradise – in itself a contentious question – was entry limited to the useful species?<sup>35</sup> Islamic philosophers, especially Abū Bakr Muhammad b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī (d. 313/925) also applied themselves to this question. Al-Rāzī approved of the hunting of dangerous meat-eating animals (such as lions, leopards, hyenas) and of dangerous animals who brought no benefit to man (such as snakes and scorpions). He justified their killing on two grounds: because if they were not killed, they would cause the death of many more animals and because as only a human soul was able to attain redemption, the freeing of the animal soul from its present body represented a step towards the ultimate redemption of the animals. This reasoning indicates al-Rāzī's adherence to the theory of the transmigration of souls.<sup>36</sup> The liberation of an animal soul from its body permitted its renewed individualisation, possibly in a human body, which in the best of cases, led to its ultimate redemption. For al-Rāzī, killing pasture animals was reprehensible as a matter of principle. Man should free himself both from his dependency on animals for food and from the practice of breeding animals, to avoid their excessive reproduction, which then made mass slaughter necessary.<sup>37</sup>

Nizāmī's verses about the love of cats may be understood in the context of his general theorization about love. It is not possible to infer more from the verses here, than the assertion that human affection can and should include humble creatures, such as the cat. However, the poet expresses himself more fully as to the relation between man and animal in another passage, this time in the seventh treatise of his *Makhzan al-Asrār*:<sup>38</sup>

شیر نخوردی که شکر خورده ای نیکونی افزونتر ازین چون بود نغز نگاربت نگاریده اند گوهر تن بر کمرت بسته اند آهوی فربه ندود با نزار مرغ علف خواره دام تو اند کم خور و کم گوی و کم آزار باش بر سر کاربست در این کارگاه بلبل گنجست به ویرانه در در خور تن قیمت جانیش هست چون تو همه گوهری عالمند رنج به قدر دینش چشم دار در بد و نیک آینه دار تو اند	اول از آن دایه که پرورده ای نیکونیت باید کافزون بود کز سر آن خامه که خاریده اند رشته جان بر جگر ت بسته اند به که ضعیفی که درین مرغزار جانوارانی که غلام تو اند چون تو همائی شرف کار باش هر که تو بینی ز سپید و سیاه جغد که شومست به افسانه در هر که در این پرده نشانیست هست گر چه ز بحر تو به گوهر کمند بیش و کمی را که کشی در شمار نیک و بد ملک به کار تواند
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The key elements of the view that Nizāmī develops in this passage can be summarized as follows: First, he emphasizes the primacy of humanity in the order of creation. Heaven and Earth pay homage to him and the wet nurse who suckled him fed him sugar rather than milk.<sup>39</sup> The beautiful (نغز *naghz*) image of man was drawn with the (divine) quill (خامه *khāma*). We find here an echo of Qur’anic imagery such as that of Sura 95, 4: “We created man in the best of forms” (*khalaqnā l-insān fī ahsan taqwīm* خلقنا الانسان في احسن تقويم). Nizāmī then addresses the relationship between animals and humanity; animals (جانوران *jānvārān*) are the slaves (*ghulām*) of mankind.<sup>40</sup> They are the fed birds of his net, i.e. they are completely subservient to man.

Man’s authority over animals, together with their fear of him and dependence on his mercy, was already ordained for Christianity, Judaism and Islam in Genesis 1, 28 und 9, 2.<sup>41</sup> The view of the primacy of man was also dominant in the philosophical tradition of Antiquity, or at least according to the influential Aristotelian theory of the faculties of the soul. These faculties, which ascend hierarchically and culminate in rationality, are dispensed along with the other mental faculties to humans, animals and even plants, in quantities befitting their position in the cosmic hierarchy.<sup>42</sup> The question as to whether primacy should be given to man or animal is also the main topic in the philosophical fairy tale of the “Dispute between Animal and Man before the King of the Djinns” in the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Safā’*. Here too, the prevailing hierarchy is maintained in the end, but the very fact that the question is posed at all is noteworthy, regardless of how it is answered. The “dispute” is placed at the end of the tract on the animal world, which concludes the natural science section of the *Rasā’il* and constitutes a transition to the section beginning with a description of mankind.<sup>43</sup> Although the animals come forward with better arguments and make their suit more eloquently than the human representatives, the argument is decided in favour of the latter, for some of them will become saints or wise men and be permitted to enter Paradise with their immortal souls, whilst no animal can live on after its death. This method of argumentation makes it clear that the authors of the *Rasā’il* did not deem animals to possess an immortal soul.<sup>44</sup> It is the conclusive argument by which animals must ultimately accept the primacy of man.

Nizāmī then calls upon noble mankind – which he compares with the mythical bird, Humā<sup>45</sup> – to act in an equally noble fashion. This entails eating little, speaking little, and causing little pain to others (کم آزار *kam-āzār*). This concept is characteristic of *Makhzan al-Asrār*, in which Nizāmī often lists moral virtues (or their opposite) in a fashion recalling that of the “mirrors for princes” genre. The call to desist from violence is a cause to which he repeatedly returns.<sup>46</sup> In this passage, Nizāmī is particularly concerned about the humane treatment of animals and grounds himself firmly in Islamic soil when making his case.

That man must abstain from mistreating animals is already dictated in the *Hadīth*. One well-known tradition relates that a woman was condemned to Hell for letting a cat starve to death; this is contrasted with the account of another individual (or a prostitute in some variants) who was granted God’s forgiveness for her sins because she drew water out of a well for a dog dying of thirst.<sup>47</sup> This signifies that on the authority of the Prophet, acts of charity towards animals are rewarded with extraordinary mercy – even when the animals concerned are neither domestic nor known to the individual. Legend portrays the second Caliph, ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb as one of the paradigms of the humane treatment of animals.<sup>48</sup> Amongst the philosophers, it is again al-Rāzī who argues for more compassionate relations between man and beast; he regards it as forbidden to cause pain to a creature capable of feeling (محيس *muhiss*), unless deserved or required in order to protect it from a greater evil. He places in this category general acts of aggression or abuse (مظالم *mazālim*), but also the hunting of animals which was a favourite sport for kings, and the abuse and exploitation (كدر *kadd*) of cattle. Relations should be characterised by honest intention, based upon recognised rules and methods and conducted in a comprehensible and just fashion, which may not be changed or abandoned at will.<sup>49</sup>

Nizāmī continues; every creature – the whole of creation is portrayed meristically through “black and white” – has its significance in this “work-place” (a metaphor for the world). Every animal has its place in creation and even the owl (جغد *jughd*), much maligned in the narrative literature (افسانه *afsāna*) is “*the nightingale of the treasures in the ruins*”. Every creature has “*the spiritual rank befitting its body.*”

This last statement of Nizāmī is reminiscent of a passage from the “Dispute between Animal and Man” of the Ikhwān al-Safā’, which discusses the proportions between body and soul. They argue the perfectly just Creator fashioned his creation in such a way as to make all beings equal to one another. In order to attain this balance, he created animals with powerful bodies and gave them mild and subservient souls (camels, elephants), just as he equipped those animals with weak and vulnerable bodies, with resilient, clever souls (bees, silk worms).<sup>50</sup> It is evident that Nizāmī must have read the *Rasā’il*, at least in relation to several other passages in the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, such as the portrayal of man as a microcosm,<sup>51</sup> the cosmic relation between the heart and the sun<sup>52</sup> and the imagery of the human body.<sup>53</sup>

Animals, continues Nizāmī, are indeed less noble than mankind in relation to their substance, but like man, they are also in possession of cosmic matter. Man may not cause his fellow creatures more pain than that for which he is able to pay the blood money (دية *diya*). This argument reflects Nizāmī’s view of the fundamental similarity of created beings, despite the subordination of animal to man. In addition to this similarity, the animals also have a valuable function in their relation to humanity; they “*hold a*

*mirror up to man.*” The mirror does not lie; it provides a faithful reflection of good and bad actions. Thus, an individual can tell from his treatment of animals whether he generally behaves in a good or bad fashion. Nizāmī does not continue the theme of the relationship between man and animal in the rest of the introduction to the seventh section. However, the embedded allegory brings it centre-stage again: Whilst out hunting, Farīdūn, the mythical king of Iran, catches sight of a gazelle that takes his fancy. He gallops towards her on his horse and draws his bow to fire an arrow. Suddenly both horse and arrow fail to obey him. In response to the reproaches of the king the arrow informs him that the gazelle must be spared – no one may kill another creature purely for his own amusement.<sup>54</sup> In the concluding verses of the seventh treatise of *Makhzan al-Asrār* Nizāmī imparts the moral to be drawn from the theme discussed; it is in serving rather than ruling that the nobility of mankind lies.

The image of the animal as an expression of this maxim appears in two other *bayts* at the end of the chapter. In the first, the snake sitting on the treasure (i.e. guarding it) is portrayed from head to foot as nothing more than a belt. The belt was regarded as the definitive symbol of a servant and is here compared effectively with the long, slender body of the snake. In the second passage, the candle is shown as unable to emit the light which benefits its surroundings without the bee’s service in providing wax.

از سر تا دم کمری بیش نیست ...  
از کمر خدمت زنبور یافت

گنج نشین مار که درویش نیست  
شمع که او خواجگی نور یافت

(MA26,58 and 61)

To the best of this author’s knowledge, the seventh treatise of the *Makhzan al-Asrār* is the only passage in Nizāmī’s literary work in which the relations between man and animal are considered as a separate theme. The other functions fulfilled by animals in Nizāmī’s work may be divided into three categories: First: In Nizāmī’s metaphorical language and technique of associating ideas, as well as in his use of proverbs, animals play an indispensable role. However, this method is by no means unique to Nizāmī, but is a common feature of classical Persian poetry. Poets tended to derive their imagery chiefly from the natural world and it was animals and plants, alongside with the heavenly bodies, which represented the most important poetical “reservoir”.

Second: Nizāmī repeatedly uses animals as the protagonists of moral parables. This too is a relatively common method in Persian literature; compare for example, Mawlanā Rūmī, whose work reflects a penchant for using animals – talking animals at that! – in this role. As befits the didactic purpose of this literary genre, a moral function for humans is bound up with the actions of the animals. Animals appear in this role in six of the twenty parables in the *Makhzan al-Asrār*: in the second parable (the

alleged wedding negotiations of the owls), through which the Sassanid king Anūshirvān comes to recognise the injustice of his actions; in the sixth parable (the hunter, the dog and the fox); in the eighth parable (the tradesman and the fox); in the tenth parable (Jesus and the dead dog) and finally in the twentieth parable (the nightingale and the falcon), which is a *munāzara* integrated into this didactic *mathnavī*. Talking animals feature in two of these parables (nos. 6 and 20).<sup>55</sup> In *Khusraw u Shīrīn*, the role of animals as the protagonists of parables finds its most succinct expression in the forty *Kalīla wa-Dimna* aphorisms (mentioned above). The fable of the partridge and the ants<sup>56</sup> and the story of the young man and the wild dogs<sup>57</sup> are the best examples of this role in the story of *Laylī u Majnūn*, whilst in *Haft Paykar*, it is the story of the faithless dog, which should be mentioned in this context. This last tale, which derives from Nizām ul-Mulk's *Sīyāsat Nāma*,<sup>58</sup> is incorporated into the actual narrative of *Haft Paykar* but fulfils for the protagonist, Bahrām-i Gūr, the function of a fictitious parable; a dog hands his master's herd of sheep over to his lover, the she-wolf. Following the discovery of his disloyalty, he is hung in chains whilst still alive, both as a punishment and as a warning to others. It is through this incident that Bahrām finally perceives the evil machinations of his vizier, who has been committing transgressions and acts of injustice against his subjects.

Third: In *Laylī u Majnūn* only does Nizāmī permit the animals to actively contribute to the outcome of the narrative instead of only playing an allegorical role. The hunting scenes and tests of bravery which so often feature in court narratives (and thus also in the work of Nizāmī) and which involve the overpowering of wild animals do not belong in this category. The feat of the slave-girl Fitna, who carried a full-grown bull up the palace steps in order to impart a lesson to Bahrām-i Gūr also belongs in the second group, in which the main function of the animals is as a more or less decorative background to the actual narrative. But this third function, as active participant in the narrative, is awarded to the animals in *Laylī u Majnūn*. They are portrayed as Majnūn's friends, serving and protecting him of their own free will. This motif was already present in the narratives on which Nizāmī based his account; in the earlier versions of the legend, we see Majnūn in the final stages of his insanity, leaving his tribe to live alone in the desert. Here he wins the friendship of the gazelles who remind him of Laylī, buying their freedom from the hunters and persecuting the wolves who attack them. Playing with sand and stones, oblivious even to himself, he only returns to consciousness when the name Laylī is mentioned. He shies away from humanity like the wild animals.<sup>59</sup>

Like Solomon, the Majnūn of Nizāmī's version is a king of the animals.<sup>60</sup> As an outcast, alienated from human civilisation, he is intuitively understood by them and accepted into their circle.<sup>61</sup> Nizāmī gives more emphasis and substance to this motif than the earlier versions of the story



do. Its significance in *Laylī u Majnūn*, his third *mathnavī*, is also revealed in the tradition of manuscript illumination, where the picture of Majnūn surrounded by his animals is one of the most common images from the story.

The beasts of prey lose their savagery through contact with Majnūn; the wolf ceases to attack the sheep and the lion lets the wild ass be. The dog makes peace (صلح *sulh*) with the hare and the gazelle drinks the milk (شیر *shīr*) of the lion (شیر in older pronunciation *shēr*).<sup>62</sup> Under Majnūn's influence the *Tieridyll* is realised.<sup>63</sup>

When considered within its wider context, the relation of this picture to the well-known literary motif of peaceful co-existence between beasts of prey and pasture animals becomes clear. However, in contrast to its more concrete portrayal here, such harmonious cohabitation tends in other works to be transposed into a long-lost golden age, or to be used as a symbol for the coming reign of peace. An example for the former use can be seen in the court of the mythical king Gayūmarth in the *Shāh Nāma*,<sup>64</sup> whilst the well-known passage in the Old Testament, Isaiah 11, 6 -7 can be cited as an example of the latter.

Not only do the animals serve Majnūn of their own accord, they also tend to his welfare. Nizāmī describes this with obvious empathy and much attention to detail; the fox sweeps out Majnūn's sleeping place with his tail, the gazelle massages his feet, the wild ass and stag lie beneath him as a pillow and the lion and the wolf watch over him.<sup>65</sup> At the risk of being attacked by the wild animals, no one can approach Majnūn without being summoned by him first. If summoned however, none of the animals will do him any harm. When food is brought to Majnūn, he consumes only a "sunlight mote" (نره *dharra*), and gives the rest to the animals to eat. These look to him as their provider (روزی ده *rūzī-dih*) and remain faithful to him until the end. Following Laylī's death, they accompany him to her grave. They maintain the dead Majnūn in their custody until his corpse has turned to dust, then each animal goes his own way.

This function of the animal, as active participant in the unfolding of the plot itself, rather than as the protagonist of a fable, is relatively rare in classical Persian literature. It is used by Nizāmī in *Laylī u Majnūn* to touching effect. Nizāmī had already begun to reflect on the relationship between animal and man in his early years and this had become a matter of fundamental moral significance to him, as shown by the seventh tract of *Makhzan al-Asrār*; in which he exhorts humanity to be aware of its responsibility, also and even especially in its dealings with fellow creatures. This guiding principle has lost none of its relevance today.



## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Antonia Bosanquet for her translation of this article into English.
- 2 KS11,49. Nizami-Dastgirdi (1333a) 33,2, the editor’s comment on this verse; also Nizami-Bürigel (1980) 346.
- 3 KS12,4; Nizami-Dastgirdi (1333a) 33,8. Nizami-Chetagurov (1960) 62,5 proposes شمار *shumār* “number“.
- 4 Nizami-Chetagurov (1960) 63; ult. سگ *sag* (dog). The less typical, antithetical pairing of donkey and cat seems to me to be the likelier reading, also in view of the wordplay with خر سند *khursand* and the alliteration خر *khar*, خورد *khward*, خواب *khwāb*, خر سند *khursand*.
- 5 Nizami-Chetagurov (1960) 64, 1: سير *sīr* (full).
- 6 Nizami-Chetagurov (1960) 64,1: خود را *khwad-rā* (for yourself).
- 7 General summary in Schimmel (1989); Omidisalar (1992); Viré (1997).
- 8 Würsch (2005a) 64.
- 9 Ikhwan al-Safa’ (1405) 2, 246.
- 10 See relevant passages in Würsch (2005a) 145.
- 11 For example Tusi (1345) 595.
- 12 Abela (1981) 1, n. 1753.
- 13 Spitta (1880) 497, n. 44.
- 14 KS92 and KS92,25. See van Ruymbeke’s article in this volume.
- 15 Jahiz (1937) 5, 337.
- 16 Jahiz (1937) 338.
- 17 The religious scholar ‘Alī al-Qārī al-Harawī (d. 1014/1605) dedicated a treatise especially to this tradition, in which he declared it to be unauthentic. The text has been edited by Smith (1983).
- 18 Schimmel (1989) 11-20.
- 19 First-hand information about this subject tends to be found by chance. Barhebraeus (d. 1286) relates that in 468/1075 Damascus was struck by famine, plague and a dramatic fall in prices. Furthermore, mice were spreading out of control. A woman who owned two houses, each worth several hundred dinars, sold one of them for the sum of seven *zūzē* (i. e. drachmai or dirhams), with which she bought herself a cat; Barhebraeus (1932) 1, 226 (Trans.); 2, 79r (left column), lines 8-12 (Text).
- 20 Jahiz (1937) 5, 339-40, quoted by al-Tusi (1345) 596.
- 21 Jahiz (1937) 340.
- 22 Ibn Qutayba (1963) 2, 201.
- 23 Jahiz (1405) 1, 338.
- 24 Nuwayri (1933) 9, 284.
- 25 Bosworth (1976) 1, 129.
- 26 Gurdiya is one of the few women playing an active role in the *Shāh Nāma*; Khaleghi-Motlagh (1971) 79 seq.
- 27 Firdawsi-Dabirsiyaqi (1344) 5, 2464-5. Firdawsi-Bertels (1960) 9, 193-4. Firdawsi-Mohl (1876) 7, 270-3.
- 28 Würsch (2005a) 57-8, n. 133.
- 29 As an example Nasir-i Khusraw (1372) 47, ult.: “*He who only feeds and sleeps like the donkey, is a donkey in human form*”; 114, -3: “*Cows and donkeys seek only to sleep and feed*”; 146, 2: “*Feeding and sleeping are matters for the donkey.*”
- 30 Würsch (2005a) 111.
- 31 See the well-known story of the cat originating from the lion’s sneezing; Würsch (2005b) 925-41; on the frequent comparison between the cat and the lion, also Delort (1987) 336-7.
- 32 Tusi (1345) 595: the cat keeps the house clean, eats insects, kills snakes and is the enemy of the mouse.

- 33 Delort (1987) 337.
- 34 Ghazali (1923) 129.
- 35 van Ess (1991) 2, 52-3; 3, 407.
- 36 van Ess (1991) 3, 430.
- 37 Razi (1939) 104-5.
- 38 Würsch (2005a) 138 seq.
- 39 Dastgerdi (Nizami-Dastgirdi (1334)) interprets the wet nurse as the embodiment of pre-eternity (ج) *azal*) and sugar as existence.
- 40 Nizāmī addresses mankind in general.
- 41 Bousquet (1958).
- 42 Aristoteles (1995) 74-5, II/3; the capacity for thought and rationality are additional qualities awarded to mankind and – this addition is worth noting – “if there should be another living creature of the same or a higher nature” (*timióteron*, 414b18-19).
- 43 Ikhwan al-Safa’ (1990) XXXII-XXXIII.
- 44 Ikhwan al-Safa’ (1405) v.2, 376. Ikhwan al-Safa’ (1990) 200. For more about the concepts of the animal soul in Medieval Islam, see Giese (2001) 111-3.
- 45 Nöldeke (1896) 133: The Humā and its *farr* in particular distribute blessings; according to a Persian popular belief, the Humā’s shadow fell on Achaemenes. This could relate to one of Aelian’s tales, according to which the ancestor of the Achaemenids was brought up by an eagle. The Humā is often presented in antithesis to the owl – as in this passage in *Makhzan al-Asrār*, where the owl is mentioned almost immediately after the Humā.
- 46 Particularly relevant to this theme is the work of Bürgel. The contest between the philosophers that takes place in the *Iskandar Nāma* is settled peacefully in comparison to the *Makhzan al-Asrār* version (Bürgel (1991a)); the slave girl who confronts Bahrām-i Gūr survives and even dispenses words of advice to the king, whilst in Firdawsi’s version she is trampled to death (Bürgel (1988a)).
- 47 Bousquet (1958) 40; ‘Attār composed a poetical rendition of the story of the dog’s rescue from dying of thirst. See Ritter (1978) 275.
- 48 Bousquet (1958) 45.
- 49 Razi (1939) 103-4. On animal rights in the Islamic context, see also Foltz (2006).
- 50 Ikhwan al-Safa’ (1405) 2, 363 seq.; Ikhwan al-Safa’ (1990) 184 seq.
- 51 It would be interesting to investigate the reception of this Greek theory in the Islamic world more thoroughly. “Microcosm” tends to be translated in Arabic with the loan translation العالم الصغير *al-‘ālam al-saghīr*: The juxtaposition of microcosm/macrocosm is also present in the work of the Ionic Nature Philosophers, the Pythagoreans and in particular, the Stoics. The interpretation of man as a reflection of the macrocosm was developed further in Neo-Platonism, and it is likely that this last provided the vehicle by which the concept passed into the Islamic world. For more about the macrocosm/microcosm concepts in Antiquity see Gatzemeier (1980) 640-2.
- 52 Würsch (2005a) 209-10.
- 53 Würsch (2005a) 212.
- 54 It is a relatively common aspect of anecdotes and fables (if we widen the latter’s definition beyond the scope of exclusively animal stories) that the moral of the tale is given by a talking object.
- 55 The phenomenon of the talking animal also features in Arabic literature, and individual examples can even be found in pre-Abbasid poetry. See Wagner (1994).
- 56 LM18; Nizami-Dastgirdi (1333b) 90; Nizami-Gelpke (1992) 71-3.
- 57 LM33,52 sqq.; Nizami-Dastgirdi (1333b) 169-72; Nizami-Gelpke (1992) 203-10.
- 58 See de Blois (2003).
- 59 Krachkovskij (1955) 1-50.
- 60 LM33,20; Nizami-Dastgirdi (1333b) 167, 14. According to Dols (1992) 337, in his function as king of the animals, Majnūn created a world that reflected his own insanity. This

interpretation was rejected (with justification, in this author’s opinion) by Seyed-Gohrab (2001) 142-3. Nizāmī would not have compared Majnūn with King Solomon if he had wanted to portray the former’s kingdom of animals as a world of insanity.

61 See also the epilogue in Nizami-Gelpke (1992) 332-3.

62 LM33,24-5; Nizami-Dastgirdi (1333b) 167, pu-ult.

63 The term originates from van Ess (1991) 3, 152.

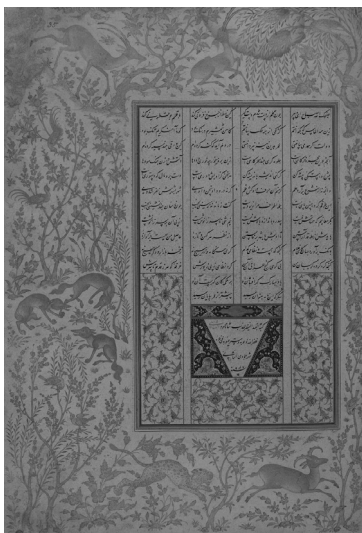
64 It is more than likely that Nizāmī’s use of the animal idyll is based on Firdawsī’s “primordial sequence,” as Seyed-Gohrab (2001) 140-1 suggests.

65 LM33,27-31; Nizami-Dastgerdi (1333b) 168, 2-6.

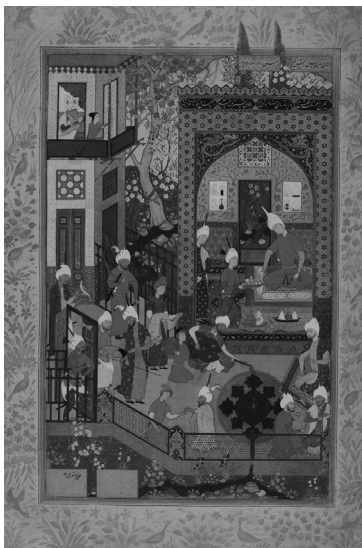


## ■ Illustrations to Chapter 10

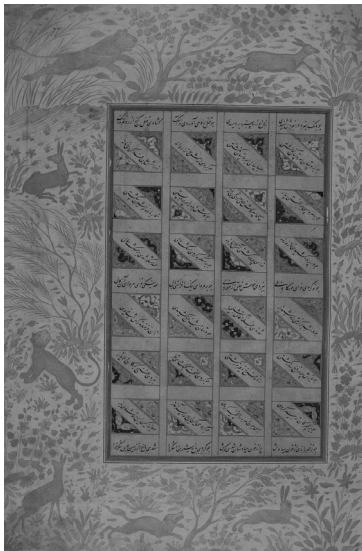
**Figure 1** Or. 2265, fol. 35a, “Tahmasp A”, Colophon of *Makhzan al-Asrar*, Shah Mahmud al-Shahi, First 10 days of Jumada I, 946, mid October, 1539



**Figure 2** Or. 2295, fol. 77b, “Tahmasp B”, “Khusraw rewards Barbad for 30 Songs”



**Figure 3** Or. 2265, fol. 77a, "Replacement Page", 17th century text and illumination



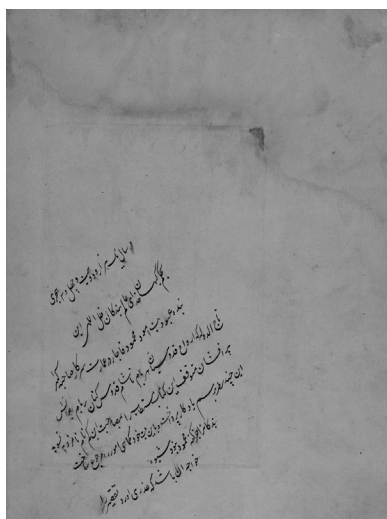
**Figure 4** Or.2265, fol. 202b, Bahram Gur's Dragon Hunt, signed by Muhammad Zaman, dated to 1086-1676



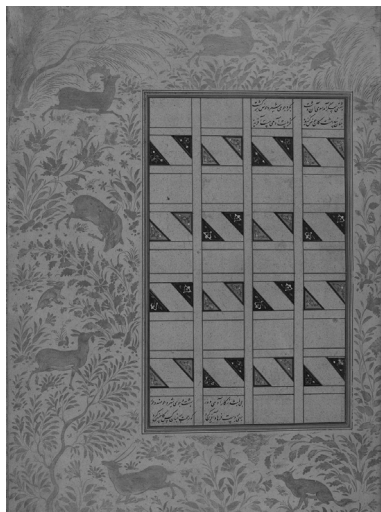
**Figure 5** Or. 2265, fol. 221b, Bahram's Visit to the Black Pavilion, dated to 1086-1667



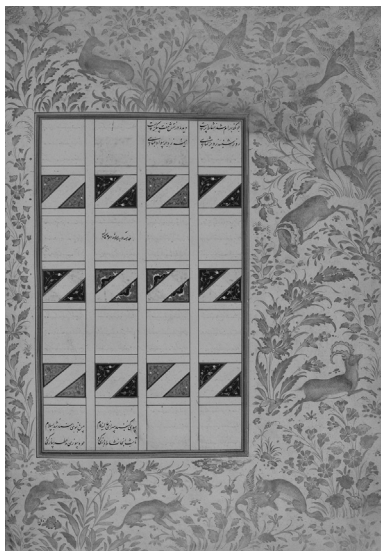
**Figure 6** Or. 2265, fol. 348b, Transfer of the manuscript to Taj al-Dawla, 1243-1827



**Figure 7** Or. 2265, fol. 83b “Tahmasp A”, Space left for “Shirin visits Farhad’s Milk Channel”, with 17th cent. Illumination

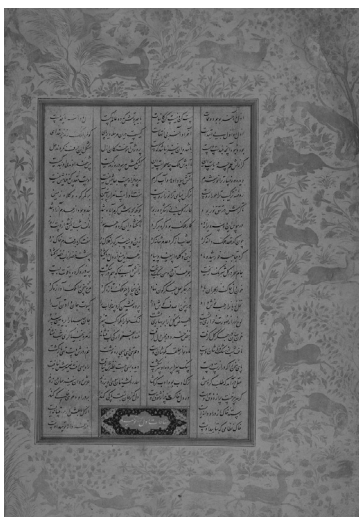


**Figure 8** Or. 2265, fol. 218b, “Tahmasp A”, Space left for “Bahram visits the Black Pavilion”

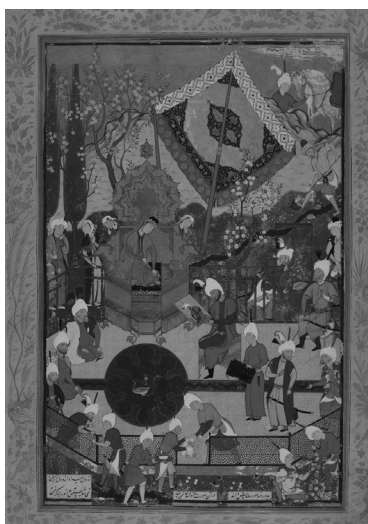




**Figure 9** Or. 2265, fol. 3b, “Replacement page” which links the opening illumination to “Tahmasp A”



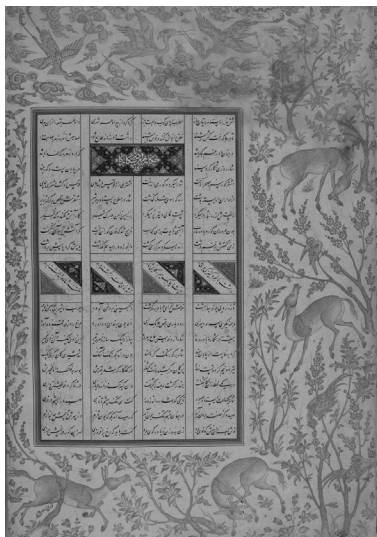
**Figure 10** Or. 2265, fol. 48 b, “Tahmasp B”, Nushaba shows Iskandar his portrait with text added from Khusraw u Shīrīn about Shirin’s portraits made by Shapur



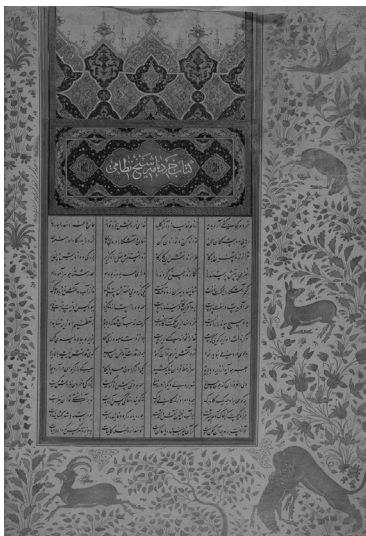
**Figure 11** Or. 2265, fol. 60b, "Tahmasp B", "Khusraw enthroned"



**Figure 12** Or. 2265, fol. 209b, "Tahmasp A", detail of the illuminated border



**Figure 13** Or. 2265, fol. 349a, "Tahmasp B", Opening of the Khirad Nama



**Figure 14** Or. 2265, fol. 260b, Detail of illumination showing the signature of Salih b. Fadl Allah



Illustrations to chapter 12

Figure 1 Images of the 11th, 12th and 13th degrees of the Zodiacal sign of Leo



Figure 2 Images of the 20th and 21st degree of the Zodiacal sign of Capricornus



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