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Food and Poetry. Kebab Imagery in Persian and Turkish Poetry[1]

Abstract

This article traces the history of kebab imagery in Persian and Turkish poetry, from its earliest attestations in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, to its demise in the early twentieth century. Until now, this metaphor has been little studied by literary historians. Its importance deserves a close study. It is possible to historicise this set of poetic images and follow its development and evolution step by step in Persian- and Turkish-language poetry. The imagery of the kebab is underpinned by Eurasian meat-eating practices and the epic figure of the hunter-king. We also need to consider the context in which Turco-Persian poetry was produced: on the one hand, palaces and their feasts; on the other, cities and their cohorts of roasters and street cooks. These experiences provide the poets with material for their variations on the kebab theme, which could express worldly feelings of fear or love for an enemy or a protector, as well as being used to describe the powerful effects of a spiritual experience or the love of God.

Keywords: Persian, Ottoman and Turkish poetry, food, kebab, multilingualism, poetic tradition.

Arab, Turkish, and Persian poets used to collect or have their poems gathered in collections called *dīwān* (divan). The poems could be organised by type or by rhyme. As the consonant *b* is the second letter in the alphabets used by Arabs, Persians, and Turks, anyone reading a collection of oriental poetry in a linear fashion is bound to come across the word *kabāb*, which refers to roasted or grilled meat: surprisingly for the contemporary reader, the kebab was a word used by almost every Persian and Turkish poet between the eleventh and the early twentieth century, to rhyme their poems in *b*. This article deals with the history of this poetic imagery.

Among specialists in Turkish-Persian literature, only Annemarie Schimmel devotes a few lines to the kebab in her masterly work on Persian poetry, followed by Riccardo Zipoli. She stresses the importance of the association of wine (*sharāb*) and roast (*kabāb*) and adds that the imagery of the kebab 'offers poets a set of images not always very tasteful to a modern Western reader.'[2] We must therefore step back from our own cul-

1 I would like to extend my warmest thanks to Philip Bockholt and Hülya Çelik for hosting my contribution to the Gotha conference 'Multilingualism, Translation, Transfer: Persian in the Ottoman Empire' in April 2023, and then allowing me to publish this article in this "Diyâr" issue. This study would not have been possible without the help of Claudia Römer, Edith Gülçin Ambros and Nicolas Vatin, all of whom carefully re-read the translations of the verses quoted. Any remaining errors are my responsibility.

2 Schimmel 1992, 268; Zipoli 2009, 214.

tural and poetic tradition, which does not use culinary metaphors in erotic poetry. I will seek to historicise and describe the evolution of kebab imagery by reference to the everyday experience of poets, who lived in a world where, as Johan Huizinga put it, to describe the atmosphere of the late Middle Ages in Western Europe, 'so intense and colourful was life that it could stand the mingling of the smell of blood and roses.'[3]

I will begin by recalling the two dimensions that underlie the imagery of the kebab over the long term: culinary traditions and conceptions of royalty in the Eurasian space. I will then show how the imagery of the kebab appeared and evolved in Persian poetry, and how it was adopted and transformed in Turkish poetry. Finally, I will discuss the plausible reasons for the disappearance of this kebab imagery in modern Persian and Turkish poetry, which began to take shape in the second half of the eighteenth century.[4]

1. The Anthropological *longue durée*: Techniques for Cooking Meat

Nowadays, kebab brings to mind *döner kebab*, which refers to a method of cooking on a vertical spit that dates back only to the nineteenth century, and which has conquered the West since the 1970s and 1980s. To understand what Persian and Turkish poets had in mind when they wrote their verses about kebab, we need to forget this familiar image for a while.

Three techniques for cooking meat have been known since ancient times in Eurasia.[5] In everyday life, meat was usually simmered in broths, soups, stews (*khoresh* in Persian, *yaḫni* in Turkish), or rice pilafs (*polow*, *pilav*). Less frequently, the meat was fried. The third technique involved roasting the meat in an oven or grilling it over an open fire. The pre-Islamic poet Imruʾ al-Qays (d. 544) mentions the two main methods of cooking by simmering and grilling:[6] 'Busy then were the cooks, some roasting upon a fire the grilled slices, some stirring the hasty stew.' Arabic poetry of later centuries contains many references to food, but the roast never became a *topos* as it did in the Turco-Persian tradition.[7]

3 Huizinga 1996, 24.

4 My corpus includes 90 Persian-speaking poets and 65 Turkish-speaking poets, authors of around 1,500 poems containing the word kebab. The quotations in this article (from 19 Persian-speaking and 12 Turkish-speaking poets) are just a small part of the whole; they have been selected because they are representative of trends observed throughout the whole corpus. For Persian poetry, I used the Ganjoor database (https://ganjoor.net), always checked with actual editions of the poets' works, and for Turkish poetry, I used the digital editions of the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (*Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kütüphaneler ve Yayımlar Genel Müdürlüğü*).

5 On the history of cooking in Islam, see Fragner 1984; Heine 1988; Işın 2018; Roden 2001; Rodinson 1950; Westrip 1997.

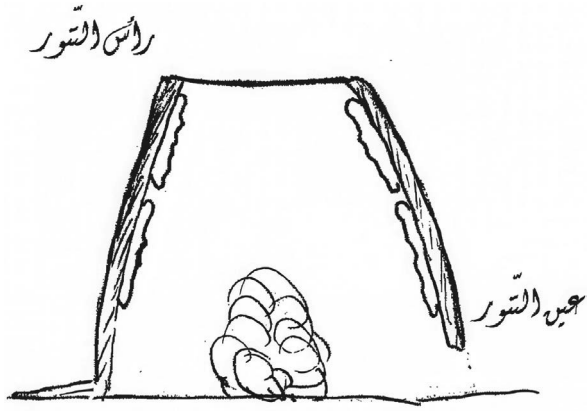
6 al-Zawzanī 2009, 51, v. 65; Arberry 1957, 65: فَظَلَّ مُعَجَّـل طُهَاةُ اللَّحْمِ مِن بَيْنِ مُنْضِجٍ صَفِيـفَ شِوَاءٍ أَوْ قَدِيْرٍ.

7 Van Gelder 2000, 114.

The hierarchy of meats differed from the one we know today: mutton was the most valued meat. Beef, on the other hand, was a coarse meat:[8] less expensive than mutton, the poorer classes of Abbasid society could afford it from time to time.[9] Poultry was expensive and took its place on the tables of the urban middle classes and elites. According to the Qur'ān (56:21), poultry meat (*laḥm al-ṭayr*) will be the dish served in Paradise. Although game was of limited quantitative importance, even in the diet of the elite, it played an eminent symbolic role. Oriental medicine and dietetics consistently valued mutton, poultry, and game.[10] Doctors recommended kebab after a bloodletting because, as Ibn Buṭlān (d. 455/1066) wrote in the eleventh century, 'its juice quickly transforms into blood and increases animal strength.'[11] Fish was cheap in river or sea regions: it could be grilled or roasted; poets never failed to make use of these images.[12]

There were two main ways of roasting and grilling meat. The first, and more common, was to cook it in a raw earth or brick oven, called a *tannūr* in Arabic, a *tanūr* in Persian, a *tennūr*, or a *tandır* in Turkish. Perhaps the poets had in mind the Qur'ān (11:40; 23:27): God warned Noah that it was time to board the Ark (*fulk*) by 'boiling the oven' (*fāra al-tannūr*). One of the cornerstones of kebab imagery therefore consisted of comparing the breast (*sīne* in Persian and Turkish) to an oven: as the kebab roasts in the oven, the heart or liver roasts in the breast, the former as a result of the heat of the fire, the latter under the influence of fear, and later love.

Figure 1. Tannūr *oven, used especially for roasting meats*[13]



8 Laurioux 2002, 33.
9 Ashtor 1968, 1017–53.
10 Pitchon 2018, 282–5.
11 Elkhadem 1990, 194–5.
12 Perry 2001, 477–86.
13 Nasrallah 2007, 574.

The second cooking technique involves a brazier or a fireplace. The meat, cut into smaller pieces, is skewered or put on a grill, and cooked in direct contact with the fire. The brazier is called a *mijmara* in Arabic, a *manqal* and a *royīne* in Persian, and a *manǧal* in Turkish; *kānūn*, *ātash-dān*, *ocaḳ* refers to the hearth, *sīkh* or *şiş* to the skewers. These skewers belong to poetic language, but the brazier was almost always overshadowed by the oven (*tannūr*), whose analogy with the chest was so suggestive. An examination of inheritance inventories written in Damascus between 1689 and 1717 shows that Damascenes did little cooking at home: they sent their dishes, in their own pans or earthenware pots, to the roaster.[14] The same was true of the people of Cairo, both in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods,[15] and of the Turkish-speaking inhabitants of the Empire. According to the registers of pious foundations in Istanbul in the seventeenth century, it is estimated that less than 5% of dwellings had a separate kitchen; a place to cook is mentioned for the poorest 20% of households, consisting of a single room, and half of households with four rooms or more.[16] The figures were even lower in Ankara and Kayseri.[17] According to Bruno Laurioux, the same was true of the medieval West.[18] In short, the two main techniques for cooking meat were not equivalent: grilling or roasting were as opposed to stewing as the masculine to the feminine, the extraordinary to the everyday.

2. The Opening Scene: The Kebab and the King Hunter of the Epic

The imagery of the kebab originated in the royal hunt and banquet tradition. Its poetical birthplace is the epic. Since ancient times, the kings and nobles of Eurasia had hunted to protect and feed their subjects, or to train for war. Royal Eurasian ideology was inseparable from the practice of hunting.[19] The kings of Mesopotamia used to hunt lions that threatened their farmers and their crops. The *Book of Kings* (*Shāhnāma*) by Firdawsī (329–410 or 416/940–1019 or 1025) features the *bazm-o razm*, banquet and war, which forms the starting point for the poetic imagery of the kebab. Most of the illustration projects carried out between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, whether in Iran, India, or the Ottoman Empire, have one remarkable thing in common: they all present a scene that closely associates royal power and kebab.

History goes that the Iranian king Goshtāsp is afraid of being dethroned by his son Esfandiyār. According to a prophecy that reaches his ears, Esfandiyār must be killed by Rostam. Goshtāsp therefore decides to send his son in search of Rostam, under

14 Establet and Pascual 2003, 185–98.
15 Hanna 1991; Lewicka 2011, 88–9.
16 Tanyeli 2003, 275–300; Yérasimos 2003, 301–17.
17 Faroqhi 1987, 98.
18 Laurioux 2002, 257.
19 Allsen 2006.

Figure 2. Shāhnāma *of Shāh Tāhmāsb*, ca. *1530, attributed to Āqā Mīrak, assisted by Qāsim ʿAlī*, ca.*1530. Feuillet 451r sold at Christie's, 31 March 2022 (£ 11,970). URL: https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6361861.*

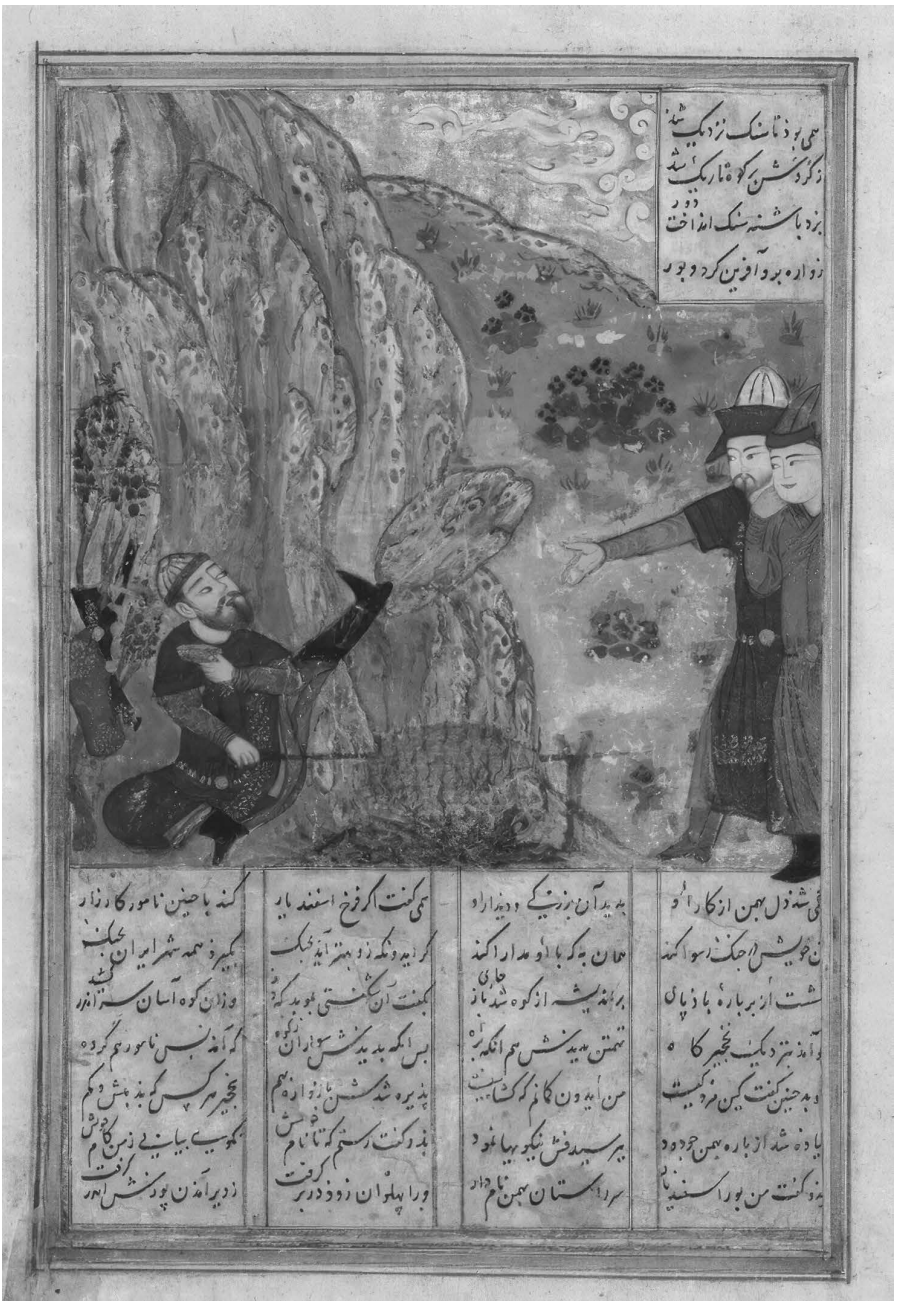


Figure 3. Turkish version of the Shāhnāma *by Şerīf Amīdī*, ca. *1500, copied and illustrated between 1616 and 1620. New York Public Library, Spencer Coll. Turk. MS. 1. URL: https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-75f7-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99*

the false pretext of having him renew his allegiance. Esfandiyār, in turn, sends his own son Bahmān to capture Rostam. The young Bahmān catches Rostam cooking an evening primrose on a spit during a hunting trip. He decides to kill him by throwing a rock at him, but Rostam, warned by a companion, pushes the rock away with a blow from his heel.[20]

An examination of eight paintings of the scene, among which fig. 2 and fig. 3, produced between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries in the three Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, reveals that the scene of Rostam and Bahmān increasingly looked like a royal hunting party, when the weary sovereign, accompanied by his close friends, interrupted the run to rest and prepare a grill: the painters of the illustrated *Shāhnāma* imagined the scene of Rostam and Bahmān as a princely hunt.[21] Throughout the long Islamic Middle Ages, in the two overlapping Persian-speaking and Turkish-speaking linguistic spaces,[22] the text and illustrations of the *Shāhnāma* contributed to reenacting the association between the king and the kebab, between the courage of the hunter and the fear of the prey.

3. From Hunting to Court: The Panegyrists and Love

At the Ghaznavid courts of Ghazna and Lahore, in the Seljuk palaces of Baghdad, Khurasan, and Transoxiana, princes fed their guests with grilled meat. This elite cuisine is described in several preserved cookery books.[23] A few braziers used at these banquets have come down to us: the oldest one belonged to the Rasulid sultan of Yemen, al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ʿUmar (r. 647–694/1250–1295).[24] The dragon-head-shaped brackets were used to attach a grill or to slide in skewers.

From the thirteenth century onwards, when the production of illustrated manuscripts increased, frontispieces frequently depicted the patron drinking and feasting, or receiving a book from the author's hand. A manuscript of the *Book of the Antidote* (*Kitāb al-Diryāq*) by the Pseudo-Galen, produced in Mosul in the first half of the thirteenth century,[25] contains (to the best of my knowledge) the first depiction of

20 Ferdowsī 2023, 921.

21 In addition to the two paintings featured here, see the list of the six others after the Bibliography.

22 Fragner 1999 coined the term Persophonie. Some authors prefer to speak of the Persianate. Cf. Green 2019.

23 The earliest example dates from tenth century: Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq 1987 (Nasrallah 2007). On the origins of caliphal cuisine, see Waynes 1989. From the thirteenth century onwards, cookery books proliferated. Cf. Marín and Waines 1993 (translated by Nasrallah 2018).

24 Brazier of Rasulid Sultan al-Malik al-Muzaffar Shams al-Din Yusuf ibn ʻUmar, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891, Accession Number: 91.1.540. Object dimensions: height 35.2 cm; width 39.4 cm; depth 41.6 cm. [H. 13 7/8 in.; W. 15 1/2 in.; Max D. 16 3/8 in.]

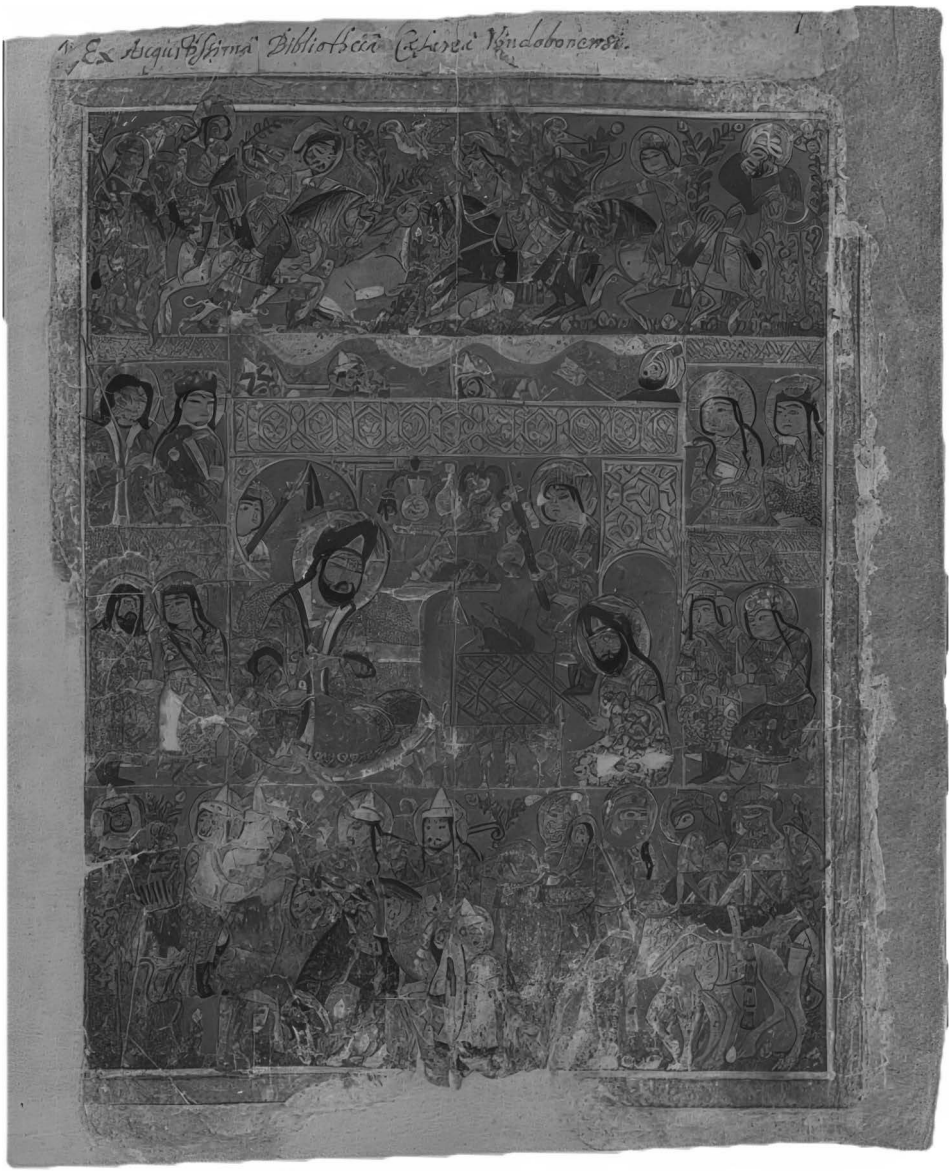
25 Pseudo-Galen, *Kitāb al-diryāq*, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. A. F. 10, f. 1v.

Figure 4. Rasulid brazier (first half of the thirteenth century)

a princely feast featuring brazier and kebab. In the central part, the prince sits on the left. A kneeling servant faces him on the right. We see behind them a tray and bottles of drink; this servant holds two skewers above a rectangular brazier, similar to the Rasulid one (Fig. 2). This frontispiece, first analysed by Richard Ettinghausen in the 1960s,[26] marks the transition between the hieratic iconography inherited from the Sassanid Empire to a more vivid realism. The 'essential element' of this painting, according to the art historian, is none other than the servant busy roasting kebab.

26 Ettinghausen 1977, 92.

Figure 5. Frontispiece of the Pseudo-Galen Book of the Antidote, *Mosul, first half of the thirteenth century*



A second noteworthy frontispiece (Fig. 6) opens the personal copy of the *Dīvān* of Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bayqarā, the Timurid ruler of Herat who reigned between 875 and 912 (1469–1505).[27] The first part of the frontispiece depicts an assembly in a garden, where the participants, gathered around the sultan, are drinking and reading. In the second frontispiece, the sultan is conversing in the background with a beardless young man, while, in the foreground, a cook is supervising the grilling of a poultry kebab.

Panegyrists began to describe royal banquets as early as the eleventh century. We can quote here a famous verse of Manūchehrī (d. after 432/1041) who, together with ʿOnṣorī (d. after 422/1031) and Farrokhī, who probably died during the reign of sultan Masʿūd I (421–432/1030–1041), is considered one of the leading poets of the early Ghaznavid period:[28]

در مجلس احرار سه چیزست و فزون نه
وان هر سه شرابست و ربابست و کبابست

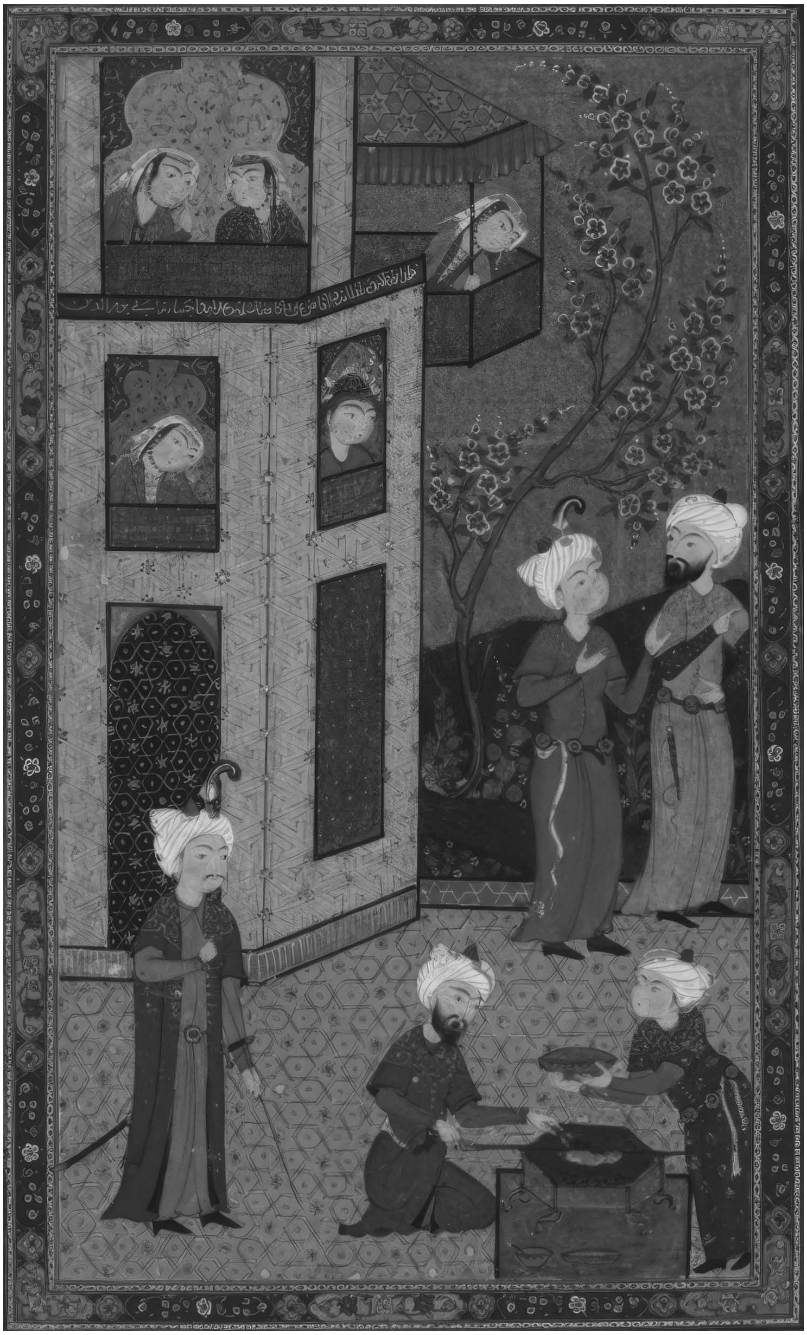
Dar majles-e aḥrār se chīzast-o fozūn ne
Vān her se sharābast-o rabābast-o kabābast

In the pleasures of well-born men, there are three things and no more,
and those three things are the roast, the rebec, and the wine.

As on the frontispiece of the Pseudo-Galen, Manūchehrī's ideal banquet comprises three elements: the roast (*kabāb*), the wine (*sharāb*) and the rebec (*rabāb*). Julie Meisami points out that the Arabic-speaking Abbasid poets, followed by their Persian-speaking counterparts, systematically developed the analogy between the ethics of the court and the ethics of love.[29] The discourse on love both expresses the relationship between the patron and the poet, and indirectly offers a model of ideal behaviour. The evolution of kebab imagery illustrates this dialectic of love and court, leading to a synthesis of Firdawsī's epic imagery and depictions of courtly elite pleasures. Initially, associations between water (*āb*) and kebab were frequent: the beloved patron makes his panegyric lover weep, consumed with grief. However, the word *āb* means water, tears, but also meat juice: the poets of the eleventh century thus combined meat juice and tears. A quatrain by ʿOnṣorī, the panegyrist of the Ghaznavid sultan Maḥmūd, makes this clear:[30]

27 Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bayqarā, *Dīvān*, BNF Suppl. turc 993, 3r. The copy is dated 890/1485.
28 Kazimirski 1866, 14–5/166. On this poet, Clinton 1972. See also Yarhsater 1960.
29 Meisami 1987, 27.
30 ʿOnṣorī 1363/1984, 311.

Figure 6. Frontispiece of the Dīvān *of Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bayqarā, Timurid ruler of Herat (copied in 890/1485)*



گل بر رخ تست وچشم من غرقه بآب
من تافته وزلف تو پیچیده به تاب
زلف تو بر آتش است ومن گشته کباب
بی خواب من و نرگس تو مایهٔ خواب

Gol bar rokh-e tost-o chashm-e man gharqe be-āb.
Man tāfte-o zolf-e to pīchīde be-tāb.
Zolf-e to bar ātash ast-o man gasthe kabāb
Bī-khᵛāb man-o nargis-e to māye-ye khᵛāb

A rose is on your face, my eye is drowned in water. I'm burning [or : I'm bent over in pain], your hair is curled by the heat.
Your hair is on the fire; I've become a kebab [or : I rotate like the kebab].
I am restless, and your narcissi [i.d. eyes] are the essence of rest.

The poet uses the diverse meaning of the verb *tāftan*, which means both to burn, to heat, and to twist, to bend, hence, to make sad or suffer. In the second line, the hair becomes a metaphor for the grill on the brazier: the worried poet compares himself to the kebab on that hearth.

In the second half of the eleventh century, references to kebab increased in number and sophistication: from two or three occurrences by the early Ghaznavid panegyrists, to around 10 in the panegyrists of the Ghaznavids of India, Sanjar the Seljuk and the courts of Azerbaijan. Masʿūd-e Saʿd (*ca*. 438–515/1046–1122), the first great poet of Ghaznavid India, who spent many years in captivity, forged the two images of the kebab roasting on the fire of separation (*ātash-e hejrān*, *firāq*), and of the kebab salted by the mouth of the beloved. *Namak* means not only salt but also wit, charm. The conversation with the beloved is full of salt; his mouth, likened to a saltshaker, sprinkles salt on the lover's roasted heart and makes it tasty and easy to digest.[31]

برفت از بر من هوش من برفت و نماند
حدیث چون نمک او بر این دل چو کباب

Beraft az bar man hūsh-e man beraft-o namānd
Ḥadīth chūn namak-e u bar īn del chū kabāb

I'm losing my mind; he's [or it's] gone and did not stay! Our conversation is like salt that he would pour on this roasted heart of mine.

In Seljuk Iran, Moʿezzī (*ca*. 440–519 or 521/1048–1125 or 1127), for his part, imposed the central theme of the banquet, which relegated the hunting theme to the background. He took over from Manūchehrī the triad of kebab, wine, and music, which he used in various forms:[32]

31 Masʿūd-e Saʿd 1986, 57.
32 Moʿezzī 1362/1983, 61.

به جان تو که درو هیچگه نبود مرا
فراغتی ز شراب و کباب و چنگ و رباب
رباب نالهٔ من بود و چنگ قامت من
سرشک من چو شراب و دلم به سان کباب

Be jān-e to ke darū hīchgeh nabūd marā
Farāghatī ze sharāb-o kabāb-o chang-o rabāb
Rabāb nāle-ye man būd-o chang qāmat-e man
Sereshk-e man chū sharāb-o delam be sān-e kabāb

In your soul, where I had no place, entertainment was provided by wine,
kebabs, harps, and rebecs.
The rebec was my sobbing and the lute my stature; my
tears were like wine and my heart like a kebab.

The great panegyrists of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, from Azerbaijan to India, laid the foundations for the imagery of the kebab. They took it from the epics and transposed it to the refined setting of the court. The central location is the banquet, where people eat kebab while drinking wine and listening to music. The poets reflect on the distance that court life creates between them and their patron: while they offer the wine of their tears, the kebab of their hearts and the music of their sobs, the princes neglect them. And that is why they burn in the fire of separation.

4. Butchers and Roasters in the Cities of the Orient: Sacred Love, Profane Love

Grilled meat was a familiar food in the cities of the East. The *ḥisba* manuals of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Naṣr al-Shayzarī, written in the Fatimid and then Ayyubid Syria, and Ibn al-Ukhuwwa (648–729/1258–1328), written in Mamluk Egypt, describe the butchers, roasters (*shawwāʾ*), sheep's head sellers, fried fish sellers, and street cooks (*ṭabbākh*).[33] Roasters would cook their own meat and that brought to them by people without ovens at home.[34] The *Sessions* (*Maqāmāt*) of Hamadhānī (358–395/969–1007) and Ḥarīrī (446–516/1054–1122) provide striking evidence of the importance of roasted meat in the diet and social habits of the well-off urban classes.[35] One of the oldest illustrated manuscript of Ḥarīrī's *Sessions* contains a painting of a banquet scene.[36]

Sufi poets played a major role in the spectacular enrichment of kebab imagery: Sanāyī (d. 525/1130–1131) in Ghazna and Merv, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (471–561/1078–1166) in Baghdad, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (*ca.* 537–617/1142–1220) in Nishapur, Rūmī (604–672/1207–1273) in Konya, all of whom made extensive use of the kebab to describe their spiritual journey – the Sufi's love for God warms up his body; the heat cooks his heart and liver. The transition from profane to sacred love was made

33 al-Shayzarī 1999, 52–59; Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938, 30–5.
34 Nasrallah 2007, 40.
35 Lewicka 2011, 124.
36 Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, BNF Arabe 5847, 47v, session n°18.

Figure 7. A banquet in Baghdad in the thirteenth century

possible by the medieval muslims' analogical worldview, as noted by Julie Meisami[37] and theorised by Philippe Descola:[38] a Persian or Turkish poem can often (but not always) be read either as a Sufi poem or as an erotic poem. Profane love is not opposed to sacred love: on the contrary, it can lead to it. Sacred love, on the other hand, does not necessarily presuppose a profane love relationship, but it has to be expressed in the language of the concrete world, the only world available to the poet. It should also be

37 Meisami 1987, 38–39.
38 Descola 2005.

recalled that digestion (*ḥaḍm*) was conceived, in Greco-Arabic medicine, as a cooking of food in the stomach. Thus the poet Sanāyī writes:[39]

هست سنایی ز عشق بر سر آتش مدام
گشته دل او کباب جانش پر از جوش بین

Hast Sanāyī ze ʿeshq bar sar-e ātash modām
Gashte del-e u kabāb jānash por az jūsh bīn

Sanāyī is continually on the fire of passion:
his heart has become kebab, see his soul boiling!

The romances of Niẓāmī of Ganja (*ca*. 483–554/1090–1159) and Amīr Khusraw of Delhi (651–725/1253–1325) contain few original variations.[40] While most of Niẓāmī's images of kebab are inspired by Firdawsī, less common are those adapted from the panegyrics and ghazals of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. A century and a half later, Amīr Khusraw of Delhi crafted his pentalogy after Niẓāmī's, while incorporating more epic and erotic metaphors. His ghazals, which contain some 40 references to kebab, are much more original. Some verses are very close to traditional themes:[41]

هر دم جگر در سوز و تاب از دیده ریزم خون ناب
اینک می و اینک کباب آن میهمان من کجا

Har dam jegar dar sūz-o tāb az dide rīzam khūn-nāb
Īnak mey-o īnak kabāb ān mīhmān-e man kojā

Every moment my liver is consumed, my eyes shed tears of blood.
Here's the wine, here's the kebab! Where's this guest of mine?

Khusraw and the Sufi poets prove to be very interested in cooking and seasoning: *kabāb-āb* gives way to the *kabāb-sharāb*, which are related to blood (*khūn*, *khūnāb*) and meat juice (another meaning of *āb*). The bittersweet ubiquity of the beloved leads the poet to multiply references to salt, which Masʿūd-e Saʿd Salmān had associated with kebab.[42]

در دل خویشتن خیال لبت
نمکی بر کباب میبینم

Dar del-e khᵛīstan khayāl-e labat
Namakī bar kabāb mībīnam

The shadow of your lips on my heart seems to [sprinkle] salt on the kebab.

39 Sanāʾī 1375/1996, 477. On this poet, see, Feuillebois-Pierunek 2021.
40 On ghazal and romances, see Lewis 2005, 121–40; Meisami 1987, 237–98; 76–236 respectively; Meisami 2005, 327–42.
41 Khusraw 1361/1983, ghazal no 15, 8.
42 *ibid*., ghazal no. 1346, 447.

Khusraw uses common themes, but also introduces more or less original variations. There is often a blurred line between a faithful variation and a new image. That is why some of Khusraw's images seem to us sharper than others. Here is one example:[43]

بس باشک آلوده شخصم گوئیا
سیخی از آب کباب آلوده اند

Bas bāshk-ālūde shakhṣam gūyā
Sīkhī az āb-e kabāb ālūde and

I'm someone completely drenched in tears:
I look like a skewer soaked in kebab juice.

Khusraw means that passion has left him emaciated and bloodless. This comparison shows how deep poetic invention is rooted in a certain worldview, which underpins here the theory of humours, and in a poetical tradition.

In the second half of the fourteenth and in the fifteenth centuries, poets continued to play with kebab, with the remarkable exception of Saʿdī (d. 691/1292) and Ḥāfiẓ (d. 792/1390). Readers familiar with kebab imagery will now appreciate it on their own and distinguish between the conventional variations, which are essential for passing on the tradition in the background, and the more daring variations, which rejuvenate it.[44] Here are a few examples:

بتاب سینه چراغ فلک برافروزند
ز آب دیده نمک بر دل کباب زنند

Be-tāb-e sīne cherāgh-e falak bar afrūzand
Ze āb-e dīde namak bar del-e kabāb zanand

They light the torch of the celestial spheres with the ardour of their breasts; they salt the roasted heart with the tears of their eyes.[45]

خیالش از دل و چشمم نمیرود بیرون
کجا رود که شراب و کباب میبیند

Khayālash az del-o chashmam namīravad bīrūn
Kojā ravad ke sharāb-o kabāb mībīnad

His image never leaves my heart and eyes: where would he go to find wine and kebab?[46]

43 *ibid*., respectively ghazal no. 739, 247.
44 Subtelny's 1986 article gives an insight into the poetic style of this period of refinement (*takalluf*), sometimes deemed excessive by *taẕkira* authors such as Jāmī and ʿAlī Shīr Navāʾī. Cf. Algar 2013; d'Hubert and Papas 2018; Toutant 2016.
45 Khvājū-ye Kermānī 1374/1995–1996, ghazal no. 140 (*Safariyyāt*), 422.
46 Salmān Sāvajī 1376/1997–1998, ghazal no. 199, 311.

دل سوخت در سماع و نمی ایستد ز چرخ
رقصی ست گرم بر سرآتش کباب را

Del sūkht dar samāʿ-o namī īstad ze charkh
Raqṣīst garm bar sar-ātash kabābrā

The heart roasts in the *samāʿ* and doesn't stop spinning: it is an impetuous dance for the kebab over the fire.[47]

شرار سینه مجنون ز آتش لیلی
کباب ساخته همه آهوان صحرا را

Sharār-e sīne-ye Majnūn ze ātash-e Leylā
Kabāb sākhte hame āhuvān-e ṣaḥrārā

The spark from Majnūn's chest, sprung from Laylā's fire, roasted all the gazelles in the desert.[48]

When they wrote their poems, poets were not only thinking about the princely banquets of the panegyrics, but also about the roasters and butchers of their towns. With the rise of Sufi poetry and the ghazal, in the course of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, the imagery of the kebab expanded with new images, suggesting the thrilling urban life and the depth of the *adab*, the literate culture of the cities.

5. The Adoption of Kebab Imagery by Turkish-speaking Anatolian Poets (Fourteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)

The first references to kebab in Turkish poetry date from the fourteenth century.[49] Şeyyād Ḥamza (d. after 749/1348–1349), an itinerant poet and Sufi who lived in Anatolia during the first half of the fourteenth century, refers only to the literal meaning of the word 'kebab': in his edifying verses, kebab symbolises the delicious food of Paradise,[50] perhaps in reference to a prophetic saying notoriously reported by Abū Ḥanīfa: 'The noblest food of the people of this world and of Paradise is meat.'[51] His contemporary Yūnus Emre (d. 720/1320) is more clearly in line with the dual heritage of Sufi poetry and Persian ghazal. Four poems refer to kebab and six to roast (*biryān*, *püryān*):[52]

ʿĀşıḳam diyen cānlaruñ baġrı kebābdur anlaruñ
Gözlerinüñ aḳan yaşı cigerinüñdür ḳanları

The breast of the souls who say 'I'm in love,' is kebab; the tears of their eyes are the blood of their liver.

47 Kamāl-e Khojandī 1975, 30.
48 Jāmī 1378/1999–2000, ghazal no. 26 (*Fātiḥat al-Shabāb*), 200.
49 See a list of the main literary works of this period in Mecdut Mansuroğlu 1954, 250–64.
50 Şeyyād Ḥamza 2017, 80, v. 935.
51 Abū Ḥanīfa 1960, vol. II, 107.
52 Yūnus Emre 2008, *ġazel* no. 47; 400; 406; 415 (respectively, pp. 38; 326; 331 339).

In the first half of the fourteenth century, the verses of Ḫoca Dehhānī (which should be dated to this period, according to Günay Kut, and contrary to earlier hypotheses by Fuat Köprülü and Alessio Bombaci)[53] are in line with Yūnus Emre, even if they demonstrate a greater integration of Persian imagery.[54] A quantitative and qualitative leap occurred with the *qāḍī* Burhāneddīn (r. 783–800/1381–1398), whose *dīvān* is preserved in a British Museum *unicum* from 976/1393. Burhāneddīn, who had received an excellent education in Arabic and Persian, was judge of Kayseri under the Eretnids. Between 1381 and his death, he administered the region, on his behalf, from the city of Sivas. He played an important role in the development of Turkish-language lyric poetry, and was an avid user of the kebab imagery, which appears 30 times in his poems. Whereas the poems of Yūnus Emre and Ḫoca Dehhānī often give a hint that divine love is meant, those of Burhāneddīn nearly always exhibit an obvious worldliness. The *qāḍī* depicts with fondness the meal taken with the beloved, and more rarely the torments suffered by the lover, roasted in the fire of separation.[55]

Ciger kebāb u gözüñ sāḳī vü yaruñ meydür
Ṭuṭaġuñı daḫı bu dem şeker-fürūş idelüm

[My] liver is the kebab, your eyes the cupbearer, your saliva
the wine. This time, let's make your lips a sugar seller!

The kebab imagery of Burhāneddīn is almost entirely based on the pairing of kebab and wine. The Persian locution *kabāb kardan* is translated as *kebāb eylemek*. The fire of love or separation becomes *firāḳuñ odı* and *ʿışḳuñ odı*, rather than *āteş-i fırāḳ*/*ʿışḳ*, which would come to the fore in the fifteenth century. Without bringing any major innovations, his kebab images are varied, and his intimate banquet scenes have a realistic and pleasing tone.

The evolution of kebab imagery in Turkish poetry becomes easier to follow from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Aḥmedī (*ca.* 735–815/1334–1413), originally from eastern Anatolia, studied in Mamluk Cairo, then moved to the principality of Aydın, the main intellectual centre of western Anatolia in the second half of the fourteenth century, and finally to the Ottoman realms. Aḥmed-i Dāʿī (d. 824/1421) began his career at the Germiyanid court, before emigrating to the Ottoman beylik. Şeyḫī (d. 832/1429) was born in Kütahya, which belonged to the lands of the Germiyanids, and then studied in Persia, from where he returned as an ophthalmic physician. He practised his art in the service of the Germiyanids and then the Ottomans. These three poets resorted to kebab imagery about 10 times, or about one poem in 20. The images of Aḥmedī and the poet-doctor Şeyḫī, who also studied with Aḥmedī for some time in his youth, show a strong proximity to those of their predecessor, the *qāḍī* Burhāneddin. We are confronted with the fire of separation (*ayrulıġuñ odı*), the fire of love, and the tears of blood.

53 Ersoy and Ay 2015.
54 Hoca Dehhânî 2017, *ġazel* no. 59; 65; 86; 91 (respectively, pp. 104; 108; 120; 123).
55 Kadı Burhaneddin 1980, *ġazel* no. 920, 357.

ʿIşḳ odı yüregümde duṭışub yanar müdām
Anuñçün oldı gözlerüm ucdan uca kebāb

The fire of love ignites and burns relentlessly in my heart:
that's why my eyes are completely fried.[56]

Yanar iken şecer-i aḥḍar içre gül nāra
ʿAceb mi lāle gibi dil ciger ḳılursa kebāb

Since the rose burns on the green tree, is it any wonder that it [the rose] turns the heart and liver into kebab like a tulip?[57]

Aḥmed-i Dāʿī's poems offer an interesting counterpoint, because he employs kebab imagery in panegyric and erotic poems that are more realistic in tone than those of his two contemporaries. In a panegyric *ġazel* written for Murād II (r. 824–848/1421–1444 and 850–855/1446–1451), the poet describes a country picnic. He calls on the cupbearer: 'Load up a hundred skins of wine (*süciden yüz ṭuluḳ*) and a hundred sheep to roast!'[58] He goes on to describe warriors whose only capital is the sword and the horse, and who, under the beneficent reign of the sultan, can spend their time feasting.

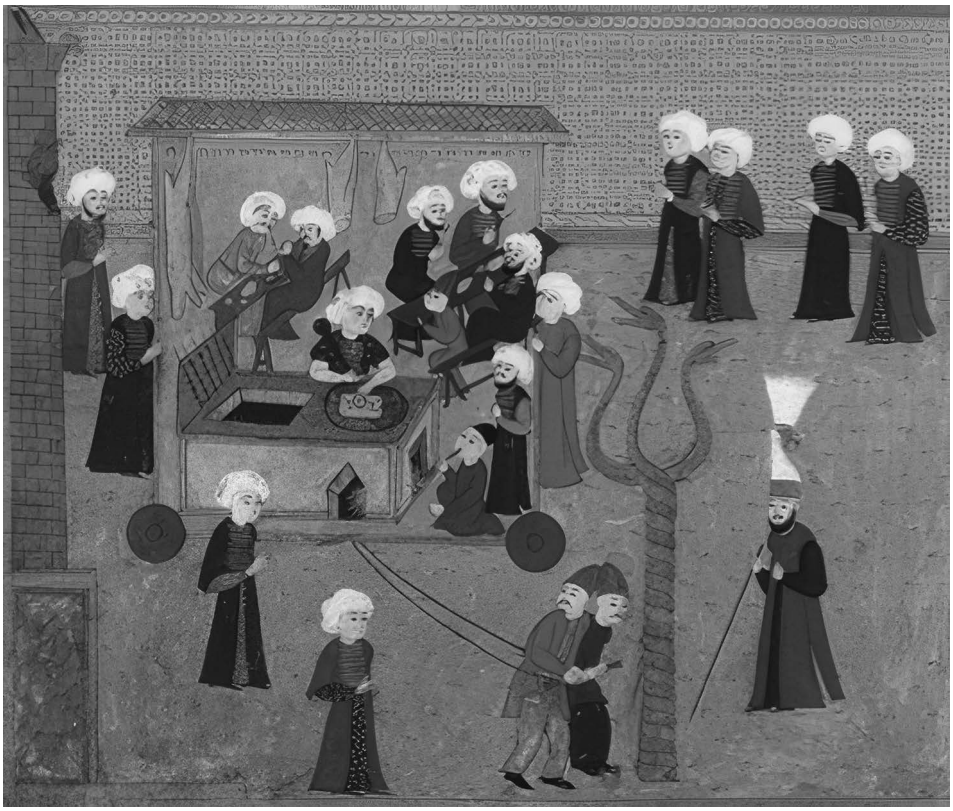
Kebab imagery had taken root in Anatolia during the period of the Sultanate of Rūm, *via* Persian-language poetry. However, we should not forget that Rūmī spent his life in Konya, where he died in 672/1273. Turkish-speaking Sufi poets were the first to adopt this imagery to depict the delights of Paradise to their followers, and then to express their spiritual experiences, such as Yūnus Emre and Ḫoca Dehhānī. The *qāḍī* Burhāneddīn made great use of it, contributing to give kebab imagery a more worldly and concrete patina than in the Persian world. This could explain why we do not find kebab imagery in the major works of religious literature of the fifteenth century, like Süleymān Çelebi's (d. 825/1422) *Mevlid* or Yazıcıoġlu Meḥmed's (d. 855/1451) *Muḥammediyye*. The major poets of the late fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth century clearly followed the path borrowed by the *qāḍī* of Sivas.

6. Circulation of Poetic Variations in Safavid-Mughal Persian (Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)

Kebab-eating habits did not change during the early modern period. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Jean de Thévenot (1633–1667) wrote that Turks ate 'pilau' (*pilav*) and meat 'either roast or boiled'[59] every day. Persian habits were similar:[60] Thévenot and Jean Chardin (1643–1713) describe the unchanged techniques for cooking meat.[61] The

56 Aḥmedī n.d., *ġazel* no. 54, 244.
57 Şeyḫī 2018, *ḳaṣīde* no. 13, 49.
58 Ertaylan 1952, '*yüklet süciden yüz ṭuluḳ sögülme içün yüz bere*.'
59 Thévenot 1664–1674, vol. 1, 61–2.
60 See Taillard 1991.
61 Chardin 2018, 519; Thévenot 1664–1674, vol. 1, 180.

Figure 8. Parade of craftsmen in Istanbul (May–July 1582)



high esteem in which kebab was held at the Safavid court is evident from a recipe book composed in 1594 by Nūrallāh, the cook of Shāh ʿAbbās (r. 995–1038/1587–1629), as it is from the travel account of Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689).[62] Beyond the refinements of the royal courts, one always encountered, in the cities of the three Empires and as far as Central Asia, the unavoidable butchers and roasters.

Ottoman sources illustrate this continuity. On the festivities (*sūr*, *sünnet*) given for the births, marriages, and circumcisions of young princes, the sultans paraded the trade guilds and offered lavish banquets. A register describing the purchases for the circumcision feast, in 1539, of Prince Bāyezīd, son of Süleymān the Magnificent (r. 926–974/1520–1566), mentions 10 kinds of kebab presented to guests, according to their social rank.[63] Levnī's illustrated *Sūrnāme*, composed after the 1720 festivities, given for the circumcision of the four sons of Aḥmed III (r. 1115–1143/1703–1730),

62 Tavernier 1676, vol. 1, 642–3.
63 Tezcan 1998. Another concordant example is given by Emecen 2003, 89–126.

mentions the purchase of several thousand birds.[64] The illustrated account of the circumcision of Prince Meḥmed, in 1582, depicts a roaster's shop on wheels.[65] A stove replaces the *tennūr*, which was certainly difficult to transport on a parade float.

As these examples show, the image of the king as hunter and nurturer was still maintained. The monumental kitchens of the Topkapı Palace, with their impressive row of chimneys, were a reminder that the sultan kept a watchful eye on the satiety of his subjects.[66]

The *sūrnāme* makes frequent use of the imagery of the kebab.[67] The anonymous *Sūrnāme-i Hümāyūn* from Vienna, dedicated to the festivities of 990/1582, describes the banquets and procession of artisans in Istanbul. As the vendors of *boza*, a drink made from fermented grain, passed by, 'one of them was grilling kebabs in a *tannūr* and spinning them, and the spectators rushed towards him.'[68] In the seventeenth century, Evliyā Çelebi counted 1,500 *kebābcı* and *köfteci* in Istanbul, running 400 shops, and 200 *biryāncı*, in 155 shops.[69] Along with street cooks (*aşçı*), roasters formed one of the two main food trades in the capital.

Given this significant presence, it comes as no surprise that the roaster features prominently in the *shahrāshūb* (in Persian) or *şehrengīz* (in Turkish), that is, collections of poems dedicated to a city's young craftsmen, which were very popular from the Timurid period onwards.[70] One of the best poets of the genre was Lisānī of Shiraz (d. 940/1533). He dedicates a ghazal to a roaster from Tabriz:[71]

دایم ز نظاره ای کبابی
دارد دل زارم این خرابی
یار از دل زار پر حسابست
اوراق کباب ازین کتابست
اشکم به شب سیاه هجران
چون اشک کباب دارد افغان
تا کی گردد دل ستم کش
از غم چو کباب تر در آتش
دارد خَلِش از جدایی او
چون سیخ کباب بر تنم مو
هر لاله که در بساط راغست
از رشک شدن سنگ داغست

64 Atıl 2000, 48. See İşkorkutan 2021.
65 Bağcı, Çağman, Renda, Tanındı 2006, 143.
66 On official meals at the Palace, Reindl-Kiel 2003, 59–88.
67 See Arslan 2008–2013.
68 Procházka-Eisl 1995, 137 (f. 47v): '*ve biri daḥi tannūrda gird-ā-gird döne döne kebāb bişirüb seyr ėdenleri serā-pā başına üşürmekde*.'
69 Dankoff, Kahraman and Dağlı 1996, vol. 1, 270.
70 On this genre, see Golçin-e Maʿānī 1346/1967–1968. For a summary of the history of this literary genre, Ambros 1986, 11–7; Çalış-Kural 2014; Sunil 2016, 141–51.
71 Bricteux 1932.

Dāyim ze neẓāre-ye kabābī
Dārad del-e zāram īn kharābī
Yār az del-e zār por ḥesābast
Evrāq-e kabāb azīn ketābast
Ashkam be shab-e siyāh-e hejrān
Chūn ashk-e kabāb dārad efghān
Tā key gardad del-e setam-kash
Az gham chū kabāb-e tar dar ātash
Dārad khalesh az jodāyī-ye ū
Chūn sīkh-e kabāb bar tanam mū
Har lāle ke dar bisāṭ-e rāghast
Az rashk shodan-e sang-e dāghast

Every time I see that roaster, my poor heart turns to rubble.
This friend has many scores to settle because of the poor heart: the *avrāq* of the kebab come from this book.[72]
My tears, in the dark night of separation, sob like kebab tears.
How long will the oppressed heart turn from grief to fire, like a juicy kebab?
It hurts to be separated from him, as if the kebab skewer is a hair on my body.
Every tulip on the prairie carpet is marked by the jealousy of the stone.

The ghazal opens with the famous comparison between the heart and ruins. Here, the poet is literally ruined: he cannot pay the roaster and has to borrow from him. Lisānī then compares his weeping with the sound of the fat of the meat dipping with a hiss into the water-filled container that was usually placed under the roast, so that the precious juice is not lost. The heart is oppressed by grief, which makes the kebab turn on the fire (double meaning of the verb *gashtan*: to turn and to become). The next verse compares the kebab to hair; and the last verse refers to the mineralogical theory according to which rubies are produced by the effects of solar radiation on stones. An Ottoman contemporary of Lisānī, Kerīmī wrote a *şehrengīz* for the city of Edirne, in which he depicts a roaster named Muṣli (Muṣliḥüddīn) Bālī.[73] It should be mentioned that food poetry developed at the same time: Būsḥāq-e Aṭʿimma devoted his poetry to writing 'imitation' (*naẓīre*) to classical poets, using food vocabulary. Kebab is mentioned a couple of times, but it is not a central motif for him.[74]

In the Persian and Turkish poetry of this period, the imagery of the kebab broadened in an unprecedented way. Iranian and Western critics and literary historians of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries spoke of the 'Indian style' (*sabk-e hindī*); in recent decades, several works have highlighted the limitations of this neo-classical and nationalist approach, which assigned geographical limits to an international style and overlooked the plurality of styles.[75] The study of the imagery of the kebab confirms

72 *Awrāq* can mean coins, leaflets, bloodstains, and pigeons (*kabūter*).
73 Göre 2015, 26–7, v. 59–61.
74 Būsḥāq-e Aṭʿimma 1382/2003.
75 Ahmad 1976; Dudney 2016; Faruqi 2004; Heinz 1973; Pellò 2012; Yarshater 1974.

the theories proposed by Paul Losensky in his work on Bābā Fighānī (d. 925/1519):[76] the 'new style' [*tāze-gūyī*] arose from the conscious play with the classical poetic tradition, collected and systematised in the Timurid period, by several poets of the first half of the fifteenth century. The verses of Bābā Fighānī and Ahlī of Shiraz (858–942/1454–1535), which contain around 10 and 50 mentions of kebab respectively, show how this play could take place:

از لخت کباب دل ما زود شدی سیر
حق نمک صحبت دیرینه کجا شد

Az lakht-e kabāb-e del-e mā zūd shodī sīr
Ḥaqq-e namak-e ṣoḥbat-e dīrīne kojā shod

You were soon satisfied with the grilled pieces of my liver; where is the consideration [lit. 'the right of salt'] for the bonds of the old hospitality?[77]

دل کباب ز خوناب دیده بد نام است
بسوختیم و هنوز از تو کار ما خام است

Del-e kabāb ze khūnāb-e dīde bad-nām ast
Besūkhtīm-o hanūz az to kār-e mā khām ast

The roasted heart is infamous because of the blood spilt by the eyes; we've burnt, but our love affair is still in its infancy [lit. 'is still raw'].[78]

These two verses show how Fighānī and Ahlī maintained a dialogue with their predecessors, mediated by their own experience of the world: instead of the whole roasted animals of the *Shāhnāma* and classical panegyrics, they wrote about small pieces of liver and still-raw kebab, reminiscent of the kebab sellers and the street cooks. From this point of view, the imagery of the kebab could not become abstract and dry, because it was transmitted as well as being kept alive.

The successors of Fighānī and Ahlī, especially those who flourished in India, like ʿOrfī (963–999/1555–1591) or Kalīm (990 or 994–1061/1651), increasingly took liberties with tradition. But Ṣāʾeb-e Tabrīzī (*ca.* 1000–1087/1592–1676) surpassed them all by far: he proposed no fewer than 330 variations on the kebab. As demonstrated by Losensky,[79] he recapitulated the earlier tradition and enriched it with impressive new images. First, these poets favoured the bird kebab to the mutton kebab, because it allowed a greater use of skewers and even spades.

دلم از صوت تذروان بهشتی نگشود
گوش بر نالهٔ مرغان کباب اندازیم

Delam az ṣowt-e tadharvān-e beheshtī nagoshūd
Gūsh bar nāle-ye morghān-e kabāb andāzīm

76 Losensky 1998.
77 Fighānī 1340/1962, ghazal no. 304, 265.
78 Ahlī 1344/1965, ghazal no. 198, 61.
79 Losensky 1998, 212–30.

My heart was not touched by the song of the celestial pheasants: let's listen to the complaint of the grilled birds.[80]

در زلف دل سوخته ام بهر چه بندی
این مرغ کباب آگهی از دام ندارد

Dar zolf del sokhte am be-har che bandī
Īn morgh-e kabāb āgahī az dām nadārad

By everything you have bound in [your] locks my heart is burned,
that roasted bird doesn't realise it's walking into a trap.[81]

باشد کباب آتش هر جا سمندری است
من آن سمندرم که کباب من آتش است

Bāshad kabāb ātash har jā samandarī ast
Man ān samandaram ke kabāb-e man ātash ast

The kebab takes fire, wherever there's a salamander: I'm
that salamander whose kebab is the fire.[82]

It is not only the heart or liver that is roasted in the chest: Ṣāʾeb dreams of grandiose burnt sacrifices, pushing to the limits an evolution that had begun in the fifteenth century.

ز شوق آن لب میگون اگر گردی کباب اینجا
ز خامی در قیامت طعمه آتش نسازندت

Ze showq-e ān lab-e mey-gūn agar gardī kabāb īnjā
Ze khāmī dar qiyāmat ṭoʿme-ye ātash nasāzandat

If, with your fervour for these wine-coloured lips, you become
a kebab here [i.e. in this life],
you will not fall prey to fire on Judgment Day for being raw.[83]

As a counterpoint to this cosmic show, poets write paradoxical verses, based either on attributing unusual qualities to an object, or on parallels between abstract meanings and concrete images. Even more than their predecessors of the sixteenth century, Ṣāʾed and similar poets excelled at subverting classical images:

در گلشنی که چهره بر افروخت شمع ما
مستان نمی خورند به غیر از کباب گل

Dar golshanī ke chahre bar afrūkht shamʿ-e mā
Mastān namīkhorand be ghayr az kabāb-e gol

80 ʿUrfī 1377/1999, ghazal no. 767, 768.
81 Kalīm 1369/1990, ghazal no. 298, 390.
82 Ṣāʾeb-e Tabrīzī 1365/1985, ghazal no. 1905, vol. II, 937.
83 *ibid*., ghazal no. 312, vol. I, 161.

In the rose garden, where [his] face lights our candle, the drunkards eat nothing but rose kebabs.[84]

زنهار خنده بر دل مجروح ما مکن
خونابه می کند نمکت را کباب ما

Zenhār khande bar del-e majrūḥ-e mā makon
Khūnābe mīkonad namakatrā kabāb-e mā

Don't laugh at our wounded hearts: our kebab sprays your salt [i.e. your lips] with blood.[85]

After the death of Ṣā'eb and up to the middle of the eighteenth century, Persian-speaking poets continued to use the imagery of the kebab, but no one devoted as many verses to it as him. The number of instances declined to a dozen for each poet, with Ṣā'eb remaining an essential inspiration. Fayyāż-e Lahījī, a disciple of Molla Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1641) and a friend of Ṣā'eb, even described the process of imitation through a kebab image: 'Fayyāż can spin the kebab of Ṣā'eb's verse; the wounded prey, attracted by the smell of the kebab, falls into his mind.'[86] Persian-speaking poets in India and Central Asia continued to use this kebab imagery until the nineteenth century, as can be seen in the poetry of Bīdil (*ca.* 1054–1133/1644–1720)[87] or the Bukharan poet Sayyidā-ye Nasafī (d. between 1707 and 1711). By contrast, the poets of Iran, from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards moved away from it and rehabilitated the older imagery of classical panegyrics and epics. Before examining these final avatars of the kebab, we need to have a look at the appropriation of kebab imagery by the Ottoman contemporaries of the Safavid and Mughal poets.

7. Ottoman Poets of the Classical Age and the Imagery of the Kebab (Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)

The popularity of kebab imagery between the mid-sixteenth and early twentieth centuries can be traced in two series of documents: the *Dīvān* of the Ottoman sultans and the *teẕkire*, collections of poets' biographies.[88] Their examination leads to the same conclusion: unlike the Persian-speaking poets of the Safavid-Mughal area, the Ottomans were relatively quick to neglect the imagery of the kebab, which reached an early peak at the end of the fifteenth and in the sixteenth centuries, before declining rapidly. The three sultans who made the greatest use of the kebab were Selim I, Süleymān the Magnificent, and Murād III: three sultans of the sixteenth century. With

84 Salīm-e Tehrānī 1349/1970–1971, 324.
85 Ṣā'eb-e Tabrīzī 1985/1365, ghazal no. 366 ,752.
86 Fayyāż-e Lahījī 1373/1994–1995, ghazal no. 472, 247: 'که از بوی کباب افتد به فکر زخم نخجیرش/ کباب مصرع صائب توان فیّاض گردیدن'.
87 Keshavmurthy 2016.
88 Listed in Stewart-Robinson 1965.

one exception, the four *teẕkire* that mention the kebab more than 10 times are from the mid to late sixteenth century. The use of kebab imagery therefore peaked when Turkish poetry was starting to distinguish itself from Persian poetry, and diminished as it became more autonomous.[89]

Why is it that the Ottoman poets, who were familiar with the Persian New Style, did not take greater advantage of this great emancipation of the poetic imagination?[90] It may be a problem of primitive accumulation of poetic capital: it seems that no poet of the early classical period uses the kebab imagery on a big enough scale, which could have been a starting point for further variations. At the turn of the sixteenth century, Aḥmed Paşa (d. 902/1496), Necātī Bey (d. 914/1509), his disciple Mihrī Ḫātun (d. after 917/1512), and Mesīḥī (d. 918/1512) used the kebab about 10 times, a far cry from the dozens of instances among Persian poets. Fużūlī (d. 963/1556) and Bāḳī (d. 1008/1600) are quantitatively and qualitatively at the same level:

Ḳan yaş töküb yanında gezer āteşüñ kebāb
Maʿşūḳa beñzer āteş ü ʿāşıḳ kebāb aña

The kebab sheds tears of blood as it goes around the fire: the fire looks like the beloved and the kebab-like lover to it [the fire].[91]

Kesildüm sīḫ-i miḥnetden çekildüm cām-ı ʿişretden
Kebābum dil şarābum eşk-i çeşmüm künc-i ʿuzletde

I have been separated from the skewer of affliction, I have renounced the banquet cup; my kebab is the heart, my wine is the tears in my eyes, in solitary retreat.[92]

In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the use of the kebab imagery shrank further. Turkish-speaking poets associated with the 'new style' remained aloof from the Persian-speaking lust for kebab imagery. Şeyḫülislām Yaḥyā (969–1053/1552–1644), Bāḳī's successor at the head of the official religious hierarchy (*ʿilmiyye*) and the leading poet of his time, mentions the kebab only twice, with one occurrence being visibly inspired by his predecessor. In the spiritual poetry of Nābī (1052–1124/1642–1712), kebab features so little that, in most of his rhymed poems in *-āb* where wine (*şarāb*) is mentioned, kebab is not even associated with it. Nedīm (1092–1143/1681–1730), whose poetry is inextricably linked to the Istanbul of the Tulip Age (*lāle devri*), as Ahmed Refik Altınay put it, offered just four verses featuring kebab; even the Mevlevis, whose initiation took place in a convent kitchen, hardly used kebab, perhaps put off by its overly worldly connotations.

Having said that, Ottoman poetry was not devoid of interesting qualitative variations. A poet from the second half of the eighteenth century could still write: 'In

89 For an overview of this period, see Kuru 2013.
90 On the New Style in the Ottoman Empire, see Aynur, Çakır and Koncu 2006; Feldman 2018; Glünz 2016; İnan 2017.
91 Fużūlī 2021, *ġazel* no. 9, 368.
92 Bāḳī n.d., *ġazel* no. 432, 265.

*ġazel*s, kebab and wine take many meanings.'[93] First, several poets relied on a proverb, *ne şiş yansın ne de kebab* (lit. 'provided that neither the skewer nor the kebab burns'; i.e. 'without displeasing anyone'). For example, Sehī Beg (d. 954/1548) writes: [94]

Tīr-i ġamzeñ deldi baġrum cevr ile hey pür-belā
Odı şöyle eyle kim ne sīḫ yansun ne kebāb

O great calamity! The arrows of your eyes have cruelly pierced my breast.
'Prepare the fire so that neither the skewer nor the kebab will burn.'

Ottoman poets also frequently associate kebab with astrology. They imagine conjunctions between the sun, located in the fourth sphere of Ptolemy's cosmology, and the zodiac signs of Aries, Taurus, Capricorn or Pisces: their beloved or patron becomes a glowing star that roasts the stars or, conversely, their burning fervour rises up to the sky.

Çıḳar eflāke āh-ı āteşīnüm
Kebāb olmışdur anuñla ḥamel ṣevr

My fervent sighs go up to the spheres: the ram (Aries)
and the bull (Taurus) were roasted by them.[95]

Lastly, Ottoman poets, like their Persian-speaking counterparts, had a striking predilection for images of skewers.

Sīḫ-i teʾṣīri ider ṭāʾir-i Cibrīli kebāb
Āteşīn demle yanub maṭbaḫ-ı mey-ḫāne-i ney

The skewer of his effects [of the reed flute] roasts Gabriel's bird [the Holy Spirit]: the kitchen in the tavern of the flute burns under his fervent breath.[96]

Ottoman poets were not as tireless versifiers of the kebab imagery as their Persian-speaking contemporaries, especially from the end of the sixteenth century onwards. This was perhaps because the most popular poets did not use it extensively, although they did build on the classical tradition through their variations and succeeded in forging some original images by taking advantage of a proverb, astrology or skewers, a tool familiar to every customer of a street restaurant.

8. Three Reasons for the Slow Disappearance of Kebab Imagery (Mid-eighteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries)

Three factors contributed to the gradual disappearance, at different speeds, of the imagery of the kebab. The first was changes in the poetic idiom. In the case of Iran, a

93 Müvaḳḳitzāde Meḥmed Pertev 2017, *ġazel* no. 24, 51: '*Ġazelde bir nice mażmūn alur kebāb şarāb.*'
94 Sehī Beg 2020, 55.
95 Muḥyī 2020, *ġazel* no. 247, 270.
96 Şeyḫ Ġālib (1171–1213/1757–1799), *ġazel* no. 304, 396.

change began in Isfahan after the fall of the Safavids, in 1722, when a group of poets began to draw on the 'classical' poetry of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This modest literary movement was considered by Iranian literary critics of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries to be the starting point of the return (*bāz-gasht*) to classical poetry.[97] The increasing hegemony of Iranian neoclassical poets and literary critics in the Qadjar era threw the dazzling variations of the 'new style' into oblivion; that is why the trinity of *kabāb*, *sharāb* and *rabāb* again dominated Iranian literature until the Constitutional Revolution.

The second factor was the change in eating habits. Kebab did not disappear from the table, but it was no longer regarded as a proper poetical matter. In the new recipe books printed in Istanbul from 1844 onwards, which were no longer aimed at the court elite but at modern households,[98] new kinds of kebab, such as 'kebab macaroni' (*kebablı makaronya*) or 'kebab with cabbage' (*savoy kebabı*), appeared.[99] Publications of this type first emerged in Iran during the 1920s.[100] Their effect was probably to dissociate the kebab from the banquet, and to turn it into an everyday thing. The simultaneous weakening of trade guilds, from 1850 onwards in the Ottoman Empire and then in Iran, led to the development of European-style restaurants with a varied menu. A few years later, in 1271/1855, an Ottoman law ordered the removal of slaughterhouses from city centres. The elites, as in Europe at the same time, no longer wanted to see 'the blood of animals,'[101] associated with the working classes, who were thought to be cruel to animals, half-wild and dangerous. These developments undoubtedly contributed to stripping kebab and blood of their poetic connotations.

The transformation of the conceptions of power was the third factor in the depoetisation of the kebab. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Qadjar Iran. For a growing number of Ottomans and Iranians, the ideal prince was no longer the hunter and nurturing warrior of the *Shāhnāma*, but the constitutional monarch, respectful of the constitution and attentive to national economy. These new intellectuals were prone to criticising the relationship of domination implicit in all classical poetry, which features a sovereign and a panegyrist, a lover and a beloved, or God and his servant.

At the time of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, in 1908, there was a reversal of traditional poetic imagery to criticise power. Edward Browne quotes a poem by Ashraf of Gīlān, a mullah who supported the constitution.[102] The poet makes a conservative mullah speak, intimating to Ashraf: 'I am a reactionary, a reactionary, a reactionary! Stop preaching the Constitution for good!' And Ashraf parodies the imagery of the kebab to ridicule the conservative mullah:

97 Schwartz 2020, 35–80.
98 See Kâmil 1997.
99 Quoted in Samancı 2015, 252.
100 Fragner 1984, 332–3.
101 See Agulhon 1981.
102 Browne 1914, 188–90. The poem was published in *Nasīm al-Shimāl* on 31 March 1908.

مطربا خیز بزن چنگ و رود
ساقیکا باده بده زود زود
میخورم از خون رعیت شراب
میکنم از گوشت رعیت کباب

Muṭribā khīz bezan chang-o rūd
Sāqiyā bade bedeh zūd zūd
Mīkhoram az khūn-e raʿiyat sharāb
Mīkonam az gusht-e raʿiyat kabāb

Singer, get up and play your harp and lute! Cupbearer, pour some wine!
I drink the blood of the people as wine; I make kebab with the flesh of the people!

According to the conventions of classical poetry, the poet had to offer his blood and his heart to the beloved. Ashraf undermines these conventions: the conservative clergy, servile supporters of Qadjar absolutism, cannibalises the people instead of providing them with food. Ashraf heralded the end of the language of the classical panegyric, which was restored during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to express the relationship between the prince and his subjects. The disappearance of the imagery of the kebab thus reflects, in its own way, the need for a new poetic language, in which it no longer had a place.

It was the combination of these three factors – changes in eating habits and table manners, poetic language, and political ideas – that led to the decline and fall into disuse of kebab imagery. It now survives only indirectly, in a few everyday expressions, such as *pokhte shodan*, in Persian, or *pişmiş olmak*, in Turkish (meaning to be experienced or mature). Thus ends the story of an image that inspired Persian and Turkish poets for almost 1,000 years.

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