

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

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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.¹ 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' fī 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.² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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 دلداری *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*).⁶ So, if somebody "meets" or "sees" him, this must be understood as a divine distinction. Sufi manuals from various epochs stress that the encounter with Khizr is the privilege of the so-called "friends of God" (*awliyā' Allāh*).⁷ 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*).⁸ 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.⁹ 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".¹⁰ 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*).¹¹ 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".¹² Another encounter report, transmitted by al-Qushayrī 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".¹³ 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'amar*).¹⁴ 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.¹⁵*

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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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 *hadith*-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*).¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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 Nisābūrī²¹, 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 سرگشتند
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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.*²²

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.²³ But we also find a similar re-interpretation in the *Khamṣa* 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.²⁴ The idea of Khizr as an *alter ego* is perpetuated in some Turkish encounter reports²⁵ 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 روئی 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.²⁶ 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*.²⁷ 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:

مگوی 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^vāhī 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 Rūmī both lost their way: according to the Arab history (تاریخ تازی *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:

چو روزی نباشد دویدن چه سود تو بنشین که خود روزی آید پدید (SN60,91-92)	دوید از پس آنچه روزی نبود به دنبال روزی چه باید دوید
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*[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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ Likewise, Khizr was an important agent in the sanctification of localities and the legitimization of sanctuaries.³⁰ 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 Tarīq 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’nī*) 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 *bayt-i ahzān*; cf. *Surah* 12:84ff), while in reality he is looking for the “Egypt of love” (مصر عشق *misr-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” (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 *Hızır-nāme* (Book of Khizr) and represents one of the pinnacles in the history of the Turkish Khizr veneration.³¹ 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 aḡzāl-i khud*.³² 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 دولت برد) *in dawlat rā Sa’dī burd*.³³ 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 Ayyānsārāyi, 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 Ayyānsārāyi’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,³⁴ 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.³⁵

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 Ata³⁶ (d. 582/1186) as told in the *Hakīm Ata Kitābī* 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” (*ḡayḡ*). It was from this moment onwards that Hakīm Ata recited his famous mystical *hikmet*-poems.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ As P.N.

Boratav (*IA* V 468) has shown, the popular Turkish concept of the *‘āshiq* has an ambiguous character: *‘āshıqlıq* 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.⁴⁰ The interesting point is that in many tales on the *‘āshıqlar* 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).⁴¹ 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 Garib] 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 Garib, the other Shah Senem.” Then he disappeared from sight.*⁴²

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.⁴³

Around the same time, Hāfiz of Shīrāz became the object of a similar legend. As Jones relates,⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ In this

couplet⁴⁶, 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 Persianate⁴⁷ 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 Iqbal 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 Iqbal’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 Caliphate, the occupation of several Arab countries by Western powers and the political behaviour of the Meccan Sharif who, in the opinion of Iqbal, “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” (مو 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, Iqbal’s poem shows a similarity with a textual genre popular in Sufi circles, called “questioning Khizr”.⁴⁸ 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.

Iqbal’s poem *Khizr-i Rāh* is a political text imbued with a strong spirit of pan-Islamic action.⁴⁹ 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. Iqbal 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.⁵⁰ 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.*⁵¹

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 verheiß. 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

I) 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
بیانباستن در دهان نهنگ	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 بیه 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 نذر ها 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 ب خاک	تا بآبی رسید روشن و پاک	421
با کس بی کسان بزاری گفت	سجده کرد و زمین 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 گوهر را 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 Sarraj (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.

