

Part I

Transforming the *rihla* Tradition: The Search for Knowledge in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Travellers

Chapter I

FROM PIOUS JOURNEYS TO THE CRITIQUE OF SOVEREIGNTY: KHAQANI SHIRVANI'S PERSIANATE POETICS OF PILGRIMAGE¹

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ABSTRACT

Like most world literatures, the Islamic world generated many different types of travel writing. While the trope of the Islamic pilgrimage (*hajj*) is well known, the impact of the imagery and concept of travel on poetic production from the Islamic world, particularly in Persian, has not merited the same scrutiny. Countering this tradition of neglect, this chapter introduces one of the most important and yet least-studied Persian travel narratives to an interdisciplinary readership: the *Gift from the Two Iraqs* (*Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn*), composed in the middle of the twelfth century by the Persian poet Khāqānī Shirwānī. I examine this work's contribution to world literature and global poetics by documenting its deployment of key tropes from a longer tradition of thinking about mobility within Persian and Islamic poetics. Of particular interest is Khāqānī's method of transforming the *riḥla*, a discourse known for celebrating migration as a pious act, into a means of critiquing sovereign power.

Keywords: travel, *riḥla*, journey, Persian poetry, medieval Islam, sovereignty, poetic critique

"BECAUSE TRAVEL BROUGHT them, through suffering, into learning as a way of life," writes Houari Touati in his recent intellectual history of travel in the medieval Islamic world, "Muslims saw [travel] as a figure for metamorphosis, coupled with the experience of pain."³ The medieval Islamic understanding of travel as a stage of self-transformation, a horizon of new experience, and a harbinger of a new epistemology has many parallels in world history. The conceptual and practical centrality of travel

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³ Houari Touati, *Islam et voyage au Moyen Age: histoire et anthropologie d'une pratique lettrée* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 2.

to the historical formation of Islamic law and related Islamic disciplines, however, conferred on it a unique, and arguably unparalleled, importance in the world of Islam. Known in Arabic as *riḥla* (from the same root that generated “camel saddle”), soon after its institutionalization within Islamic culture, this journey subsequently also came to signify a literary genre.⁴

The *riḥla* genre (which I refer to here also as the travel narrative) has been richly studied by many generations of Arabist scholarship, particularly with reference to its contribution to the consolidation of Islamic thought and doctrine. This chapter considers how this tradition relates to classical Persian texts that made travel into a metaphor. I show, not only how Persian literature drew on core Islamic traditions, but also how this poetry transformed Islam from within. I thereby supplement the narrative of Islamic pilgrimage with a Persianate inflection that transfers the physical journey of *riḥla* to the realm of the imagination, where Persian poetics found its fullest expression. Given that Persian poetics is not traditionally dominated by narrative form, the role of narrative in shaping this aspect of the tradition is worth noting.

My analysis documents how this literature differed from its counterpart in Arabic prose, in part by plotting a trajectory from travel as an act of piety to travel as an act of rebellion against sovereign power. In part because the shift from piety to the critique of sovereignty is most apparent in the oeuvre of the poet Khāqānī of Shirwān (d. 1199), this poet’s oeuvre dominates this discussion. At the same time, I integrate several of the precedents and intertexts for Khāqānī’s aesthetic into a larger conversation concerning the many ways in which travel signified to medieval Persian readers and writers. Tropes pertaining to mobility converge among three overlapping genres in classical Persian literature: the literature of exile, the literature of imprisonment, and the literature of travel.⁵ Before exploring these intersections in greater detail, I will dwell on the meanings that were attached to the *riḥla* in Arabic, prior to its New Persian transformation.

Both as a practice and as a mode of reflection, the *riḥla* generated a highly sophisticated repertoire for conceiving travel’s uses and aims. Central among these were the obligation to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca and to migrate away from lands that had fallen under infidel rule and which thereby had to be classified as belonging to the abode of war (*dār al-ḥarb*).⁶ With the rise of Islamic empires across central and western Asia, the *riḥla* came to signify a means of clarifying the territorial, and hence, the conceptual

⁴ For a brief overview, see Ian Netton, “Rihla,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*² [henceforth abbreviated as *EI*], ed. E. Bosworth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1961–2004), 8:528.

⁵ Of these three, only the literature of imprisonment is clearly delineated as a genre in Persian literature, as shown in my PhD dissertation on the prison poem (*ḥabsīyyāt*), “The Political Aesthetic of the Medieval Persian Prison Poem, 1100–1200” (Columbia University, 2013), currently under revision under the title *The Persian Genre of Incarceration: Prisons and the Literary Imagination*.

⁶ For two collections on these topics, see Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, eds. *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1990) and Ian Netton, ed., *Golden Roads: Migration, Pilgrimage and Travel in Medieval and Modern Islam* (London: Routledge, 2005).

and doctrinal borders of the space known in Islamic sources as *dār al-islām*, the abode (*dār*) of Islam.

As a genre, the travel narrative traverses disciplines, and epistemologies, as diverse as ethnography, history, and geography. Somewhat more peripheral to the *riḥla* tradition, although crucial for grasping Islamic perceptions of the spatial and cultural differences that are traversed by many forms of travel, is *ʿajāʾib* (“wonders”), the literary genre that describes the marvels of far-off lands, and which has a medieval European counterpart in *mirabilia*.⁷ Although *ʿajāʾib* texts purport to represent the outermost regions of the world, they are based in explicitly imaginary texts. This representational tradition figures into Arabic travel literature, particularly in the late medieval period, but is not strongly represented in the Persian corpus, with a few important exceptions.⁸ To venture a sweeping generalization that nonetheless will help to situate the analysis of poetic traditions that follow, we might venture to describe Dante’s *Inferno* as a text wherein diverse strands of influence stemming from the *riḥla* tradition on the one hand and *ʿajāʾib* tradition on the other, converge.

As a practice, the *riḥla*’s deepest importance to the history of Islam lies in the role played by the “search for knowledge” (*ṭalab al-ʿilm*) in the collection and organization of the corpus of *ḥadīth* (sayings of the prophet and his companions) that, alongside the Qurʾan, constituted the *sunna*, from which subsequent jurists deduced Islamic teachings. In the late nineteenth century, Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher connected the development of the *riḥla* genre in the early eighth century to the consolidation of the *ḥadīth*, which was in turn instrumental in helping to form the major schools of Islamic law.⁹ Goldziher’s account was nuanced in subsequent decades, but his general argument represents the prevailing view.¹⁰ The eighth-century Islamic scholar Ziyād b. Maymūn treated the search for knowledge as a secondary obligation (*ṭalab al-ʿilm farīḍa*) incumbent on all Muslims.¹¹ Three centuries later, Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī composed an entire book, *Travel in Search of Ḥadīth* (*Al-riḥla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*), reporting on scholars who had journeyed across the abode of Islam for the sake of gathering and refining oral traditions related to the Prophet.¹²

⁷ For the literature of *ʿajāʾib*, see Syrinx von Hees, “The Astonishing: A Critique and Re-reading of *ʿĀḡāʾib* Literature,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 8 (2005): 101–20, and C. E. Dubler, “*Adjāʾib*,” *EP* 1:203–4.

⁸ Exceptions include Naghmeḥ Sohrabi, *Taken for Wonder: Nineteenth Century Travel Accounts from Iran to Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21–46, and the texts discussed in Rebecca Gould, “Cosmopolitical Genres and Geographies: Poetry and History in the Nineteenth Century Caucasus,” *Comparative Literature* (forthcoming).

⁹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1889–90), 2:33–34, 176–80.

¹⁰ See G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [1983]), 66–70, and Nadia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II: Quranic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), 2:40.

¹¹ Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Kitāb tahdhib al-tahdhīb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984 [reprint of Hyderabad ed., 1325–1327]), 5:102ff.

¹² Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Riḥla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ʿIṭr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 1975).

Rihla as a Spiritual Quest

Also related to the *rihla* is the institution of the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca that able Muslims are required to perform at least once in their lives. The poem around which this chapter turns, the *Gift from Two Iraqs* (*Tuḥfat al-Iraqayn*), owes its genesis to the institution of the *hajj*. The geographic denominator in the text, “*Two Iraqs*” references (and in one word, the dual plural *Iraqayn*, hence less anomalously than in English) both Persian and Arab Iraq, specifically the region of Basra, where the Tigris and the Euphrates met, and Kufa, on the Euphrates near the terminus of the ancient caravan route from the Hijaz. Its author, Khāqānī Shirwānī, performed the *hajj* twice, and this narrative, completed in 1157–1158, appears to date to the period of his first pilgrimage.¹³ However, as will be seen, the *Gift from Two Iraqs* is much more than a record of a journey, even once as fraught with a sense of mission as was the *hajj*. The complexity of the text’s relationship to the world it claims to represent is attested by the fact that, according to the conceit of the text, the poet remains enchained at home for the entire course of his “journey.”

Alongside its nominal association with Islamic pilgrimage, *Gift from Two Iraqs* exemplifies a broader tradition, which is deeply rooted in Islamic culture yet also distinct from the pilgrimage tradition, of journeying for the sake of knowledge. Touati’s argument that the journey for the sake of knowledge was “constructed as a break” with the *hajj* and in the belief that travel anywhere in the world for the sake of increasing one’s knowledge was as praiseworthy as the pilgrimage is borne out by a cursory review of medieval Persian travel literature.¹⁴ Even poets like Khāqānī, whose travel narratives originated in the practice of *hajj*, filled their narratives with eulogies to many other cities, such as Baghdad, and reserved only a few verses for Mecca and Medina. This disjuncture between the stated purpose and the literary form taken by its representation reverberates across Persian literature. As Khāqānī scholar Beelaert notes, “pilgrimage itself is not an important subject in Persian literature—or indeed in Islamic literatures as a whole—even if it is a very important event in the life of a Muslim.”¹⁵ Hence, the split between the pious purpose of the pilgrimage and the genres that were concerned with its (partial) representation is intrinsic to Islamic culture. As I will argue, however, Khāqānī took this disjuncture further than any poet prior to him had done.

13 The dates of Khāqānī’s pilgrimage have not been established and the question of the relation of *Tuḥfat* to this journey remains unsettled. For further discussion, see Ḥusayn Āmūzgār, *Muqaddamah-i tuḥfat al-khavāṭir* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Ruznama-i Zindagi, 1955), 26–30.

14 Houari Touati, *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages*, “Preface to the English-Language Edition,” trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), xiii.

15 A. L. F. A. Beelaert, *A Cure for the Grieving: Studies on the Poetry of the 12th Century Persian Court Poet Khāqānī Shirwānī* (Brill: Leiden, 1996), 37. One exception is the nineteenth century travelogue *Safarnāmah-i Farhād Mirzā, Mu’tamad al-Dawlah*, ed. Ismā’īl Navvāb Ṣafā (Tehran: Zawwār, 1366/1987). For further on Persian pilgrimage poems, see Henri Massé, “Aspects du pèlerinage à la Mecque dans la poésie persane,” *Melanges Franz Cumont* (Bruxelles: Annuaire of the Institut de Philosophie, 1936), 859–65.

While the vast majority of *riḥla* narratives are in Arabic and in prose, there is growing recognition of the Persian contribution to this literary corpus, particularly for the early modern and modern periods.¹⁶ Like many of its Arabic predecessors, the earliest extant Persian travel narrative, Nāṣir Khusrow's *Book of Travel* (*Safarnāma*), conjoins the search for knowledge with a religious pilgrimage, in this case to Shī'a-ruled Fatimid Cairo, at that time a political centre for the Ismā'ili faith.¹⁷ The author, Nāṣir Khusrow (1004–1088), was a poet and philosopher from Qubādyān, in the Marv District of north-eastern Khorasan. Over the course of his journey, he converted to the Ismā'ili branch of Shī'a Islam. The instigation for Nāṣir's journey was a dream he had in 1045, while he was serving as a "wine-loving bureaucrat in the Seljuq administration."¹⁸ During this dream, a voice reproached the poet for wasting his life in drink, and asked him why he did not remain sober. Nāṣir Khusrow replied that drinking is the only solution that "the wise [*hukuma*] have devised to alleviate this world's grief [*andūh-i dunyā*]" (2). The voice enigmatically replied, "seek and you shall find [*jūyand yābandeh bāshad*]" and then pointed towards the *qibla*, the direction of the Ka'ba towards which Muslims pray.

As the direction in which Muslim prayers are pointed, the *qibla* visually entails a mental peregrination to Mecca on the part of every believer; hence pilgrimage is inscribed into every act of prayer in the Islamic tradition. Taking this symbolic linkage of pilgrimage and prayer literally, Nāṣir immediately set about making preparations for his journey. A few days later, he travelled to Faryāb and Marv. Announcing that he had decided to travel in the direction of the *qibla*, Nāṣir quit his job, settled his debts, renounced everything worldly (*az dunyā anche bud tark kardam*), and began his journey to the western lands under Ismā'ili rule. As he later recalled, the dream had revealed to him that, unless he changed all his ways and actions, he would never find happiness (*farrukh*, 2). Hence, Nāṣir's westward pilgrimage was a concrete endeavour to implement such change.

Although the *qibla* that instigated Nāṣir's journey points to Mecca, the author had another, equally important, destination in mind when he embarked on his journey: Fatimid-ruled Cairo, a city that, since 969, had been the political centre of Ismā'ili Shī'ism. While Mecca was Nāṣir's nominal destination, reaching Cairo was arguably his ultimate goal. Although he includes valuable descriptions of both cities, it was in Cairo that Nāṣir stayed the longest from the year 1046 to 1052. It was also in Cairo

¹⁶ Most notably in recent years, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma, eds., *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Sohrabi, *Taken for Wonder*, and Nile Green, ed., *Writing Travel in Central Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). Notably, and partly due to the paucity of sources, these works do not treat the medieval period.

¹⁷ *Safarnāma-i Abū-Mu'in Ḥamid-ad-Dīn Nāṣir Ibn-Khusrau Qubādyānī Marwazī*, ed. Muḥammad Dabir Siyāqī (Tehran: Zawwār, 1956/1335). Future citations are from this edition and given parenthetically.

¹⁸ The citation is from Ehsan Yarshater's preface to the English translation of the *Safarnāma* by Wheeler Thackston, *The Book of Travels* (= *Safarnāma*) (Albany: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986), vii.

that Nāṣir became formally initiated into the Ismāʿīlī creed and rose to the rank of *ḥujjat*, a religious leader charged with overseeing one of the twelve regions (*jazāʾir*) where Ismāʿīlīs lived but which was not controlled by the Fatimids.¹⁹

Although his *Safarnāma* chronicles what he saw as he passed through Mecca, Cairo, and Jerusalem, Nāṣir traversed a geography that was in many substantive empirical senses similar to what Khāqānī saw a century later when he journeyed from Azerbaijan to Diyār Bakr. The cities of Darband (Daghestan), Qazvin, Rayy, and the topography of Mount Damavand and the Caspian Sea, all of which are mentioned by Nāṣir, also comprise the figurative geography for Khāqānī's masterwork. The *Safarnāma* thus set an important precedent for subsequent Persian travel literature, and provided a countertext against which the later Persian travellers could fashion their narratives that often differed radically from this initial example. Although he does not mention the *Safarnāma* by name, Khāqānī was familiar with Nāṣir's poetry. As will be seen below, he incorporates many of his literary devices into his poetry, particularly when Nāṣir touches on the topoi of exile, travel, and imprisonment.

As the first Persian travel narrative in verse, and possibly the first text of this genre in any Islamic language, Khāqānī's *Gift from Two Iraqs* (1157) differs from its Persian and Arabic predecessors in many crucial respects.²⁰ First and foremost, this is due to its status as poetry. The difficulty of situating the text in relation to the precise dates of the poet's travels attests to the complex relation between this Persian travel narrative the world it proposed to represent, for in this verse narrative, the sun, not the poet, "is the traveler."²¹ Much more than a documentation of an empirical sequence of events, *Gift from Two Iraqs* is a fictional journey grounded in historical fact. Its intimate relation with other poetic genres, in particular the poetry of exile and imprisonment (explored in greater detail below), further complicate the text's relationship to the world it represents. *Gift from Two Iraqs* is a travel narrative that uses the topos of travel in the same way that prior Persian poets had used the topos of exile: as a means of arriving at a new relation to the poet's self. Hence the striking preponderance of autobiographical material in the text, including, famously, the poet's eulogies to his grandfather, father, mother, and uncle, which take the form of celebrations of their professional activities, and which he links to his poetic vocation (*Tuhfat*, 198).

In contrast to the literature of wonders (*ajāʾib*), much travel writing in the Islamic world assumed an empirical, rather than a fantastical, trajectory for the traveller.

¹⁹ As noted by V. Ivanov, *jazāʾir* typically means islands in Arabic and Persian, but in this context it refers to "the Ismaili community in a country which politically was not under Fatimid sovereignty" (Ivanov, "The Organization of the Fatimid Propaganda," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15 (1939): 12).

²⁰ For the claim to primacy for this text, see J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1956), 204. Beelaert lists later Persian travel narratives that reference *Tuhfat*, as well as a manuscript held in the Leiden University Library (Or. 1620), by the poet Sāʿī, that narrates the author's journey from Shirwān to Šafavīd-ruled Isfahan (*A Cure*, 11n53).

²¹ Beelaert, *A Cure*, 10.

Khāqānī's *Gift from Two Iraqs* instead develops an elaborate poetic tropology. It announces its foreignness to the *riḥla* canon through its extended metaphors and similes (particularly comparisons to the sun), its autobiographical reflection, and its rhetorical engagements with objects and persons that, outside of poetry, would have called for a more inhibited imagination. Even as it parts ways with normative pilgrimage narrative conventions, however, *Gift* competes with and imitates the best travel narratives, not least through the author's division of his text into seven *maqāla* (chapters), a taxonomy that was reserved for non-fictional treatises, histories, and other avowedly documentary genres.²²

Persianizing the *Riḥla* Narrative

Even as Khāqānī inflects his narrative with his poetic consciousness, he uses the empirically oriented *riḥla* tradition to introduce new narrative strategies for evoking the physical world, and which prior to him were marginalized by a Persian poetic tradition that made "the literary imagination [...] paramount, autonomous, and even sovereign."²³ After he returned from his pilgrimage, Khāqānī's predecessor in Persian travel narrative, Nāṣir Khusrow, began to compose the poems that would be included in the complete version of his collected poems (*dīwān*). Many of these texts were written in the remote village of Yumgān in Afghanistan, to which Nāṣir had been exiled following his return, and where he remained in hiding until the end of his life, fearing persecution from those hostile to the Ismā'īlī faith.²⁴ One *qaṣīda* (ode) composed during this period resonates particularly powerfully with the pathos of exile, while also incorporating a device that was to profoundly inflect Khāqānī's *Gift*: the trope of the messenger who travels to places that the poet himself cannot reach. The poet addresses the wind:

سلام کن ز من ای باد مر خراسان را
مر اهل فضل و خرد را نه عام نادان را
خبر بیاور از ایشان به من چو داده بوی
ز حال من به حقیقت خبر مرا ایشان ر²⁵

[Say my hello, O wind, to Khorasan,
to the virtuous and wise among them, not to the vulgar and ignorant ones.
Bring back from them the news to me
as you have taken the truthful news of my situation to them.]

²² For a Persian text divided into four *maqālas* that was almost exactly contemporaneous with Khāqānī's *Tuḥfat*, see Niẓāmī 'Arūḍī, *Chahār maqāla*, ed. Muḥammad Mu'in (Tehran: Zawwār, 1957).

²³ Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 53.

²⁴ For Nāṣir Khusraw's exile in Yumgān, see Manūchihr Ātishī, *Nāṣir-i Khusraw: sargashtah-i jahān va tab'īd-i Yumgān* (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Intishārāt-i Āhang-i Dīgar, 2009/1388).

²⁵ *Divān-i ash'ar-i Ḥakīm Abu Mu'in Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw Qubādīyānī* (Isfahan: Intishārāt-i Kitāb'furūshī-yi Ta'yīd, 1956–1957/1335), 10 (qaṣīda 4, vv. 3–4).

Whereas Nāṣir made the wind into the bearer of his grief in his poems, Khāqānī developed the image of the sun in the same way in *Gift*.

Alongside Nāṣir, Khāqānī had a second major predecessor in his efforts to narrate a journey in verse. This was Sanāʾī of Ghazna (d. 1131), a poet with whom Khāqānī shared a similarly exalted sense of his vocation. For most of his career, Sanāʾī was based at the court of Masʿūd III (r. 1099–1115) in Herat. Tense poet–patron relations are evident in the work of this poet, who, similarly to Khāqānī, conceived of himself as “the master of the world of words [...] and yet a servile slave to his brutal masters.”²⁶ Khāqānī connected his own entry into the world with Sanāʾī’s death, as the following self-referential verses attest:

بدل من آمدم اندر جهان سنایی را
بدین دلیل پدر نام من بدیل نهاد²⁷

[I entered the world as a replacement [*badaʾl*] to Sanāʾī.
For this reason my father gave me the name Badīl.]

Sanāʾī completed the *hajj* in 1130, but, significantly, did not commemorate this event with a poem.²⁸ His contribution to the Persian literature of travel veered more toward polemics, and was more suffused with satire than spiritual uplift. The most notable work in this regard is Sanāʾī’s *Chronicle of Balkh* (*Kārnāmah-yi Balkh*). Although occasioned by his departure from Ghazna to Balkh, where he sojourned during the years 1109–1114, the text is primarily engaged with historical personalities from Ghazna.²⁹ Both *Gift* and *Chronicle of Balkh* belong formally to the most important Persian narrative verse form, called the *mathnawī* genre. This form consists of rhyming couplets with ten to eleven syllables per hemistich. Its recitation creates a sense of forward narrative movement in a way that other verse forms such as the *qaṣīda*, lack. Also like *Gift*, Sanāʾī’s text is structured topographically and addressed to multiple patrons. The setting moves from Ghazna, where the poet had been based at the Ghaznavid court, to Balkh, which at that time was, like the “two Iraqs” of Khāqānī’s text, under Saljuq rule.³⁰ It is not surprising therefore to see Khāqānī refer to Sanāʾī’s text in the pages of his own *Gift* (28, v. 11).

²⁶ Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 145.

²⁷ *Divān-i Afzal al-Dīn Badīl ibn ‘Alī Najjār Khāqānī Shirvānī*, ed. Ziyā’ al-Dīn Sajjādī (Tehran: Zawwār, 1960), 850.

²⁸ For Sanāʾī’s *hajj*, see J. Stephenson’s introduction to *The First Book of the Hadiqatu’l-haqīqat; or, The Enclosed Garden of the Truth* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1910), viii. Sanāʾī did complete his major work, *Hadiqa al-haqīqa*, soon after completing the *hajj*, but this text does not dwell on any physical journey.

²⁹ *Kārnāmah-i Balkh* is included in *Maṣnavīhā-yi Ḥakīm Sanāʾī: bi-inzīmām-i Sharḥ-i sayr al-ibād ilā al-maʿād*, ed. Mudarris Razavī (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihirān, 1348/1969), 142–78. For further intertexts with Sanāʾī’s travel narrative, see Sunil Sharma, *Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000), 57, and Matthew Chaffee Smith, “Literary Courage Language, Land, and the Nation in the Works of Malik al-Shuʿara Bahar” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2006), 28.

³⁰ For *Kārnāmah-i Balkh* in the context of Sanāʾī’s biography, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanāʾī of Ghazna*

As Khāqānī was later to do with unparalleled mastery, *Chronicle of Balkh* combines Persian rhetorical devices pertaining to the many varieties of complaint (*ḥasb-i ḥāl*, *shikwa*) with social satire of a world from which the poet was alienated.³¹ Sanā'ī's tense relationship to Ghazna in many respects parallels Khāqānī's complicated relationship to his native Shirwān, which permeates his oeuvre, from his prison poetry to his ghazals and his *Tuḥfat*.³² Both poets were deeply attached to their places of origin, and both were equally haunted by the desire to escape from their native lands through travel. Their feelings of confinement generated a new literary idiom, which was multivalently expressed in the literatures of exile, travel, and incarceration (each of which frequently overlapped). Sanā'ī condenses these idioms into verses that insist on the futility of travel even when engaging in this practice:³³

مرد در شهر خویش با نیروست
دیده هم بر میان چشم نکوست
خاک در ساکنی پسندیدست
چون بجمید آفت دیده‌ست
نه بهر شهر تازه‌تر فلکیست
رازق هر چه کشور است یکیست
سفر و خانه ژاژ دان و هوس
کار لطف خدای داند و بس

[A man is powerful [only] in his own city.
The pupil is confident [only] in the center of the eye.
Dust is pleasant when it is motionless.
When it stirs, it is a calamity for the eye.
One cannot find a new fortune in every city.
The giver of sustenance in every country is the same.
Journeying and staying at home alike are nonsense.
God's beneficence alone knows what will come.]

Even as they pursued similar themes, Khāqānī and Sanā'ī relied on the same poetic device: that of the messenger who serves as an alter ego for the poet's self. Throughout *Gift*, Khāqānī turns to the sun, addressing it as a friend, a prophet, and a patron.³⁴ The sun is Khāqānī's interlocutor destined for geographies he cannot himself travel to, trapped as he is in the "sublunary world" of Shirwān, imprisoned (fictionally) beneath the ground. As he laments:³⁵

(Leiden: Brill, 1983), 39–56, and de Bruijn, "Kār-Nāma-ye Balk," *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1991–), 15(6): 585.

31 For varying formulations of this device, see Sharma, *Persian Poetry*, 54, and Beelaert, *A Cure*, 35.

32 For Khāqānī's *ghazals*, see Alireza Korangy, *Development of the Ghazal and Khaqani's Contribution. A Study of the Development of Ghazal and a Literary Exegesis of a 12th c. Poetic Harbinger* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013).

33 *Maṣnavihā-yi Ḥakīm Sanā'ī*, 177. This translation modifies that in Sharma, *Persian Poetry*, 55.

34 Khāqānī's sun imagery is most thoroughly discussed in Beelaert, *A Cure*, 29–114.

35 Beelaert, *A Cure*, 31.

از دهر خط امانم آری
 پس گوش سوی دهانم آری
 کز سستی دل نمی توانم
³⁶ کاواز بتو بلند رانم

[[To bring me a safety guarantee from fate,
 tilt your ear towards my mouth.
 With a weak heart I cannot
 raise my voice to you.]]

Having established a relationship with the sun as his messenger, Khāqānī instructs the sun to journey to Iraq on his behalf

طوبی لک اگر کنی تجثم
 زی روضه کشور چهارم
 مه قعده فلک جنبیه سازی
 دو اسبه سوی عراق تازی

(*Tuḥfat*, 84, vv. 1–2)
 [Lucky you if you depart
 to the garden in the fourth clime,
 if you make the moon and the sky companion-mounts
 and rush to Iraq riding the two horses.]

Thus *Gift* is structured by the sun's journey through Iraq, all the way to Mecca, all the while serving as a proxy for the poet, metaphorically enchained in Shirwān. Given its status as one of the inaugural texts in the Persian *riḥla* tradition, the fictional conceit that lies at this tradition's inauguration foundation tells a broader story of the importance of the imagination to Persian poetics. The increasing autonomy of the Persian literary imagination in relation to the literature of travel was also accompanied by an increased capacity to develop and deliver a critique of worldly powers, as will be seen below.

Among the many Persian poets who used the messenger trope as a device to envision the circulation of their verse was Sanā'ī, who in his *Chronicle of Balkh* addresses the wind as a traveller who traverses spaces vaster and more rapidly than the poet himself:

ویحک ای نقشبند بی خامه
 قاصد رایگان بی نامه
 فلک از بهر ناخوشی و خوشی
³⁷ کرده بر نام تو خریطه کشی

[Oh fortunate painter without a brush,
 free messenger without a letter,
 fate has inscribed its designs
 in your name, for better or worse.]

³⁶ *Maṣnavī-i tuḥfat al-'Irāqayn*, ed. Yaḥyā Qarib (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahāmī-i Kitābhā-yi Jībī bā hamkārī-i Mu'assasah-'i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1978–1979/1357), 80, v. 13; 81, v. 1. Future citations from *Tuḥfat* are from this edition and are given parenthetically.

³⁷ *Maṣnavihā-yi Ḥakīm Sanā'ī*, 142.

As with Nāṣir's verses above, the wind is figured in these verses as an artist gifted with the miraculous ability to move through space. Unnamed as such, this "painter without a brush" spreads the poet's words across the vast spaces of Ghaznavid dominion. Beyond the congruence between Khāqānī's sun and Sanā'ī's wind, both verse narratives include a panegyrics to a multitude of patrons. Such formal parallels suggest the importance of Sanā'ī's precedent for Khāqānī's Persianate poetics of pilgrimage.

Although it nominally reproduces the narrative structure of the Islamic pilgrimage, *Gift* participates in the poetry of exile and imprisonment (while extending its formal range and thematic scope) by thematizing the difficulty of reaching Mecca and Medina. Midway through his text, and not in any particularly chronological sequence, the poet eulogizes the Ka'ba:

مانی بعروس حجله بسته
در حجله چارسو نشسته
حوری بمثال عبقری پوش
شاهی بمثل دواج بر دوش

(*Tuḥfat*, 133, vv. 6–7)

[You are a bride behind a veil,
seated in the bride's rectangular chamber.
You are a *houri* in glorious garments.
You are a shah with a mantle on his shoulders.]

Although the sun, and with it, Khāqānī's imagination, dwells briefly in Mecca, the core of this narrative transpires in other geographies. To this extent, it ceases to wholly belong to the *riḥla* genre, even while partaking of its core features. Khāqānī dedicated his text to Jamāl al-Dīn Mawṣilī (of Mosul in Iraq), a vizier who never made the pilgrimage during his lifetime, although he was said to have funded the construction of walls around Medina and the repair of the Prophet's mosque.³⁸ Due to such acts of patronage, Jamāl al-Dīn attained fame as a generous patron within Mecca. The Andalusian traveller Ibn Jubayr noted during his visit to the city from 1183–1185 that Jamāl al-Dīn had endowed the bath (*ḥammām*) in Mecca, arranged for the construction of stairs leading up to Mount Arafat, restored houses that had fallen into disrepair, and constructed an elegant grave for himself in Medina, next to the Prophet.³⁹ Known during his lifetime as al-Jawād ("generous one") in recognition of his beneficence, Jamāl al-Dīn was imprisoned in 1163 by the Zangi ruler Quṭb al-Dīn Mawdūd, who perhaps had grown jealous of and come to fear his vizier's wealth.⁴⁰ Jamāl al-Dīn died in prison the following year. These final tragic episodes in the life of the patron pertain to a period after Khāqānī's sojourn in Mosul, yet his text seems to anticipate such a turn of events.

In addition to looking after the welfare of travellers to Mecca and Medina and sharing his wealth with the poor, Jamāl al-Dīn was a patron of Arabic as well as Persian literature.

³⁸ Osman Latiff, *The Cutting Edge of the Poet's Sword: Muslim Poetic Responses to the Crusades* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 86.

³⁹ Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, ed. William Wright (Leiden: Brill, 1907), 124–27, 167–96.

⁴⁰ See Carla Klausner, *The Seljuk Vezirate: A Study of Civil Administration, 1055–1194* (Cambridge, MA: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University, 1973), 67–68, 73.

His material support for poets earned him a special place in Khāqānī's narrative. While Jamāl al-Dīn was but one of the many patrons eulogized in Khāqānī's *Gift*, he is praised at greatest length and most frequently. Khāqānī makes Jamāl al-Dīn's legendary generosity into a metaphor for the ideal poet–patron relation.

Instructing the Sovereign

Having followed Persian adaptations of the *riḥla* through narrative form, the remainder of this chapter shifts towards a more lyric-epic mode in order to consider how the Persian transformation of the *riḥla* generated a critique of sovereignty among Persian poets such as Khāqānī. In particular, I focus on a poem known as “*Ṭwān-i Madā'in*,” due to its being set near the ancient, pre-Islamic, site known in Arabic sources as al-Madā'in (“the two cities”) and which lay between the ancient royal centres of Ctesiphon and Seleucia. By the time of Khāqānī's sojourn to Iraq, and indeed in a figurative sense since the beginning of Islam, al-Madā'in had become a ruin and ceased to command its former regal glory. Whereas *The Gift from Two Iraqs* straddled the dual identity of Persian and Arab Iraq, the Madā'in *qaṣīda* encompassed a similarly multifarious geography of Persian kings and their Muslim conquerors.

Khāqānī conceived the Madā'in *qaṣīda* during his return from the *hajj*, on his way to Shirwān, during the same years that *Gift* was composed. The poem traverses a geography similar to that of the *Gift*, but unlike this lengthier text, the journey in this lyrical poem (technically not a lyric *ghazal*, but rather a *qaṣīda*) is undertaken in the poet's own name, and the speaker is the traveller who directly observes what is described. No sun serves as cosmic mediator or as allegorical trope. The voice of the poet is emphatically in the first person mode. With respect to the relation between the literary imagination and the world it references, this poem approximates more closely to the traditional understanding of travel literature than does *Gift*, in that a journey undertaken by the poet unambiguously founds the poem. The narrative of this poem, which describes the poet wandering amid sovereign ruins, offers a biographical, documentary counterpart to the imaginary journey performed by the sun in *Gift*. Also in sharp contrast to *Gift*, this poem, although technically belonging to genre of the Islamic ode, is more an anti-panegyric than a panegyric, and more inclined to question than to praise sovereign power.

For these reasons, the Madā'in *qaṣīda* is central to the Persian transformation of the *riḥla* tradition, particularly through its influential evocation of Sasanian ruins in an era of declining Saljuq sovereignty. Khāqānī's anti-panegyric *qaṣīda* also elucidates the intertextual relation between the poetry of exile, to which Nāṣir Khusrow contributed substantially, and the literature of imprisonment that was Khāqānī's greatest contribution to Persian literature.⁴¹ That the convergence between the poetry of exile and the literature of imprisonment took place in a text that played a role in transforming, the *riḥla* tradition attests to the productivity of the literary imagination in Persian literary culture.

⁴¹ For further on the conjuncture between the literature of exile and imprisonment, see Aḥmad Reḍā Sayyādī and 'Alī Reḍā Nūrī, “Gham-i ghurbat dar ash'ar-i Nāṣir Khusrow, Sanā'ī o Khāqānī,” *Majalle-i Keyhāneh Farhangī* 468 (1387/2008–2009): 46–51.

The most important figure in the literary critique of sovereignty in the classical Persian tradition is Khāqānī.⁴² Following on the exilic poetry of Nāṣir Khusrow that was in turn inspired by the practice of travel, the poet who nourished himself on the dust (*khāk*) and oppression (*ẓulm*) of Shirwān made of prison a metonym for the poet's vocation. Just as he dwelled on the poetic possibilities of a signless Ka'ba, the sky arching over Khāqānī's head could neither absorb nor address the poet's demand for cogent speech, so too were the Saljūqs and their minions deaf to poets who demanded justice. Khāqānī's silent sky captures the paradoxes of twelfth-century Islamic sovereignty. From the tension between the sultanate's discretionary power and the poet's vocation arose a literary voice that argued for poetry's sovereignty by revealing the precarious foundations of the king's sovereign power.

A few words are in order about the historical site that gave rise to Khāqānī's poem on Madā'in. Built during the reign of Khusrow Nushīrwān (r. 531–579), the Īwān (palace) of Ctesiphon, a mud brick vault "thirty-five meters high covering an audience hall eleven hundred square meters in area" is still regarded as a "crowning achievement of ancient architecture."⁴³ Still standing, albeit in ruins, the original parameters of this palace complex are known primarily through the recollections of poets and other travellers who made their way to Baghdad's environs. Among eighteenth century Persephone travellers, such as the Qajar migrant to India Mīr 'Abd al-Laṭīf Khan Shūshtarī, the encounter with Sasanian ruins was often mediated by Khāqānī's poem.⁴⁴

Madā'in, the Arabic word by which Ctesiphon is known, is the dual plural form of the word for city (*madīna*). Madā'in refers to the two Sāsānian cities on the banks of the Tigris: Ctesiphon and Seleucia. Together, these cities constituted a bishopric of the Nestorian Church. Ctesiphon itself dates back to the Arsacid dynasty (247 BCE–228 CE), during which period it became the major administrative centre in Semitic Mesopotamia.⁴⁵ Edward Gibbon considered Ctesiphon the rightful successor to Babylon as "one of the great capitals of the East."⁴⁶ Although the famed Sasanian ruler Nushīrwān did not found Ctesiphon, the city with which he is associated through his palace, he did augment the city architecturally, most notably by infusing it with the iconology of royal sovereignty. This architectural transformation in turn set the stage for the city's

⁴² Karamī, "Nagāhī be maḍāmīn-i Musawī o zībāihāyī ān dar diwān-i Khāqānī," 182, connects the poet's new design (*tarḥī nū*) to his appropriation of sovereign metonyms.

⁴³ Scott John McDonough, "Power by Negotiation: Institutional Reform in the Fifth Century Sasanian Empire" (PhD dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 2005), 3.

⁴⁴ Mīr 'Abd al-Laṭīf Khan Shūshtarī, *Tuḥfah al-'ālam wa zayl al-tuḥfa* [ca. 1799], ed. S. Muvaḥhid (Tehran: Ṭahūrī, 1984), 76–81. For Shūshtarī and other Qajar-era travellers, see Abbas Amanat, "Through the Persian Eye: Anglophilia and Anglophobia in Modern Iranian History," *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vajdani (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 136–37, and Mana Kia, "Contours of Persianate Community, 1722–1835" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 132.

⁴⁵ V. Minorsky, "Geographical Factors in Persian Art," *BSOAS* 9 (1938): 624.

⁴⁶ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Philadelphia: B. F. French, 1830), 4:78.



Figure 1.1. Depiction of Madā'in-Ctesiphon in *Aiwān-i Madā'in*, *Iranschāhr*, 41.

post-Sasanian appropriation as Madā'in, the preeminent symbol of regal glory from a pre-Islamic civilization.

One particularly striking evocation of these ruins occurs in a book-length collection of poems and reflections on Khāqānī's text published in 1924 by the Berlin-based journal *Iranshahr* (Figure 1.1). Partially translating Reḍa Tawfīq's 1912 Turkish-language edition of Khāqānī's Madā'in qaṣīda, this publication uses lines from the text as envois to new poetic creations. The unsigned editorial preface also not incidentally inaugurates the nationalist reading of the Madā'in qaṣīda that was to frame many subsequent renderings of Khāqānī's poem by locating the text within a long genealogy of appeals to Sasanian regal glory as against the Arab invaders. According to this modern reading, Khāqānī is among those poets who, like Ferdowsī, stands among the ruins (*dar jolū-yi kharābeh'hāyi*) that frame his poetry and gazes with tearful eyes at the little that has remained (*bāqī mondeh*) from the days of Iran's glory (*sar bolandi-yi īrān*).⁴⁷ While the readings on the pages of *Iranshahr* yield new poetic reflections concerning the inevitable demise of nation-states suited to a modern age, particularly in the aftermath of World War I, even in the hands of modern Iran's most visionary critics, the proto-nationalist reading that has dominated the text's recent reception has done little to elucidate its contribution to the Persian critique of sovereignty.

⁴⁷ *Aiwān-i Madā'in: tasdīs-i qaṣīda-i Khāqānī, bi qalam-i chand nafar az fuḍalā' wa shu'arā'-i īrān*=*Aiwan-i-Medāin: un poème de Khâqâni (1606), adapté et augmenté par quelques poètes contemporains* (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: *Iranschāhr*, 1343). This text includes a translation of Reḍa Tawfīq's Turkish introduction to his translation of Khāqānī's poem, published under the title *Medayin haraberleri* (Istanbul: Cem'i Kütüphanesi, 1912).

More even than as a result of its own glory, poet travellers including al-Buḥturī (d. 897), Omar Khayyām (1048–1131), Maʾrūf al-Raṣāfī (1875–1945), and historian-chroniclers including al-Masʿūdī and al-Ṭabarī inscribed the ruins of Nushīrwān’s palace on Islamic cultural memory both before and after Khāqānī set himself to the task.⁴⁸ In many respects, Khāqānī’s elegy is continuous with its predecessors. Al-Buḥturī anticipated Khāqānī when he glorified the “generals and troops, / as far as the eye can see” in his homage to the Īwān.⁴⁹ Although al-Buḥturī had already noted on gazing at the palace and imagining its inhabitants that “It was built up for joy forever, but / their domain is for condolence and consolation now,” Khayyām went even further in locating this chain of references within the discourse of what in medieval European literature is referred to as *ubi sunt*, an abbreviation of “ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere?” (where are those who, before us, existed in the world?), the question the served as a refrain for many poems emphasizing the fleetingness of world existence. Within medieval Europe, *ubi sunt* came to reference a literary genre (or, as I prefer to term it, a discourse) that foregrounded the transience of life as against the permanence of mortality.⁵⁰ As a genre that relies, almost by definition, on the poet’s encounter with ruins during the course of his journey, *ubi sunt* too merit inclusion in any taxonomy of Persianate critiques of power through the medium of the journey narrative.

A quatrain (*rubāʿī*) by Omar Khayyām in the *ubi sunt* mode plays on the multivalent meanings attached to the name of the king Bahrām Gūr, whose second appellation alluded to his fondness for hunting the onager (*gūr*), a term that also coincides with the Persian word for grave:

آن قصر که بهرام درو جام گرفت
روبه بچه کرد و شیر آرام گرفت
بهرام که گور می‌گرفتی دایم
امروز نگر که گور بهرام گرفت⁵¹

[The palace where Bahrām raised his cup,
where lions rested and foxes propagated,
and Bahrām, who used so easily to capture prey [*gūr*],
is taken captive by the grave [*gūr*] today.]

⁴⁸ For an overview of Persian and Arabic poets who have composed elegies to Madāʾin, see Sayyid Aḥmad Pārsā, “Derangī bar Īwān-i Madāʾin-i Khāqānī,” *Majallah-yi Dānishkada-yi Adabiyāt-i Tehrān* 41/54–5 (2006–2007/1385): 5–18. For comparisons of Buḥturī and Khāqānī’s poems on Madāʾin, see Amīr Maḥmūd Anvār, *Aiwān-i Madāʾin* (Tehrān: Dānishgāh-i Tehrān, 1383/2004) and Jerome W. Clinton, “The *Madāʾen Qasida* of Xāqānī Sharvānī, II: Xāqānī and al-Buḥturī,” *Edebiyât* 2 (1977): 191–206.

⁴⁹ *Diwān al-Buḥturī*, ed. Ḥasan Kāmil Ṣayrafī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʾārif, 1963), 2:1152–62. On al-Buḥturī’s sympathetic representation of the Sāsānians, see Samer M. Ali, “Reinterpreting Al-Buḥturī’s Īwān Kisrā Ode,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37 (2006): 58.

⁵⁰ The *ubi sunt* was a fertile ground of reflection in medieval Persian and Arabic literary culture as well as in the Latinate world. For the Arabic *ubi sunt*, see Carl Becker, “*Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere*,” in *Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Sprachgeschichte vornehmlich des Orients* (Breslau: Marcus, 1916), 87–105, and Ibrahim al-Sinjilawī, “The Lament for Fallen Cities” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1983). For *ubi sunt* in European literature, see Mary Ellen Becker, “The Ubi Sunt: Form, Theme, and Tradition” (PhD dissertation, Arizona State University, 1981).

⁵¹ *Tarānehayī Khayyām*, ed. Ṣādeq Hedāyat (Tehrān: Jāvidān, 1352), 71, *rubāʿī* 74.

In the poet's present, the palace [*qaṣr*] where Bahrām raised his sceptre [*jām*], or more precisely his cup, the Iranian symbol of sovereignty, has now become a grave for the much-revered king. Khayyām's *ubi sunt* extends across three temporalities: first, the temporality of Bahrām's reign, when the Sasanian king excelled in capturing onagers and displaying his sovereign power; second, the intermediate temporality when the palace was reduced to ruins, and became a place of habitation for lions (*shīr*) and of propagation for foxes (*rūbahān*); third, the temporality of the poet who gazes on the past as a traveller gazes on a foreign country. This third temporality accomplishes the poet's task by burying the great king Bahrām Gūr, slayer of onagers (*gūr*), now taken captive by a very different kind of *gūr*. Omar Khayyām's *ubi sunt* is but one of many texts in this genre that relies for its meaning on an interplay of homonyms, a poetic device known in Arabo-Persian rhetoric as *jinās* (paronomasia), and which heavily characterizes Khāqānī's poetics generally, and especially his critique of sovereignty. That this mode of verbal opposition occurs in so many *ubi sunt* texts indicates how the discursive world of the *ubi sunt* is premised on a linguistic opposition that is given spatial as well as temporal expression.

Even before poets turned their mind to the task of representing the ruins of Ctesiphon, orators such as the famous Mu'tazilī leader Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā' (d. 748) had already engaged with this image to suggest the fleetingness of worldly power. "Where are the kings," asked Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā', "who built Madā'in?" Typically for the *ubi sunt*, Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā's list of these king's accomplishments contrasts royal sovereignty, which is subject to decay, with the orator's temporality, which is not subject to the decay induced by time:

And strengthened palaces and fortified gates? [...] And trained purebred horses?
And possessed all the lands? [...] This world [...] crushed them with its breast, it
chomped on them with its canines. It gave them in exchange for vast space,
narrow confines; for might, humility; for life, perishing. They went to reside
in graves. Maggots ate them. They became such that you see only their
abodes [*masākanahum*], and you find only their signposts [*ma'alimahum*] [...]
You do not hear a single sound from them.⁵²

The Persian poet Ferdowsī (d. 1025) recycled Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā's oratory of sovereign power's demise in a speech delivered by the Sāsānian king Ardashīr (r. 379–383) to the Persian ruling elite:

کجا آن بزرگان با تاج و تخت
کجا آن سواران پیروزبخت
کجا آن خردمند کندآوران
کجا آن سرافراز و جنگی سران

⁵² I cite, with minor modifications, from the translation of Tahera Qutbuddin, "Khutba," in *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 267. For the Arabic text, see Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat, *Jamharat khuṭab al-'arab fī l-uṣūr al-'arabiyya al-zāhira* (Beirut: Dar al-Matbu'at al-'Arabiyyah, 1933), 2:501–3, No. 475.

کجا آن گزیده نیاکان ما
 کجا آن دلیران و پاکان ما
 همه خاک دارند بالین و خشت
 خنک آنک جز تخم نیکی نکشت⁵³

[Where are the mighty ones with their thrones and crowns?
 Where are the horsemen elated with victory?
 Where are the wise brave ones?
 Where are the proud warriors?
 Where are our exalted ancestors?
 Where are our valiant servants?
 Now their pillow is dust and brick
 Lucky he who did not grow but the seed of goodness.]

Ferdowsī's text corresponds precisely to its Latin counterpart in offering a Persian parallel, at the opening of each hemistich, to the *ubi sunt* refrain: "where?" (*kojā*). Ferdowsī deploys anaphora rather than epistrophe, but the effect is the same. From the reflections of Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā' to al-Buḥturī to Khayyām and Ferdowsī, one theme is consistently reinforced: the sovereignty of kings, these authors intimate in anticipation of Khāqānī's more forthright declarations, yields to poetry's more permanent sovereignty. The difference between worldly and poetic power is temporally exposed through the discourse of the *ubi sunt*. Spatially it is exposed as the poets gaze on ruins, through the topos of travel. The contrast between worldly and poetic sovereignty leads al-Buḥturī to conclude his poem on Madā'in by insisting on the equality of races and peoples. "I find myself thereafter in love with noble," states al-Buḥturī, "men of every race [*sinkhin*] and origin [*issī*]" (v. 56). While of course not equivalent to a modern theory of human equality, al-Buḥturī's insistence on the proximity of all peoples to his understanding of greatness constitutes a challenge to the hierarchal discourses on which the prerogative of royal sovereignty is founded, including those that inform Sasanian kingship.

The equalizations inflicted by these poet's *ubi sunt* discourse onto the passage of time through the medium of ruins (as well as spatially through the travel narrative) were fully absorbed in Khāqānī's poem. As the poet who, more than any of his contemporaries, used topoi pertaining to exile and complaint to extend the authority of poetry, Khāqānī also drew on the medieval discourse of *ubi sunt* to contest sovereign power. When Khāqānī set out to compose his *qaṣīda* on the ruins of Nushīrwān's palace in 1156, he had already composed the six prison poems that refashioned his poetic persona within a prophetic lineage and which created the foundation for his understanding of poetry's discursive sovereignty.⁵⁴ For Khaqani, poetry vatic utterance had already been infused with sovereignty by the topos of incarceration.

53 *Shāhnāma*, ed. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, Mahmoud Omidshar, and Abū al-Faḍl Khaṭībī (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987–2008), 1504.

54 These poems are included in the appendix to Gould, "The Political Aesthetic."

Khāqānī's Madā'in *qaṣīda* moves wholly within the temporalizing aesthetics of the *ubi sunt*. As Johannes Huizinga argued a century ago, this discourse is inflected by the "ever present theme of death" characteristic of the Middle Ages globally, and pertains well beyond the tradition of any single literature.⁵⁵ Yet whereas Huizinga treated the *ubi sunt* as a pan-European phenomenon, there is a case to be made that this discourse was intrinsic to the global Middle Ages, particularly across the Islamic world. Khāqānī pays homage to the temporal contrasts intrinsic to the *ubi sunt* when he asks in v. 13 "What is there to be surprised about [*che 'ajab dārī*]? In the world's garden / the owl follows the nightingale [*bulbul*] just as a lament [*nūḥeh*] follows a sweet song [*alḥān*]." The poet moves beyond the standard emphasis on the fleetingness of worldly power and the eternal cycle of birth and death, anticipating and indeed superseding later poets, when in the second section (vv. 26–35) he turns to ekphrasis, and carries the *riḥla* genre one step further towards the critique of sovereign power. In these verses, the poet evokes a panorama of ruins, on to which is projected a tableau of images from Iran's now distant past.⁵⁶

Khāqānī's poetic discourse differs from other genres of travel literature in that the poet's evocation of the past is not fashioned in response to a royal mandate. There is no patron for this poem: the poet speaks in his own voice. Instead of chronicling the achievements of Sasanian kings, but in keeping with the aesthetics of rebellion that the Madā'in *qaṣīda* seeks to cultivate, Khāqānī exposes the founding violence of royal sovereignty. Here and elsewhere, the conceptual severance of power from glory is one consequence of the Khāqānīan aesthetic mode. The opening hemistich of the Madā'in *qaṣīda* entail a discursive transformation of sovereignty. The lesson (*'ibrat*) Khāqānī instructs the reader to learn from the ruins is the text of his own poem, a mirror (*āyineh*) to the passage of time:

هان ای دل عبرت بین از دیده نظر کن هان
ایوان مدائن را آیینهی عبرت دان⁵⁷

[Behold! O heart willing to take lessons, Take a look!
Know that the ruins of Madā'in are a mirror that gives lessons.]

This distich simultaneously addresses the poet and the regime that limits (and constrains) the poet's vocation. This duality of address is a hallmark of the classical Persian aesthetics, wherein unmitigated calls for revolution would have possessed little cogency, and the most effective political critiques employed a poetics of indirection.

⁵⁵ J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Garden City: Anchor-Doubleday, 1954), 139.

⁵⁶ As Clinton has noted, most readings of Khāqānī's Madā'in *qaṣīda* (including that proposed by the editors of *Irānshahr*) end here, causing readers to forget the powerful critique of sovereign power that transpires over the rest of the poem and impoverishing this text's reception history. For a recent example of how the Madā'in *qaṣīda* is treated in modern Iranian historiography as a proto-nationalist appeal to lost Sasanian glory, see Mehdi Ma'khūzī, *Ātash andar chang* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1388).

⁵⁷ *Divān-i Afzal al-Dīn Badīl ibn 'Alī Najjār Khāqānī Shirvānī* ed. Sajjādī, 358–60. The remaining Persian quotations in this chapter are from this poem.

With his repertoire enriched by his experience of travel, Khāqānī inverted, subverted, parodied and transformed the panegyric genres that structure his *Gift*. Duality of address—whether through apostrophe, *ihām* (simulation in the sense of double entendre), *jinās*, or other forms of allusiveness—is the basic strategy through which such poetry comes to life.

From the hemistich “The earth is drunk. It has drunken deep” (v. 26) onwards, the text’s otherworldly temporalizing discourse becomes increasingly inflected by this-worldly critique, which brings it into proximity with the *riḥla* tradition. This poem is less concerned with the fleetingness of time than with the corruptibility of worldly power, yet it uses time as well as space to reinforce this theme. Instead of merely recognizing human mortality, the poet states that the earth is drunk (*mast*) with the blood of Nushīrwān that flows from his son’s cup (*kās*). Cups, particularly in Sasanian iconography, are bearers of regal power and not vessels for mortality. The double entendre on *pand* (meaning both advice, and the species of bird known as a kite, translated below as “hawk,” given the latter’s association with royalty) that follows generates a startling contrast that anticipates the king’s eventual fall:

بس پند که بود آنگه بر تاج سرش پیدا
صد پند نوست اکنون در مغز سرش پنهان

So many hawks shined on his crown.

Now much more new counsel is hidden in his brain.

The sovereign power delineated here is fraught with mortality. Nothing will remain, and we know this due to the very position of the speaker, gazing on ruins of what used to be. Sasanian power in Khaqani’s rendering breeds death. Khāqānī’s pun exposes the entire social order on which medieval kingship is founded.

In v. 30, there is a brief return to the temporalizing *ubi sunt* with the rhetorical question “where have they gone (*kojā raftand*)?” Unusually, the poet answers his rhetorical question. When kings die, their bodies depart, but not to heaven: the earth’s belly, the poet says is pregnant (*abestān*) with the flesh of the royal deceased. A series of observations follow that fulfill Walter Benjamin’s insight that genres are only realized in the act of their transgression. Whereas Samuel Johnson argued that every new innovation “subverts the rules which the practice of foregoing authors had established,” Benjamin went further, pointing out that all major literary works transgress the boundaries of genre. And yet, a text that has transgressed a genre remains accountable to it. “A major work either establishes a genre [*Gattung*] or abolishes it,” argued Benjamin. “A perfect work does both.”⁵⁸ As an exemplar of a range of genres, discourses, and forms (the narrative of mobility and confinement, the *ubi sunt*, and the *qaṣida*) and as the antithesis of these modes, written after Khāqānī has been freed from prison, the Madā’in *qaṣida* fulfills the Benjaminian vision of a work that shapes a genre by violating its norms.

“Giving birth [*zāyidan*] is difficult,” the poet continues, “but sowing seed [*notfeh setadan*] is easy.” These words at once transgress the temporalizing focus of the *ubi sunt*,

58 Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000), 27.

as exemplified by al-Buḥturī, Ferdowsī, and Omar Khayyām, and alter its substance. Suddenly, the poet's subject is less the fleetingness of earthly existence than poetry's perpetual sovereignty. Those who give their bodies to the earth, including the deceased kings Nushīrwān and Hormuz, are performing the imperfect, masculine, labour of sowing seeds that culminates in aborted births, or in death. By contrast with the kings who indiscriminately sow their sperm, Khāqānī aligns the poet's task with the more creative work of giving birth. Rather than feed his body to the earth by lusting after worldly glory, Khāqānī vows with his verse to create sovereignty from poetry. Echoing the medieval discourse of the *ubi sunt*, the *qaṣīda*'s final apostrophe—"How many tyrants' bodies [*tan-i jabbārān*] has the earth eaten so far?" (v. 34)—signals its apotheosis. It also extends poetry's discursive sovereignty, for the cycle that cannibalizes the king's power knows no end. The voracious earth will never be satiated (*sīr nashod*) by human blood.

Whereas other poets deploy the temporalizing discourse of *ubi sunt* to place a cosmic valuation on the fleetingness of worldly power and to suggest that nothing on earth is permanent, Khāqānī offers a counterweight to the emptiness of the worldly sovereign. Pace Clinton, who counts among the most astute readers of this poem to date, Khāqānī is more inspired by poetry's discursive sovereignty than by religious piety. Inaugurating section three (vv. 36–42) with an apostrophe to himself, the poet instructs himself to learn the lesson (*ibrat*) of Nushīrwān's court, in the expectation that the balance of power between the poet and his patron awaits imminent reversal. The verse that follows even more explicitly reverses the balance of power between poet and ruler:

امروز گر از سلطان رندی طلبد توشه
فردا ز در رندی توشه طلبد سلطان

Though today the beggar seeks food from the sultan,
tomorrow the sultan will beg from the hungry one.

This prophecy of a new social order in the near future is immediately followed by a verse that draws a decisive link between *Gift* and this *qaṣīda*, composed during the same years. In this verse, Khāqānī provides the name of the text on which he was working at the time, *Tuhfat al-Iraqayn* (Gift from the Two Iraqs), and indicates that it is destined for the court in Shirwān:

گر زاد ره مکه توشهست به هر شهری
تو زاد مداین بر تحفه ز بی شروان

If provisions for Mecca can be taken as a souvenir to every city,
Then take this gift, born in Madā'in, as a souvenir to Shirwan

This verse signals a remarkable moment of intertextuality, for in this and subsequent verses Khāqānī presents his entire poetic output as a gift (*tuhfeh*) comparable to the

pious offerings that spot the road to Mecca, an Islamic equivalent to Latinate *viaticum*.⁵⁹ Does this make the Madā'in *qaṣīda* an offering to God? While there is no single answer to that question, it is clear what this poem is not, notwithstanding the *qaṣīda*'s formal status as a panegyric. Khāqānī verses are neither an offering nor an homage; rather they are an admonition (*ibrat*) to the sultan to follow the path of justice. In terms of the Persian transformation of the *riḥla*, Khāqānī's comparison is also significant inasmuch as it compares the performance of the *ḥajj* to the writing of poetry. Both the *ḥajj* and the writing of poetry are driven by spiritual values that give these activities an authority that the mere exercise of sovereign power lacks. Hence the Persian transformation of the *riḥla* from an act of piety to an act of rebellion comes full circle in this verse.

Calling his *qaṣīda* a fragment (*qīṭ'eh*), Khāqānī figures himself as a miracle worker:

بنگر که در این قطعه چه سحر همی راند
مہتوک مسیحا دل، دیوانہی عاقل خوان

Observe in this *qīṭ'eh* what magic is performed
by a dead man, with the heart of Christ, a madman with a wise mind.

While other poems by Khāqānī, most notably the Christian *qaṣīda*, define the political terms of the prison poem through an oppositional aesthetics, the Madā'in *qaṣīda* reconfigures space and time to channel the politics of ruins.⁶⁰ Like Khāqānī's other works, the Madā'in *qaṣīda* sets forth a conception of poetry's sovereignty. Poetry is the court from which the sultan will seek the nourishment (*tūshe*) and counsel of those he is mandated to protect (v. 37–38). The legitimacy of the sultan's sovereignty is contingent on his ability to heed his poets' admonitions. Just as mirrors-for-princes across the medieval world instructed princes to heed the lessons of others in order to maintain their hold on power, here the poet proposes to learn how the poet can emerge triumphant over the worldly sovereign.

The Madā'in *qaṣīda* revises elegant tales of kingly glory, including those found in the *Shāhnāma*, to develop an aesthetics that treats poetry, rather than kingship, as the pinnacle of power. Khāqānī was keenly aware of his dependency on patronage networks, and therefore of the pressure to praise the sultan. At the same time, he also perceived that the path to worldly power was paved with hypocrisy at best and bloodshed at worst. The poet's twilight vision of a rapacious earth pregnant with a blood-drenched Sasanian dynastic genealogy initiates a dialectic between worldly power and poetry's sovereignty.

⁵⁹ This reading is not universally attested in all manuscripts, some of which give *tūsha* ("provision"). It is however the variant accepted by Meisami in her important contributions to *Qasida poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1:137–82 ("Poetic Microcosms: The Persian Qasida to the End of the Twelfth Century"); 2:162–69, 431–35 (annotated translation of the Madā'in *qaṣīda*).

⁶⁰ For the Christian *qaṣīda*, Khāqānī's most important prison poem, see Rebecca Gould, "Wearing the Belt of Oppression: Khāqānī's Christian Qasida and the Prison Poetry of Medieval Shirvān," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 9 (2016): 19–44.

Rather than renouncing power, or yielding it to the ruler, the poet appropriates the mantle of sovereignty. Sacralized Persian kingship *and* the sultan's discretionary power are equally challenged by poetry's prophetic utterance.

Al-Buḥturī excused the travesties promulgated at Madā'in by invading Arab armies in 637 CE with reference to the fallibility of human nature. He shed "tears of affection for the cycles of history" with seeking an alternative to this tale of woe.⁶¹ Khāqānī shed no tears. Contrary to the still prevalent nationalist reading of this text, the Madā'in qaṣida does not weep for the Sasanian kings, the Arab dynasties that followed, or even for the poet's incarcerated self. Building on both the literature of pilgrimage and the poetry of imprisonment, the Madā'in qaṣida's poetics of ruins offers a uniquely Persian take on the sovereignty of poetic discourse that lurks beneath the façade of worldly power.

61 Ali, "Reinterpreting Al-Buḥturī's Īwān Kisrā Ode".