

1 Nizāmī's World Order

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

Stones

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

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

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

(IN 26, 53-56)

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

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

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

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

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

Plants

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

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

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

■ Animals

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

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

تا من منم از طریق زوری نازرده زمن جناح موری
(LM8,56)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Man and Woman

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

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

You are the angel, who defends / God's praise; knows the Creator's signs.

Contemplate goodness; be not bad / observe the beast; be not a beast.

Both good and evil you can weigh / aspire to Reason's sovereignty.¹⁷

These few lines provide an example of Nizāmī's enlightened monotheistic piety. He wants man to be pious, good, aware of God's grace as visible in his creation, but at the same time, guided by reason. The image of man is central in his poetry. Let us examine only a few dominant aspects of this very complex topic. His image of man is neither flat nor idealized (except for his praise of princes, which consists of the usual superhuman panegyrics). In general, his image is dynamic and full of tension, displaying a thorough knowledge of man's psyche. His heroes are not static types; they are human beings, who undergo a development, driven by their particular dispositions and emotions. They have to struggle against temptations that come from within, they have to purify themselves in order to become what the poet (here as it were in the place of God) wants them to become. Nizāmī is not blind to the reality of evil, particularly within the ruling classes. As mentioned above, there is the character of the tyrannical vizier in *Haft Paykar* who incarcerates thousands of innocent persons in the absence of the king. Seven released prisoners tell their deplorable fate, giving the reasons for their incarceration. Their reports on human injustice and cruelty¹⁸ are a sobering counterpart to the seven enchanting love-stories. They show Nizāmī's awareness of the grievances of bad government, which were no less real during his time than for Nizām al-Mulk, a century earlier, from whose *Siyāsat Nāma* these reports are taken.

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

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

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

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

(SN55,97-104)

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

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

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

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

Two other episodes illustrate similar non-achievements: Iskandar's unsuccessful attempt to find the Water of Life²⁷ and his resignation from his prophetic mission, under the impact of a perfect community, whose people lead a pious life without ever having been instructed by any prophet, simply on the grounds of their inborn insight and reason:

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

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

(EN27, 162 and 165-7)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

خدا را دانی از خود را بدانی (KS93, 17)	بدان خود را که از راه معانی
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Know yourself, for according to old wisdom (lit. meanings) you will know God if you know yourself.

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

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

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

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

(SN8,40-9)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nizāmī

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

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

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

(MA14, 40-43)

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

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

*Through piety, poetry will let you reach a place/ where Orion will
be outshone by your girdle.*

*Poetry will make you as famous as a prince/ For "The poets are
the princes of speech."*⁴⁷

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

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

I am the King of kings of virtue by dint of the excellence of my poetic ideas (concelli) (maliku l-mulūk-i fazlam be-fazīlat-i ma' ānī).

Space and time I have seized through (my) celestial vision/manner (mithāl).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(KS104, 25-27)

*I ended my poem in felicity / Folded the paper which I filled to this point.
O Lord, whatever mistake crept into it / Pardon it gracefully, you are the pardoner.
Happy be the souls of those / Who say: God's mercy be on Nizāmī!*

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

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

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

...
 من نه کز سر کار بی خبرم
 گفت با حکم کردگار مکوش
 در همه علمی از تو بیشترم
 لیک علت به خود نشاید گفت
 ره بیندار خود نباید رفت

(HP28,85b-87)

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

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

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

نظامی چو این داستان شد تمام
 به عزم شدن نیز برداشت گام
 نه بس روزگاری برین برگذشت
 که تاریخ عمرش ورق درنوشت
 فزون بود شش مه ز شصت و سه سال
 که بر عزم ره بر دهل زد دوال
 چو حال حکیمان پیشینه گفت
 حکیمان بختند و او نیز خفت
 رفیقان خود را به گاه رحیل
 گه از ره خبرداد و گاه از دلیل
 بختید و گفتا که آمرزگار
 به آمرزشم کرد امیدوار
 زما زحمت خویش دارید دور
 شما وین سرا ما و دارالسرور
 درین گفتگو بد که خوابش ربود
 تو گفتی که بیداریش خود نبود

(IN40, 3-10)

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

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

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

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

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

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

(LM9, 14-25)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

■ Artists, Sages and Saints, Princes and Prophets

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

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

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

(KS78, 90-97)

*Bārbad took place, the barbyton⁵⁵ in hand / encompassing the
world like a spherical globe,
Giving a rub-down to the friends with his song / Healing heart's
wounds with his plectrum.
His heart's smoke (i.e. sigh) surpassed that of the aloe / So much
so, that his lute struck a blow on the song of Dāwūd.⁵⁶
He had the same tune resounding within his brain / Which the musi-
cian Jesus had in his heart.
He changed the hearts into a fumigating pan / So that they burnt
aloe, while he struck his lute.
When he played those sweet melodies / The night-swarmed birds
would fall into sleep.
So fiercely would he pluck the barbyton's ear / That it started to
sigh from all its heart.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(HP9, 7-19)

*A famed man dwells in Grecian lands / clever? Stone is wax within
his hands;
Learned and skilled, of matchless art / of Sām's race⁵⁸, and his
name Simnār.⁵⁹*

*The whole world has observed his skill / all praise him; he has built
withal,
In Syria and Egypt, some / fine buildings, perfect every one.
The Greeks bow to his skill; in Chin / from his pick artists chips do
glean.
Although a builder, clearly he / a myriad artists holds in sway.
And, of sound judgement, he can tell / the secrets of the stars as
well.
His gaze draws o'er the sphere a web / like the spider of the astro-
labe.⁶⁰
Like Apollonius⁶¹ wise, he can / devise and loose all talismans.
He knows the veiled ones of the sky / The moon's raids, the sun's
hostile eye;
He'll solve this problem, only he / can such a precious fabric
weave.
He'll raise a vault from earth so high / that it will plunder from the
sky
The stars' bright lamps.⁶²*

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

نسبتی گیرم از سپهر بلند که نیارد به روی شاه گزند
(HP25,81)

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

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

تا خبر یافت از خردمندی دیو بندی فرشته پیوندی
در همه توسنی کشیده لگام به همه دانشی رسیده تمام
همه همدستی او افتاده او همه در بسته ای گشاده او ...
پیش سیمرغ آفتاب شکوه شد چو مرغ پرنده کوه به کوه ...
از سر فرخی و فیروزی کرد از آن خضر دانش آموزی
(HP29,147-154)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(HP5, 8-10 and 17-23)

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

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

ایمن آن شد که دید از دورش	پادشاه آتشی ست کز نورش
در برابر گل است و در بر خار	واتش او گلی است گوهر بار
در نیچد دران کز او دورست	پادشه همچو تاک انگورست
بیخ و بارش کند به صد خواری	وانکه پیچد در او به صد یاری

(HP9,57-60)

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

The Prophet Muhammad

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

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

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

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

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

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

(SN, 3,1-4)

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

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

In the following Description of the Ascension, we find:

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

(SN3, 24-5)

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

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

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

(LM2 ,104, 105 and 107-8)

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

Angels and demons

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

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

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

The sky

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

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

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

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

(KS24, 64-6)

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

Thousands of narcissi sank/disappeared from the world-turning sphere / for the one yellow rose⁸² to rise.

Shīrīn spurred her mount /

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

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

(KS95,1-3)

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

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

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

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

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

(HP22, 55-60)

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

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

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

(HP22, 70-2)

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

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

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

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

(SN58,3-11)

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

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

God

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

هست کلید در گنج حکیم
 نام خدايست بر او ختم کن

(MA1,1-2)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 فاتحه فکرت و ختم سخن

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

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

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

(MA2,1-6)

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

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

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

(MA1,31-4)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(SN2,12-5)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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

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

