

From Piety to Rebellion: The Persianate *Hajj* and the Transformation of the *Rihla* Tradition

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“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.”² 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 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 *rihla* (from the same root that generated “camel saddle”), soon after its institutionalization within Islamic teaching, journey subsequently also came to signify a literary genre.³

The *rihla* genre has been richly studied by many generations of Arabic Studies scholarship, particularly with reference to its contribution to the consolidation of Islamic thought and doctrine. This chapter integrates into this body of scholarship the medieval Persianate literature of travel. I document how the Persianate literature of travel differed from its Arabic counterpart, in part by plotting a trajectory from travel as an act of piety to travel as an act of rebellion against the sultan. Because the narrative shift from piety to rebellion is most apparent in the oeuvre of the poet Khāqānī of Shirwān (d. 1199), his work dominates this discussion. At the same time, I integrate several of the precedents and intertexts to Khāqānī’s aesthetic into a larger conversation concerning the many ways in which travel signified to medieval Persian readers and writers. Collectively, these convergences demonstrate the intimacy among three overlapping genres in classical Persian literature: the literature of exile, the literature of imprisonment, and the literature of travel.⁴ Before exploring these intersections in greater detail, we would do well to dwell on the meanings that were attached to the *rihla* in Arabic, before its New Persian transformation.

Both as a practice and as a mode of reflection, the *rihla* generated a highly sophisticated sets of ways for conceiving travel’s uses and aims, including the obligation to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca and to migrate away from lands that had fallen under the of infidel rule powers and into the abode of war (*dār al-ḥarb*).⁵ With the rise of Islamic empires in central and western Asia, the *rihla* came to signify a means of clarifying the territorial, and hence, the conceptual and doctrinal borders of the space known in Islamic sources as *dār al-islām*, the abode (*dār*) of Islam.

As a genre, the *rihla* traverses disciplines, and epistemologies, as diverse as ethnography, history, and geography. Somewhat more peripheral to the *rihla* tradition, although important in the general literature of Islamic travel, is *‘ajā’ib* (“wonders”), the literary genre that describes the marvels of far off lands, and which has a medieval European counterparts in *mirabilia*.⁶ Although *‘ajā’ib* texts purport to represent the most outerlying regions of the world, their basis is often openly fictive. This representational tradition figures into Arabic travel literature, particularly in the late medieval period, but is not strongly

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

³ For a brief short overview, see Ian Netton, “Rihla,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*² [henceforth abbreviated as *EF*], eds. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1961-2004), 8: 528.

⁴ Of these three, only one, the prison poem (*ḥabsīyyāt*), is clearly delineated as a genre in Persian literature, as shown in my PhD dissertation, “The Political Aesthetic of the Medieval Persian Prison Poem, 1100-1200” (Columbia University, 2011), currently under revision under the title *The Aesthetics of Incarceration: Prisons and Genres in Medieval Persia*. This chapter differs from that work in making a case for the treatment of the literature of exile and of travel in similarly generic terms.

⁵ For two important recent 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).

⁶ For recent discussions of *‘ajā’ib*, see Syrinx von Hees, “The Astonishing: a critique and re-reading of *‘Ajā’ib* literature,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 8.2 (2005): 101-120, and C. E. Dubler, “*‘Ajā’ib*,” *EF* 1: 203-4.

represented in the Persian corpus, with a few important exceptions.¹ Of the four epistemologies that bear on Islamic travel literature, *‘ajā’ib* seems the least relevant to Persian travel writing, and therefore does not receive treatment here.

As a practice, the *rihla*'s deepest importance to the history of Islam lies in the role played by the “search for knowledge” (*ṭalab al-‘ilm*) in the collection and organization of the corpus of *ḥadīth* (sayings of the prophet and his companions) that, alongside the Qur’ān, constituted the *sunna*, from which subsequent jurists deduced Islamic teachings. In the late nineteenth century, Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher connected the advent of the *rihla* 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.² Goldziher’s genealogy was substantiated and nuanced in subsequent decades.³ The eighth century Islamic scholar Ziyād b. Maymūn regarded the search for knowledge as a secondary obligation (*ṭalab al-‘ilm farīḍa*) incumbent on all Muslims.⁴ Three centuries later, Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī composed an entire book, *Travel in Search of Ḥadīth (al-rihla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth)*, reporting on the scholars who had journeyed across the abode of Islam for the sake of *ḥadīth*.⁵

Rihla as a Spiritual Quest

Also related to the *rihla*, if less directly, is the institution of the *ḥajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca that able Muslims are required to perform at least once in their lives. Formally, the text around which this chapter turns, the *Tuḥfat al-‘Iraqayn* (Gift from Two Iraqs), owes its genesis to the institution of the *ḥajj*. Its author, Khāqānī Shirwānī, performed the *ḥajj* twice, and this narrative, completed in 1157-8, appears to date to the period of his first pilgrimage.⁶ However, as will be seen, *Tuḥfat*'s relationship to any act of traveling, including the *ḥajj*, is rather complicated, inasmuch as, according to the conceit of the text, the poet remains enchained at home for the entire course of the “journey.”

Alongside its nominal association with the *ḥajj*, *Tuḥfat* exemplifies a broader tradition, which is deeply rooted in Islamic culture and also distinct from the pilgrimage tradition, of seeking knowledge for epistemological ends. Touati’s argument that the *rihla* engaged in for the sake of knowledge was “constructed as a break” with the *ḥajj* and in the belief that travel anywhere in the world for the sake of increasing one’s knowledge was as praiseworthy as the *ḥajj* is substantiated in the history of medieval Persian travel literature.⁷ Even poets like Khāqānī, whose travel narratives originated in the practice of *ḥajj*, 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 history and its literary representation applies more broadly to the tradition within which Khāqānī worked, for, 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.”⁸

While the vast majority of *rihla* 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, when most of the relevant Persian texts were composed.⁹ Like many of its Arabic predecessors, the earliest

¹ For an eighteenth century Persian travelogue that draws on the *‘ajā’ib* tradition, see Naghmeh Sohrabi, *Taken for Wonder: Nineteenth Century Travel Accounts from Iran to Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21-46. For a nineteenth century genre-crossing historiography that incorporates *‘ajā’ib*, see Rebecca Gould, *History as Ethical Self-Fashioning: The Sources of the Persianate Self in Bākīkhānūf’s Garden of Paradise*,” (under review).

² Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1889-9), 2: 33-34, 176-180.

³ See for example G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [1983]), 66-70, and Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II: Quranic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), 2: 40.

⁴ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Kitāb tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984 [reprint of Hyderabad ed., 1325-1327]), 5: 102ff. [in juynboll]

⁵ Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Rihlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Iṭr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1975).

⁶ 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, 1955), 26-30.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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. An important exception to this generalization is the nineteenth century travelogue *Safarnāmah-i Farhād Mirzā, Mu’tamad al-Dawlah*, ed. Ismā‘il Navvāb Šafā (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), 859-865.

⁹ 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*

extant Persian travel narrative, Nasser Khosro'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 center for the Ismaili faith.¹ The author, Nasser Khosro (1004-1088), was a poet and philosopher from Qubādyān, in the Marv District of northeastern Khorasan. Over the course of his journey, he became an Ismaili convert. 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."² During this dream, a voice reproached the poet for wasting his life in drink, and asked him why he did not remain sober. Nasser Khosro 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 denoting the location of the Ka'ba.

As the direction in which Muslims pray, the *qibla* visually entails a mental peregrination to Mecca on the part of every believer; hence *rihla* is inscribed into every act of prayer in the Islamic tradition. Taking this symbolic linkage of pilgrimage and prayer literally, Nasser Khosro immediately set about making preparations for his journey. A few days later, he traveled to Faryāb and Marv. Announcing that he had decided to travel in the direction of the *qibla*, Nasser Khosro quit his job, settled his debts, renounced everything worldly (*az dunyā anche bud tark kardam*), and began his journey to the western lands under Ismaili rule. As he later recalled, the dream had revealed to him that, unless he changed all his ways and actions (*hameh āfa'āl va ā'amāl*), he would never find happiness (*farrukh*, 2). Hence, Nāṣir's westward *rihla* was a concrete endeavor 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 began travelling: Fatimid-ruled Cairo, a city that, since 969, the political center of Ismaili 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 Nasser stayed the longest from the year 1046 to 1052. It was also in Cairo that Nasser became formally initiated into the Ismaili creed and rose to the rank of *hujjat*, a religious leader charged with overseeing one of the twelve regions (*jazā'ir*) where Ismailis lived but which was not controlled by the Fatimids.³

Although his *Safarnāma* concentrates on what he observed in Mecca, Cairo, and Jerusalem, Nasser traversed a geography described by Khāqānī a century later when he journeyed from Azerbaijan to Diyār Bakr. The cities of Darband, Qazvin, Rayy, and the topography of Mount Damavand and the Caspian Sea, all of which are mentioned by Nāṣir, were also well known to Khāqānī. The *Safarnāma* thus set an important precedent for subsequent Persian travel literature, and provided a counterexample against which the later travelers could fashion their own narratives. Although he does not mention the *Safarnāma* by name, Khāqānī was familiar with Nasser Khosro's poetry, and, as will be seen below, incorporates many of his literary devices into his poetry, particularly when it touches on the topics of exile, travel, and imprisonment.

As the first Persian *rihla* narrative in verse, and possibly the first text of this genre in any Islamic language, Khāqānī's *Tuhfat* differs from its Persian and Arabic predecessors in many crucial respects.⁴ 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 *rihla* and its historical context, for in this verse narrative "the sun is the traveler, not Khāqānī himself."⁵ Rather than documenting an empirical event, *Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn* is a fictional journey grounded in historical fact. Its intimate relation with other poetic genres, including in particular the poetry of exile and imprisonment, which I explore shortly in greater detail, further complicate the text's relationship to historical reality.

Sea: *Persianate Travel Writing* (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.

¹ *Safarnāma-i Abū-Mu'īn Hamīd-ad-Dīn Nāṣir Ibn-Khusrau Qubādyānī Marwazī*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī (Tehran: Zawwār, 1956/1335). Future citations are from this edition and given parenthetically.

² The citation is from Ehsan Yarshater's preface to the English translation of the *Safarnāma* by Wheeler Thackston, *The Book of Travels (Safarnāma)* (Albany, NY: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986), vii.

³ As noted by Ivanov, *jazā'ir* typically means islands in Arabic and Persian, but in this context it refers to "what would better be described as a 'religious colony,' i.e. the Ismaili community in a country which politically was not under Fatimid sovereignty V. Ivanov, "The organization of the Fatimid Propaganda," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15 (1939): 12 of 1-35.

⁴ For this claim to "firstness," see J. Rypka, *History of Iranian literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1956), 204. Beelaert usefully lists later Persian travel narratives that reference *Tuhfat*, as well as a manuscript held in the Leiden University Library (Or. 1620), by the poet Sā'ī, that narrates the author's journey from Shirwān to Ṣafāvīd-ruled Isfāhan (*Cure* 11, n53).

⁵ Beelaert, *A Cure*, 10.

Tuhfat is a *rihla* 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 the professions of his grandfather, father, mother, and uncle, which he links to his poetic vocation (*Tuhfat*, 198).

The centrality of the ideology of *rihla* to the latter necessitated an empirical and scientific, rather than a fantastical, trajectory for the travel narrative. Khāqānī's *Tuhfat* diverges from the *rihla* tradition, and announces its foreignness to the *rihla* canon through its extended metaphors and similes (particularly to the sun), its autobiographical reflection, and its highly rhetorical engagements with objects and persons that in non-poetic contexts would have been treated with greater restraint. Even as it parts ways with normative *rihla* narrative conventions, however, *Tuhfat* competes with and imitates the best of *rihla* 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 empirical genres.¹

Rihla and Exile

Even as Khāqānī inflects the *rihla* narrative with his poetic consciousness, he uses the empirically oriented *rihla* tradition to introduce new narrative strategies for evoking the physical world, and which prior to him were marginalized by a Persian poetic tradition wherein "the literary imagination was paramount, autonomous, and even sovereign."² After he returned from his pilgrimage, Khāqānī's predecessor in the Persian travel writing, Nasser Khosro, began to compose the poems that entered into his *dīwān*. Many of these poems were written in the remote village of Yumgān in Afghanistan, to which Nasser 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 Ismaili faith.³ One *qaṣīda* composed during this period, resonates particularly powerfully with the pathos of exile, while also incorporating a device that was to profoundly inflect Khāqānī's *Tuhfat*: 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 مر ایشان را⁴

Say hello to me from Khurāsān,
 to the virtuous and wise among them, not to the vulgar ones.
 Bring back from them the news to me
 when you have conveyed to them the truth of my situation.

Whereas Nasser made the wind into the bearer of his grief in his poems, Khāqānī used the sun in the same way in *Tuhfat*. Alongside Nāṣir, Khāqānī had a second major predecessor in his efforts to narrate a journey in verse. This was Sanā'ī of Ghazna (d. 1131), a poet with whom Khāqānī shared a similarly exalted sense of his vocation. For most of his career, Sanā'ī was based at the court of Mas'ūd III (r. 1099-1115) in Herat. Tense poet and 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."⁵ Khāqānī connected his own entry into the world with Sanā'ī's death, as the following autobiographical verses attest:

badal man āmadam andar jahān Sanā'ī ra
bad īn dalīl pidar nām i man badīl nihād⁶

I entered the world as a replacement to Sanā'ī

¹ For a Persian text divided into four *maqālas* that was almost exactly contemporaneous with Khāqānī's *Tuhfat*, see Nizāmī 'Arūḍī, *Chahār maqāla*, ed. Muḥammad Mu'īn (Tehran: Zawwār, 1957).

² Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 53.

³ For Nāṣir Khusraw's exile in Yumgān, see Manūchīhr Ātishī, *Nāṣir-i Khusraw: sargashtah-i jahān va tab 'idī-i Yumgān* (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Intishārāt-i Āhang-i Dīgar, 1388/2009).

⁴ *Divān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Abu Mu'īn Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw Qubādīyānī* (Isfahan: Intishārāt-i Kitāb'furūshī-yi Ta'yīd 1335/1956-7), 10 (*qaṣīda* 4, vv. 3-4).

⁵ Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 145.

⁶ *Dīvān-i Afzal al-Dīn Badīl ibn 'Alī Najjār Khāqānī Shirvānī* ed. Ziyā' al-Dīn Sajjādī (Tehran: Zawwār, 1960), 850.

for this reason my father gave me the name Badil.

Sanā'ī completed the *hajj* in 1130, but, significantly, did not dedicate a poem to this event.¹ Instead, his contribution to Persianate travel narrative pertained to more polemical topics, and was more suffused with satire than spiritual uplift. This work of Sanā'ī's is entitled *Acts 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.² Both *Tuhfat* and *Kārnāmah* belong formally to the *mathnawī* genre, a narrative verse form that consists of rhyming couplets with ten to eleven syllables per hemistich. Also like *Tuhfat*, Sanā'ī's text is structured topographically and addressed to multiple patrons. The setting moves from Ghazna, where he had been based at the Ghaznavid court, to Balkh, which at that time was, like Khāqānī's Iraq, under Saljuq rule.³ It is not surprising therefore to see Khāqānī refer to Sanā'ī's text in the pages of his own *Tuhfat* (28, v. 11). As Khāqānī's was later to do with unparalleled mastery, *Kārnāmah-i Balkh* combines Persian rhetorical devices pertaining to the many varieties of complaint (*hasb-i hāl*, *shikwa*) with social satire of a world from which the poet was alienated.⁴ 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 *Tuhfat*.⁵ Both poets were deeply attached to their places of origin, while at the same time being 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 literature of exile, travel, and incarceration.⁶ Sanā'ī condenses these idioms into verses that insist on the uselessness of travel even when engaging in this practice:

مرد در شهر خویش با نیروست دیده هم بر میان چشم نکوست
 خاک در ساکنی پسندیدست چون بجمید آفت دیده است
 نه بهر شهر تازه تر فلکیست رازق هرچه کشور است یکیست
 سفر و خانه ژاژ دان و هوس کار لطف خدا ی داند و بس (5-1)

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, the two poets relied on the same poetic device, that of the messenger who serves as an alter ego for the poet's self. Throughout *Tuhfat*, Khāqānī turns to the sun, addressing it as a friend, a prophet, and a patron.⁸ The sun is Khāqānī's interlocutor destined for

¹ For Sanā'ī'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. Sanā'ī did complete his major work, *Hadiqa al-haqīqa*, soon after completing the *hajj*, but this text is, if anything, a denial of the institution of the *rihla*.

² *Kārnāmah-i Balkh* is included in *Masnavihā-yi Hakīm Sanā'ī: bi-inzām-i Sharh-i sayr al-'ibād ilā al-mā'ād*, Mudarris Razavī (Tehran: Dānīshgāh-i Tīhrān, 1348/1969), 142-178. For further intertexts with Sanā'ī's travel narrative, see Sunil Sharma, *Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000), 57 (on Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān), and Matthew Chaffee Smith, "Literary Courage Language, Land, and the Nation in the Works of Malik al-Shu'ara Bahar" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2006), 28 (on Bahār).

³ For a discussion of *Kārnāmah-i Balkh* in the context of Sanā'ī's biography, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Of piety and poetry: the interaction of religion and literature in the life and works of Hakīm Sanā'ī of Ghazna* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 39-56, and de Bruijn, "Kār-Nāma-ye Balḵ," *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Costa Mesa, CA.: Mazda Publishers, 1991-), 15(6): 585.

⁴ For varying formulations of this device, see Sharma, *Persian Poetry*, 54 and Beelaert, *A Cure*, 35.

⁵ 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).

⁶ For the latter, see, in addition to my book manuscript and the works cited in n59, Rebecca Gould, "Prisons Before Modernity: Incarceration in the Medieval Indo-Mediterranean," *Al-Masāq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 24.2 (2012): 179-197.

⁷ *Masnavihā-yi Hakīm Sanā'ī*, 177. This translation modifies that in Sharma, *Persian Poetry*, 55.

⁸ Khāqānī's sun imagery is most thoroughly discussed in Beelaert, *A Cure*, 29-114.

geographies he cannot himself travel to, trapped as he is in the “sublunary world” of Shirwān, imprisoned (fictionally) beneath the ground:¹

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

Bring me out from the line of time.
 Then tilt your ear towards my mouth.
 With a drunken heart I cannot
 raise my voice to you.

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

طوبی لك اكر كنى تجيم^۱ زى روضه كشور چهارم
 مه قعده فلك جنبه سازى دو اسبه سوی عراق تازی

(*Tuhfat*, 84, vv. 1-2)

Praise to you, if you both to go
 to the garden in the fourth clime.
 If you make the sky your mount in the month of Qada
 Rush hastily to Iraq.

Thus *Tuhfat* is structured by the sun’s journey through Iraq, all the way to Mecca, all the while serving as a proxy for the poet, who is metaphorically enchained in Shirwān. Given its status as one of the inaugural texts in the Persian *rihla* tradition, the fictional conceit that lies at its foundation is noteworthy.

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

ويحك اى نقشبند بى خامة قاصد رایگان بى نامه
 فلک از بهر ناخوشی و خوشی کرده بر نام تو خریطه کنی^۳

Oh fortunate painter without a brush,
 Free messenger without a letter,
 For better or for worse, destiny
 has made you the courier [of my verse].

As with Nasser Khosro’s verses above, the wind is figured in these verses as an artist by virtue of its ability to move miraculously 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 use of the sun and Sanā’ī’s use of the wind, both texts include a “long series of panegyrics” to a multitude of patrons.⁴ Such formal parallels suggest the importance of Sanā’ī’s precedent for Khāqānī’s narrative poetics.

Although it nominally follows the narrative structure of the pilgrimage, *Tuhfat* participates in the poetry of exile and imprisonment by thematizing the difficulty of reaching Mecca and Medina. Midway through his *mathnawi*, and not in any particularly chronological sequence, the poet eulogizes the Ka’ba:

¹ Beelaert, *A Cure*, 31.

² *Maṣnavī-i tuhfāt al-‘Irāqayn*, ed. Yahyā Qarib (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahāmī-i Kitābhā-yi Jībī bā hamkārī-i Mu’assasah-‘i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 2537/1978-9), 80, v. 13; 81, v. 1. Future citations from *Tuhfat* are from this edition and are given parenthetically.

³ *Maṣnavīhā-yi Ḥakīm Sanā’ī*, 142.

⁴ Beelaert, *A Cure*, 141

۶۳۳ محور سفرنامه

مانی بعروس حجله بسته در حجله چارسو نشسته
 حوری بمثال عبقری پوش شاهی بمثل دواج بر دوش
 (Tuhfat, 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, does dwell briefly in Mecca, the core of his narrative transpires in other geographies. Khāqānī dedicated his text to a Zangi vizier, Jamāl al-Dīn Mawṣilī (of Mosul in Iraq), who never made the pilgrimage during his lifetime. Even though he never undertook the *hajj* himself, Jamāl al-Dīn attained fame as a lavish patron of Mecca. The Andalusian traveller Ibn Jubayr noted during his visit to the city from 1183-5 that Jamāl al-Dīn had endowed the largest *ḥammān* (bath) 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.¹ 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.² Jamāl al-Dīn died in prison the following year. These final tragic episodes pertain to a period after Khāqānī's sojourn in Mosul.

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. His material support for poets gave him a special place in Khāqānī's narrative. While Jamāl al-Dīn was but one of the many patrons eulogized in Khāqānī's *mathnawi*, he is the one who 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.

Rihla as Admonition

Having traced a genealogy for the Persian literature of travel up to the time of Khāqānī, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of a poem that Khāqānī conceived during his return from the *hajj*, on his way to Shirwān, during the same years that *Tuhfat* was composed. The poem traverses the same geography as *Tuhfat*, but unlike this lengthier text, this journey in this poem is undertaken in the poet's own name, and the speaker is the traveler who observes what is described. With respect to the relation between the literary imagination and the world of its reference, this poem approximates more closely to the traditional understanding of travel literature than does *Tuhfat*. The narrative of this poem, which describes the poet wandering amidst sovereign ruins, might be deemed the biographical counterpart to the fantastic journey performed by the sun in *Tuhfat*. Also in sharp contrast to *Tuhfat*, this poem is more an anti-panegyric than a panegyric.

For these reasons, the text is central to the Persian aesthetics of travel, particularly through its influential evocation of Sāsānian 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 Nasser Khosro contributed substantially, and the literature of imprisonment that was Khāqānī's greatest contribution to Persian literature.³ That the convergence between the poetry of exile and the literature of imprisonment took place in a text that participated in, while also transforming, the *rihla*, attests to the reconfiguration of the relation between the imagination and its referent that writing of travel made possible within Persian literary culture.

The major protagonist in the narrative of twelfth-century prison poetry—its advent, its astonishing proliferation, its absorption into other literary genres, and its reconfiguration of patron/poet relations—is Khāqānī.⁴ Following on the exilic poetry of Nasser Khosro that was in turn inspired by the practice of

¹ Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, ed. William Wright (Leiden: Brill, 1907), 124-127, 167-196.

² For basic bibliographic information on this figure, see "al-Djawād al-İsfahānī," *The Encyclopedia of Islam*², 2: 489 (no author named); 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.

³ For another account of the juncture between the literature of exile and imprisonment, see Aḥmad Reḍā Sayyādī and ʿAlī Reḍā Nūrī, "Gham-i ghurba dar ash'ar-i Nāṣir Khusrow, Sanā'ī o Khāqānī," *Majalle-i Keyhāneh Farhangī* 468 (1387): 46-51.

⁴ On Khāqānī's innovative style, see Karamī, "Nagāhī be maḍāmīn-i Musawī o zibāihāyī ān dar dīwān-i Khāqānī," 182, who connects the poet's new design (*tarḥī nū*) to his appropriation of sovereign metonyms.

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, when he compared human life to a signless Ka'ba, the sky arching over Khāqānī's head was deaf to the poet's demand for cogent speech, so too were the Saljūqs and their minions deaf to the pleas of poets demanding justice. Khāqānī's silent sky signifies the paradoxes of twelfth-century sovereignty. From the tension between the sultanate's discretionary power and the poet's vocation arose a literary genre that argued for poetry's sovereignty by foregrounding the political aesthetics of incarceration.

This exploration of Persian literature's transformation of the *rihla* will close with one of the poet's final and best known if not always best understood, poems, on the ruins of the Sāsānian palace known in Islamic sources as Madā'in and in Greek sources as Ctesiphon. Although it neither a prison poem, nor a complaint, nor a poem of exile in any formal sense, this text is, unambiguously inscribed with the experience of travel. Any endeavor to link the Persian literature of travel with the poetry of exile and imprisonment culminates in this literary wonder. The Madā'in qaṣīda retrospectively reflects on the prison poem genre that Khāqānī had forged, while at the same time anticipating, as if prophetically, its obsolescence.

A few words are in order about the historical site that gave rise to the poet's elegy. 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."¹ Still standing, albeit in ruins, the original parameters of this structure are known primarily through the recollections of poets and other travelers who made their way to Baghdad's environs. Among eighteenth century Persianate travellers, such as the Qajar migrant to India Mīr 'Abd al-Laṭīf Khan Shūshtarī, the encounter with Sāsānian ruins was often mediated by Khāqānī's poem.²

Madā'in ("two cities"), the Arabic word by which Ctesiphon is known and which is the source of the title assigned by later scholars to Khāqānī's qaṣīda, 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 center in Semitic Mesopotamia.³ Edward Gibbon considered Ctesiphon the rightful successor to Babylon as "one of the great capitals of the East."⁴ Although Nushīrwān did not found Ctesiphon, the city with which he is forever associated through his palace, he did augment the city architecturally, most notably through an infusion of the iconology of royal sovereignty, which in turn set the stage for the city's post-Sāsānian appropriation as Madā'in.

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). 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 Sāsānian 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 bolandī-yi īrān*).⁵ While the readings found on the pages of *Iranshahr* yield new poetic reflections suited to a modern age, even in the hands of modern Iran's most visionary critics, the proto-nationalist reading that

¹ Scott John McDonough, "Power by Negotiation: Institutional Reform in the Fifth Century Sasanian Empire" (PhD Dissertation, U of California Los Angeles, 2005), 3.

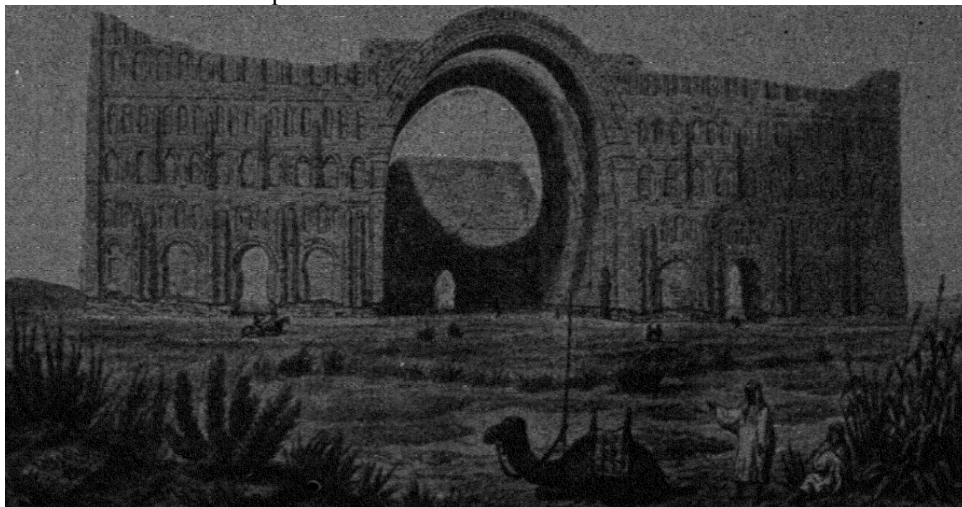
² Mīr 'Abd al-Laṭīf Khan Shūshtarī, *Tuhfah al-'ālam va zayl al-tuhfa* [c. 1799], ed. S. Muvahid (Tehran: Tahūrī, 1984), 76-81. For recent discussions of Shūshtarī and other Qajar-era travellers, see Abbas Amanat, "Through the Persian Eye: Anglophilia and Anglophobia in Modern Iranian History," *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, eds., Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 136-7, and Mana Kia, "Contours of Persianate Community, 1722-1835" (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 132.

³ V. Minorsky, "Geographical Factors in Persian Art," *BSOAS* 9.3 (1938): 624.

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

⁵ *Aiwān-i Madā'in: tasdīs-i qaṣīda-i Khāqānī, bi qalam-i chand nafar az fuḍalā' wa shu'arā'-i Irān=Aiwan-i Medāin: un poème de Khāqānī (1606), adapté et augmenté par quelques poètes contemporains* (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Iranschähr, 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, 1330).

has dominated the text's recent reception has done little to elucidate the traces of the aesthetics of incarceration within this poem.



(Figure 1). Depiction of Madā'in-Ctesiphon in *Aiwān-i Madā'in*, *Iranschāhr*, p. 41.

More even than as a result of its own glory, poet travellers including al-Buḥturī (d. 897), Omar Khayyām (1048-1131), Ma^crūf al-Raṣāfī (1875-1945), and historian-chroniclers including al-Mas^cūdī and al-Ṭabarī inscribed the ruins of Nushīrwān's palace on Islamic cultural memory both before and after Khāqānī set himself to the task.¹ 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.² 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," Omar Khayyām went even further in locating this chain of references within a *ubi sunt* tradition, a literary genre that, during the Latinate Middle Ages as well as globally, foregrounded the transience of life as against the permanence of mortality.³ 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, and for that matter, Islamicate, travel narratives.

A rubā^cī by ^cUmar Khayyām in the *ubi sunt* mode plays on the multivalent meanings of 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 کور میگرفتی دایم
 امروز نکر که کور بهرام گرفت

4

The palace where Bahrām raised his cup,
 where lions rested and foxes propagated,
 and Bahrām, who used so easily to capture prey [*gūr*],

¹ For an overview of Persian and Arabic poets who have composed elegies to Madā'in, see Sayyid Aḥmad Pārsā, "Derangī bar Īwān-i Madā'in-i Khāqānī," *Majallah-yi Dānishkada-yi Adabiyāt-i Tehrān* 41/54-5 (1385): 5-18. For comparisons of Buḥturī and Khāqānī's poems on Madā'in, see Amīr Maḥmūd Anwār, *Aiwān-i Madā'in* (Tehrān: Dānishgāh-i Tehrān, 1383/2004) and Jerome W. Clinton, "The *Madā'en Qasida* of Xāqānī Sharvānī, II: Xāqānī and al-Buḥturī," *Edebiyāt* 2.1 (1977): 191-206

² *Dīvān al-Buḥturī*, ed. Ḥasan Kāmil Ṣayrafī (Cairo: Dār al-Ma^cārif, 1963), 2: 1152-1162. On al-Buḥturī's sympathetic representation of the Sāsānians, see Samer M. Ali, "Reinterpreting Al-Buḥturī's Īwān Kisrā Ode," *JAL* 37.2 (2006): 58.

³ Named for its association with the refrain *ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere* (where are they who have gone before us), 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 diss: U 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).

⁴ *Tarānehayī Khayyām*, ed. Ṣādeq Hedāyat (Tehrān: Jāvīdān, 1352), 71, rubā^cī 74.

is taken captive by the grave [*gūr*] today.

In the poet's present, the palace [*qaṣr*] where Bahrām raised his scepter [*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 Sāsānian 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 traveler gazes on a foreign country. This third temporality has done the poet's work 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 *jenās*. That this mode of verbal opposition occurs in so many *ubi sunt* texts indicates how the genre's poetics is premised on a linguistic opposition that is expressed temporally as well as spatially.

Even before poets turned their mind to the task of representing the ruins of Ctesiphon, orators such as the famous Muṭazilī leader Wāṣil b. ʿAṭā' (d. 748) had already engaged with this image to suggest the fleetingness of worldly power. "Where are the kings," asked Wāṣil b. ʿAṭā', "who built Madā'in?" Typically for the *ubi sunt*, Wāṣil b. ʿAṭā''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 [*maʿalimahum*]...
You do not hear a single sound from them.¹

The Persian poet Ferdowsī (d. 1025) recycled Wāṣil b. ʿAṭā''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
کجا آن گزیده نیاکان ما
کجا آن دلیران و پاکان ما
همه خاک دارند بالین و خشت
خنک آنک جز تخم نیکی نکشت²

Where are the mighty ones with their thrones and crowns?
Where are the horsemen elated with victory?
Where are the wise ones?
Where are the proud warriors?
Where are our exalted ancestors?
Where are our valiant servants?
All the dirt they have now is the earth and a few bricks.

¹ I cite, with minor modifications, from the translation of Tahera Qutbuddin, "Khutba," in Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson (eds.), *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 267. For the Arabic text, see Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat, *Jamharat khuṭab al-ʿArab fī l-ʿuṣūr al-ʿarabiyya al-zāhira* (Beirut: Dar al-Matbuʿat al-ʿArabiyyah, 1933), 2:501-3, No. 475.

² *Shāhnāma*, eds. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, Mahmoud Omidshalar, and Abū al-Faḍl Khaṭībī (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987-2008), 1504.

Their seeds have grown cold.

Ferdowsī's text corresponds precisely to the Latin genre in offering a Persian parallel, at the opening of each hemistich, to the *ubi sunt* refrain: *kojā* ("where?"). 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: royal power, these authors argue in anticipation of Khāqānī's poetics of ruins, yields to poetry's longer-lasting sovereignty. The difference between the two forms of power is revealed temporally through the *ubi sunt*, as well as spatially, through the topos of travel. The contrast between these two forms of power leads al-Buḥturī to conclude with an argument for the equality of races and peoples that of itself constitutes a challenge to hierarchal discourses of cultural difference, including those inculcated by Sāsānian kingship: "I find myself thereafter in love with noble / men of every race [*sinkhin*] and origin [*issī*]" (v. 56). The equalizations inflicted by time onto the *ubi sunt* and by space onto Sāsānian ruins were fully absorbed in Khāqānī's poem. As the poet who used the topos of exile and complaint to extend the parameters of the Persianate literature of travel, Khāqānī used the *ubi sunt* to comment on the poet's contestatory relation to sovereign power. When Khāqānī set out to compose his *qaṣīda* on the ruins of Nushīrwān's palace in the 1156, he had already composed the six prison poems that refashioned his poetic persona within a prophetic lineage and laid out the terms of his argument for poetry's discursive sovereignty.¹ The vatic utterance had already been declared supreme by the topos of incarceration.

The majority of Khāqānī's *Madā'in* *qaṣīda* moves wholly within the *ubi sunt* idiom. As Johannes Huizinga argued a century ago, this idiom is inflected by the "ever present theme of death" characteristic of the middle ages globally, and pertains well beyond any specific national tradition.² Khāqānī pays homage to the temporal contrasts the *ubi sunt* was created to elucidate 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 [*al-ḥān*]." The poet moves beyond the genre's emphasis on the fleetingness of worldly power and the eternal repetition of birth and death, anticipating and indeed superseding the *ubi sunt*'s later practitioners, when in the second section (vv. 26-35) he turns to ekphrasis, and enters more fully in to the *riḥla* genre. In these verses, the poet evokes a panorama of ruins, onto which is projected a tableau of images from Iran's past.³

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. Instead of chronicling the achievements of Sāsānian kings, but in keeping with the aesthetics of rebellion that this poem seeks to cultivate, Khāqānī exposes royal sovereignty's violence. Here and elsewhere, the conceptual severance of sovereignty from regal glory is one consequence of the Khāqānīan aesthetics of incarceration for which both *Tuḥfat* and the *Madā'in* *qaṣīda* set the stage. The opening hemistich of the *Madā'in* *qaṣīda* constitutes a prolegomenon to the literature of incarceration through its 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 دان

4

Make a lesson in your heart from this image:

Know that the ruins of *Madā'in* are a mirror's lesson

This distich simultaneously addresses the poet and the regime that determines the horizons of the poet's vocation. This duality of address is a hallmark of the classical Persian aesthetics of incarceration, wherein unmitigated calls for revolution would have possessed little cogency, and the most effective political critiques employed a poetics of indirection. With his repertoire enriched by his experience of travel,

¹ These poems are included in the appendix to Gould, "The Political Aesthetic."

² J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Garden City: Anchor-Doubleday, 1954), 139.

³ 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 Sāsānian glory, see Mehdī Ma'khūzī, *Ātash andar chang* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1388).

⁴ *Dīvān-i Afzal al-Dīn Badīl ibn 'Alī Najjār Khāqānī Shirvānī* ed. Sajjādī, 358-360

Khāqānī inverted, subverted, parodied and transformed the panegyric genres that structure his *Tuhfat*. Duality of address—whether through apostrophe, *ihām*, or other forms of allusiveness—is the basic strategy through which the prison poem’s genre contract is validated.

From the hemistich “The earth is drunk. It has drunken deep” (v. 26) onwards the text’s otherworldly *ubi sunt* idiom becomes increasingly inflected by this-worldly critique, and thereby also approximates more closely to the literature of travel. This post-*ubi sunt* poem is less concerned with the fleetingness of time than with the corruption of worldly power. 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*). Given that cups are normally bearers of regal power and not vessels for human blood, the double entendre on *pand* (advice, bird) that follows generates a startling image:

بس پند که بود آنگه بر تاج سرش پیدا

صد پند نوست اکنون در مغز سرش پنهان

So much counsel [*pand*] shined from his crown
that now one hundred birds [*pand*] are eating his brains secretly.

The sovereign power delineated here is anything but glorious. This form of late Sāsānian power breeds death in its most grotesque form, rendered here by the specter of birds (literally, kites) feasting on the brains of the honored Nushīrwān. As indicated in the translation above, *pand* is used both in the sense of counsel and to refer to birds who feast on human flesh. Khāqānī’s *ihām* on *pand* threatens to destabilize the entire social order on which medieval kingship is founded.

Khāqānī’s poem leaves a startling effect through the *ihām* on *pand* alone, the aesthetics of incarceration demands even more. In v. 30, there is a brief return to the *ubi sunt* genre with the rhetorical question “where have they gone (*kojā raftand*)?” Exceptionally, the poet answers his rhetorical question. When kings die, their bodies go somewhere, and it is not to heaven: the earth’s belly, the poet says is pregnant (*abestān*) with the flesh of the royal deceased. Then follows a series of observations that fulfill Walter Benjamin’s insight that genres are only realized in the act of their transgression. Whereas Samuel Johnson argued that that every new innovation “subverts the rules which the practice of foregoing authors had established,” Benjamin went even further, pointing out that the most significant works fall outside the boundaries of genre. And yet, a text that has transcended a genre is nonetheless accountable to it. “A major work either establishes a genre [*Gattung*] or abolishes it,” argued Benjamin. “A perfect work does both.”¹ As simultaneously an exemplar of its genre and as its antithetical culmination, written now long after Khāqānī has been freed from his prison cell, the Madā’ in *qaṣīda* corresponds to the Benjaminian vision of a major work that fulfills the genre contract by violating its norms.

“Giving birth [*zāyīdan*] is difficult,” the poet continues, “but sowing seed [*notfeh sūtūdan*] is easy.” In addition to the work they perform on the prison poem, these words at once transgress the thematic focus of the *ubi sunt*, as exemplified by al-Buḥturī, Ferdowsī, and Omar Khayyām, and alter the genre’s substance. Suddenly, the poet’s subject is less the fleetingness of earthly life than poetry’s sovereignty. Those who give their bodies to the earth, including the deceased kings Nushīrwān and Hormuz, are performing the weak, masculine, labor of sowing seeds (*notfeh sūtūdan*) that culminates in nothing. By contrast with the kings who rule by indiscriminately sowing their sperm, Khāqānī aligns the poet’s task with the work of giving birth. This imagery recalls the river of sperm in prison poem six that “floods the womb” and “births a pearl in the sea of me” (6: 52). Rather than feed his body to the earth by lusting after worldly glory, Khāqānī vows with his verse to create sovereignty from poetry. Fashioned in the idiom of the medieval *ubi sunt*, the *qaṣīda*’s final apostrophe—“How many tyrants’ bodies [*tan-i jabbārān*] has the earth eaten so far?” (v. 34)—signals the end of the ideology of Khāqānī’s literary form. It also signals the perpetuation of 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.

Other poets in the *ubi sunt* mode place a cosmic valuation on the fleetingness of worldly power. Whereas prior (and future) poets would use the genre’s refrain (*Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere?*) to suggest that nothing on earth is permanent and to present life as a shadow among shadows, Khāqānī offers a counterweight to a corrupt kingship. Pace Clinton, the best reader of this text at present,

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000), 27.

Khāqānī's alternative 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

If today the hungry one seeks food from the sultān,
tomorrow the sultān will seek food 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 *Tuhfat* and this *qaṣīda*, composed during the same years. In this verse, Khāqānī names the *mathnawī* on which he was working at the time, *Tuhfat al-Iraqayn*, and indicates that it is destined for the court in Shirwān:

گر زاد ره مکه توشه است به هر شهری تو زاد مدائن بر تحفه ز بی شروان

If provisions from every city fill the spot to Mecca
Then take viaticum as a gift [*tuhfeh*], for the sake of Shirwān.

This verse signals a remarkable moment of intertextuality, for in this and subsequent verses Khāqānī refashions his oeuvre as a gift (*tuhfeh*) comparable to the pious offerings that spot the road to Mecca.¹ Does this mean that this poem is 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 dictates as a panegyric form. Khāqānī verses are neither an offering nor an homage; rather they are an admonition (*ibrat*) to the sultan to follow the path of justice rather than oppression. In terms of the Persian transformation of the *rihla*, Khāqānī's comparison is also significant inasmuch as it compares the performance of the *hajj* to the writing of poetry, thereby configuring both acts as forms of political insubordination. Both the *hajj* and the writing of poetry are driven by spiritual values that stand in judgment on corrupt sultanate power. Hence the Persian transformation of the *rihla* from an act of piety to an act of rebellion achieves its apotheosis in this verse.

Calling his *qaṣīda* a fragment (*qīfeh*), Khāqānī figures himself as a miracle-worker who wields licit magic (*sihr-i ḥalāl*) while composing verse:

بنگر که در این قطعه چه سحر همی راند

مهتوک مسیحا دل، دیوانه‌ی عاقل خوان

Observe in this *qīfeh*, how the licit magic [*sihr-i ḥalāl*] moves:
a dead man, with the heart of Christ, a madman with a wise mind.

While the Christian *qaṣīda* defines the political terms of the prison poem through an oppositional aesthetics, the Madā'in *qaṣīda* draws on the *rihla* tradition to mobilize the political capacities of ruins.² 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 (*daryūze*) of those he is mandated to protect (v. 37-38). The legitimacy of the sultan's sovereignty is a function of his willingness to heed his poets' admonitions. Just as the mirrors-for-princes texts that prescribed the ethics of medieval kingship instructed princes to heed the lessons that would later assist in the consolidation of sovereignty,

¹ 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*, eds. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1: 137-182 ("Poetic Microcosms: The Persian Qasida to the End of the Twelfth Century"); 2: 162-169, 431-435 (annotated translation of the Madā'in *qaṣīda*).

² For the Christian *qaṣīda*, Khāqānī's most important prison poem, see For an exposition of the prison poem, see Rebecca Gould, "I Bind Myself in the Belt of Oppression": Khāqānī's Christian Qasida and the Prison Poetry of Medieval Shirwān," forthcoming in the *Journal of Persianate Studies*, and "The Political Cosmology of Prison Poetics: Khāqānī of Shirwān on Muslim-Christian Difference," *Literature Compass* 8.12 (2014).

here the poet instructs himself to learn from the ruler's mistakes how the poet can emerge triumphant, as a spiritual victor who commands a discursive sovereignty that trumps the power of the sultan and the shah. The Madā'in qaṣīda revises elegant tales of kingly glory, including those found in the *Shāhnāma*, for the sake of clarifying an aesthetics that treats poetry, rather than kingship, as the most exalted form of power. Khāqānī was keenly aware of his dependency on the court. But 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 Sāsānian dynastic genealogy drenched in blood gestures towards a dialectic between material power and poetry's sovereignty. Rather than seek to purify his poetry from power, however, the poet configures his verse in terms that critique the material grandeur of royal kingship. Sacralized Persian kingship *and* the sultan's discretionary power are replaced with the vatic idiom of poetry.

By the end of Khāqānī's poem, al-Buḥturī's nostalgic *ubi sunt* has been superseded. Al-Buḥturī excused the travesties promulgated at Madā'in by invading Arab armies in 637 CE with reference to the basic fallibility of human nature. He shed "tears of affection for the cycles of history" with seeking an alternative to this tale of woe.¹ Khāqānī shed no tears. Pace the prevalent nationalist reading of this text, the Madā'in qaṣīda does not weep for the Sāsānian kings, the Arab dynasties that followed, or even for the poet's incarcerated self. Situated between travel literature and the literature of confinement, the Madā'in qaṣīda's poetics of ruins eloquently attests to the peculiar power of Persian literature to realign the coordinates of political rule.

¹ Samer M. Ali, "Reinterpreting Al-Buḥturī's Īwān Kisrā Ode".