Utrecht University

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Pro Lingua Persica

Persian in Islamic
Mystical Literature

Oratie

Uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van de leeropdracht Perzische en Iraanse Studies aan de Universiteit Utrecht op woensdag 27 oktober 2021.

Mijnheer de Rector Magnificus,
Beste collega's en vrienden,
Beste studenten,
Dames en heren,

In his inaugural lecture for the Chair of Oriental languages at this University 320 years ago, Adriaan Reland (1676-1718) emphasized the importance of Persian for understanding the religious, intellectual and artistic culture of Islam. His lecture was published in 1701 as *Oratio pro Lingua Persica et Cognatis Literis Orientalibus* ("Discourse in defence of the Persian Language and Related Oriental Scripts").[1] Reland shows how knowledge of Persian is helpful in disciplines ranging from Biblical Studies and Jewish Studies, to history, geography, etymology and comparative linguistics. He was fascinated by the similarities between Persian and the Germanic languages. His interest in the study of Islam was motivated by the intellectual history of Muslims and the way Muslims have conceptualized religion. His book *De religione Mohammedica*, published in 1705, took the view that one cannot understand Islam, and have a dialogue with Muslims, without studying the texts that Muslims themselves regard as authoritative.[2] This book introduced a new methodology for looking at Islam. It became a best-

1 A. Reland, *Oratio pro Lingua Persica et Cognatis Litteris Orientalibus*, Utrecht: willem vande water, 1701; for an evaluation of this inaugural lecture see J.T.P. de Bruijn, "The Persian Studies of Adriaan Reland (1676-1718)," in *Pearls of Meanings: Studies on Persian Art, Poetry, Sufism and History of Iranian Studies in Europe by J.T.P. de Bruijn*, Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020, pp. 237-247. For a biography of Reland see Henk J. van Rinsum, "Adriaan Reland (1676-1718) and His Formative Years A Prelude to De Religione Mohammedica," in *Orient in Utrecht: Adriaan Reland (1676-1718) Arabist, Cartographer, Antiquarian and Scholar of Comparative Religion*, ed. B. Jaski, C. Lange, A. Pytlowany and H.J. van Rinsum, Leiden: Brill, 2021, pp. 17-43; Richard van Leeuwen and Arnoud Vrolijk, *The Thousand and one nights and Orientalism in the Dutch Republic, 1700-1800:* Antoine Galland, Ghisbert Cuper and Gilbert de Flines, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, pp. 103-107; and on Reland's approach to Islam, especially on prophet Muḥammad see C. Lange, "Follow the Light: Adriaan Reland (1676-1718) on Muhammad" in the same volume, pp. 65-90.

2 J.T.P. de Bruijn, "The Persian Studies…," p. 239.

inv.nr. 10801
Pieter Stevensz. van Gunst (1659-1724)
Portret van Adriaan Reland (1676-1718) ca. 1712
kopergravure op papier
Collectie Centraal Museum, Utrecht/aankoop 1951 © Centraal Museum Utrecht

seller, republished in Dutch in 1717 and translated into English (1712), French (1721), German and Spanish. It was banned under the Papal censorship, the *Index librorum prohibitorum* in 1725.[3]

For us today it may seem strange that Reland defends and invites his audience to study the Persian language and culture, but with a swift look at the landscape of European scholarship before and around the time of *Oratio*, we see that Thomas Hyde (1636-1703), Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, wrote a "remarkably learned treatise on the religion of the Ancient Persians" in 1700, and translated other texts from Persian.[4] In the Netherlands, the interests of Dutch orientalists can be seen in the writing of grammars and dictionaries, and the translation of several works directly from Persian. Louis de Dieu (1590-1642) wrote a grammar of Persian; Jacob Golius (1596-1667) wrote the first Persian-Latin dictionary. Golius taught Saʿdī's *Rose Garden* (*Gulistān*, completed 1258), and he was a key figure in attracting people such as Georgius Gentius (d. 1678) and Levinus Warner (1619-1665). These scholars translated into Latin several Persian works, especially the works of the Persian sage Saʿdī of Shiraz (c. 1210-1292). André du Ryer translated the *Rose Garden* into French in 1634. A year later Friedrich Ochsenbach turned this into German. In 1651, George Gentius (d. 1678) published the entire *Gulistān* in Persian together with a Latin translation, which remained the standard text until the beginning of the nineteenth century when translations into other European languages appeared. Adam Olearius published a free German translation in 1654, which was reproduced three times before the end of the seventeenth century. Saʿdī had become a household name, a favourite of intellectuals such as Voltaire (1694-

3 See De Bruijn who refers to German and Spanish translations. He bases his information on A.J. van der Aa's *Biografisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden*, 1852-57, XVI, p. 148.

4 *Historia Riligionis Veterum Persanem*, Oxford, 1700; See A.J. Arberry, "Hafiz And His English Translators," in *Islamic Culture*, 20, 1946, pp. 111-112. Reland refers to Hyde and his knowledge of Persian in his *Oratio* (p. 21) with much respect. "Quae omnia nunc primum Orbi nostro plane exposuit illustre ſidus Academiae Oxonienſis, Thomas Hyde, vir in Literarum Orientalium studio exercitatissimus, cui lingua Persica, & reconditae Orientis antiquitates immane quantum debent."

1778), and Diderot (1713-1784) during the Enlightenment, and later of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832).[5] Voltaire wrote his *Zadig* and represented it as if it were a translation from Saʿdī.[6]

Reland's acquaintance with Persian occurred after Golius' death, when he went to Leiden and purchased several of Persian manuscripts.[7] His interest was not simply linguistic. He explains why Persian is important in the Islamic world. After referring to it as an elegant language, Reland states that Persian is "in frequent use at the court of the Emperor of Constantinople."[8] Yet his main reason for studying Persian was to equip the European student for successful Christian missionary work because he believed that among the Muslims "the Persians excel by their natural disposition and diligence," because they could defend their religion with considerable intellectual strength. He also said:

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5 Dutch orientalists, including Reland, had also noted similarities between the Persian and Dutch languages, listing words such as *mādar* ("moeder"), *pedar* ("vader"), *band* ("band"), to show that the similarities could not be accidental. Such observations could be regarded as part of the Dutch linguistic nationalism of the previous century. Simon Stevin (1548-1620) and Goropius Becanus (1518-1572) developed a theory of Dutch as the original primal language, the "*Oertaal*," from which all the world's languages derived. Becanus added an interesting etymology for the word "doutst," tracing it to "het oudst" or "the oldest." Such ideas also lived among orientalists such as Franciscus Raphelengius (1539-1597) who studied the bible in different languages, noticing resemblances between some languages and striking differences in others. He discovered that Hebrew and Arabic were strikingly different from languages such as Dutch, Latin and Persian. He compiled a word list of Persian and Latin words for Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) who promised him that he would write a chapter on the subject. Marieke van der Wal en Cor van Bree, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlands*, Houten: Spectrum, 1994, p. 189.

6 See John D. Yohannan, *The Poet Saʿdi: A Persian Humanist*, Bibliotheca Persica Persian Studies Series 11, Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1987, pp. 2-3. Voltaire would have said, "I assure you, sir, that I do not understand a word of Persian; but I have translated Saʿdi as La Motte translated Homer. That is, without any knowledge of the original language." See p. 3.; idem, *Persian Poetry in England and America*, Delmar, N.Y.: Caravan Books, 1977, pp. xvi-xvii.

7 J.T.P. de Bruijn, "The Persian Studies…," p. 241.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 242. Also see *Oratio*, p. 12: Quae ratio est quod per totam Asiam a cultiore sexu in pretio habeatur, & in aula Imperatoris Constantinopolitani sit usitatissima.

> The religion of the Persians – which they have in common with almost all Asia and a considerable part of Africa and Europe – deserves to be better understood by the Europeans who used to despise it as being barbarian or to dismiss it through ridicule. For they ascribe to the Mohammedans inane teachings, which have never entered their minds, and these are day by day taught to credulous young people. But whoever has entered upon a discussion with Persians, has he not experienced that their religion is protected by strongholds which are not to be underestimated?[9]

What does Reland mean when he says that Persian is "in frequent use at the court of the Emperor of Constantinople," and why is this language essential for the study of Islam across an even wider geographical area? Moreover, by what strongholds do Persians protect their religions? To understand these, we must make a short trip into the history of the Persian language. After two centuries of Arab dominance, from the 7th to the 9th centuries, the New Persian language emerged in written sources in the semi-independent courts to the East of present-day Iran, i.e., Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Poetry was the main vehicle for culture at these courts. Later, mighty Turkic dynasties such as the Ghaznavids and Saljuqs (Seljuks) took over and became the main purveyors of Persian culture. For the Ghaznavids, Persian was the language of the court at their capital Ghazni, in the eastern part of Afghanistan. They expanded into India and introduced Persian in the eleventh century, making cities such as Lahore bulwarks of literary and cultural activity.[10] The Persianization of northern India

9 J.T.P. de Bruijn, "The Persian Studies…," p. 242.

10 Gavin R. G. Hambly, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Delhi Sultanate.

continued under subsequent dynasties and was boosted by the Mongol invasion of Persia, when Persian-speaking refugees sought shelter in India, and further by the conversion of Mongol courts to Islam. In 1582, the Mughal Emperor Akbar made Persian the official language of India.

To the West, the Saljuqs introduced Persian to Anatolia. The Ottomans, when they established their rule in Anatolia, were trilingual: Arabic for religious matters, Turkish for administration, and Persian as the language of culture and prestige. Their expansion into Europe carried Persian culture to the Balkans.[11] Green refers to "persographia," the written heritage in Persian, including access to the technique of paper-making and material culture, as an important factor which contributed to the flourishing of the Persian literary tradition. Persian sources became the building blocks of a culture that shaped Islam. This is one of the reasons that pioneering commentaries on Persian poets such as Saʿdī, Ḥāfiẓ and Rūmī are to be found in Bosnia.

While Persian as a vehicle of elite culture spread mainly because of politics, the adoption of Persian as the language of Islamic mystics was equally important.[12] The complex networks of the Sufi brotherhoods connected areas from Bengal to the Balkans. Islamic

11 Nile Green identifies a horizontal and a vertical space of the use of Persian. By horizontal use he means the language as part of the equipment of royal courts and Sufi lodges, and by vertical he means Persian going through the social hierarchies of society. These are not equal at all. While Green places Persian as a lingua franca in vertical and horizontal spaces, Bert Fragner, who wrote his *Persophonie,* draws a distinction between 'mother tongue' (*Muttersprache*) and a 'second language' (*Zweitsprache*). Through this distinction he identifies the areas in which Persian was the mother tongue from the 9th century and a wider area in which multilingualism was a tradition among various Asian cultures. Fragner shows that Persian served as a "transregional contact language" (*transregionale Kontaktsprache*) in the Balkan-Belgrade Complex. Such distinction allowed Fragner to emphasize a shift from a "mother tongue" to a "second language," which served as a written *lingua franca*. See N. Green, *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, p. 18; Bert Fragner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalität*, *Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens*, Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999; For a discussion of this topic and Persian identity see A. Ashraf, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Iranian Identity and other sub-entries.

12 Dick Davis, "Sufism and Poetry: A Marriage of Convenience," in *Edebiyât*, 10, 1999, pp. 279-292.

mystics travelled widely, and they read, taught, commented and wrote in Persian, contributing to the ever-growing corpus of Persian poetry. The result was that Persian became a *lingua franca* for a large area, in which authors with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds contributed to Persian art and culture.[13]

Reland does not elaborate on Persian poetry in his *Oratio*, but he did collect manuscripts of Persian poetry.[14] It is the poetry, chiefly religious and didactic poetry, that plays a central role in making Persian so widely used and has been the stronghold of religion. Persian mystical poetry is a vector of Islam, its philosophy and ethics. The number of manuscripts and commentaries of Rūmī and Ḥāfiẓ, to mention just two sages, produced in this vast region prove the intellectual range and vigour of that environment. These poets were cherished as interpreters of Islam, creating a robust culture, typifying ideals of life, defining who was a good Muslim. Each of these poets could be regarded as a prefiguration of an essential conceptual realm in Islamic culture. Their works were read and recited by people of almost all walks of life. As we will see presently, Rūmī and his work have such appeal for Muslims that his work, together with that of other Persian masters, was taught at schools. His *Mathnavī-yi maʿnavī* ("Spiritual Couplets") is read as a commentary on the Quran, showing one how to be pious, while his personal story and his radical transformation from a theologian to a non-conformist ecstatic lover are an exemplar for love mysticism.

We now know more than Reland did. Nothing we have learned detracts from Reland's assessment of the importance of Persian for understanding Islamic culture. Persian religious poetry is

13 While Persian mystical poetry was a main incentive for the wide spread of the Persian language as a *lingua franca*, other factors such as bureaucracy and administration also played a role in creating a global langue of Persian. See Nile Green's introduction in *The Persianate World*.

14 See A. Vrolijk, "The Adriaan Reland Collection at Leiden University Library: Antoine Galland Autographs, Oriental Manuscripts and the Enigmas of the 1761 Auction Catalogue," in The Orient in Utrecht: Adriaan Reland (1676-1718), Arabist, Cartographer, Antiquarian and Scholar of Comparative Religion, eds. B. Jaski, C. Lange, A. Pytlowany, H.J. van Rinsum, Leiden: Brill, 2021, pp. 362-398.

indispensable for understanding Islamic culture as it has been lived, experienced and appreciated through many centuries by people with a varied range of ethnicities. Aside from the delights it offers to the reader, this poetry helps one to understand religiosity and how a religion is understood and practised. To appreciate Persian poetry and to evaluate the changing religious landscape it is equally important to examine the reception history of these poets chronologically through the centuries and synchronically through a vast area, from the Balkans to Bengal. Why did Islamic intellectuals in Bosnia write commentaries on Saʿdī, Rūmī and Ḥāfiẓ? How did they interpret this poetry? Why did politicians use this poetry in their speeches, or why do people still comment on daily social-political events by quoting verses from these poets on Social Media?

I will begin with that great mystic poet known affectionately as "Our Master" to show why and how he has appealed to generations of Muslims from the thirteenth century until today.

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, 'The Manifesto of the Sufi Search for Truth'

In his well-received book *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Shahab Ahmed takes Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1273) and Ḥāfiẓ to be the most widely-read authors in the world of Islam. Of Rūmī he says, "The manifesto of the Sufi search for Truth is summed up by probably the most widely-read Sufi poet in history, … one of the most prolifically copied, recited, and performed poetical (or other) texts in Islamic history, the *Mas̱navī-yi maʿnavī* (Doublets of Meaning)."[15] The reasons for Rūmī's popularity are diverse. It is not

15 Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 21. Ahmed's choice of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex to answer the question "What is Islam?" is to challenge the Islam centred in the Arabic-speaking regions. His justification is as follows: "it is at once a major and a dominant historical paradigm of Islam—but is largely unrecognized as such. The purpose, then, is to answer the question 'What is Islam?' by way of this Balkans-to-

Rūmī, Mathnavī-yi maʿnavī*, copied by Viṣāl-i Shīrāzī, facsimile edition, published in Tehran: by sāzmān-e asnād-i kitāb-khāna millī-yi īrān 1385/2006, p. 53.*

only his didactic poetry that appealed and still appeals to Muslims, but also his personality. I refer here only to his *mathnavī* and part of his biography, written by his son.

The *Mathnavī*, a work of some 25,000 couplets, is Rūmī's *magnum opus*. It has been part of the education of Muslims, teaching a codified system of ethics and conduct, and giving examples of how to be a good Muslim. It combines theoretical reasoning with entertaining didactic tales. The *Mathnavī* is characterized (by either Jāmī or

Bengal paradigm that—despite its scale, centrality, duration, maturity, articulation, and capaciousness …, usually is not conceived of as sufficiently "central" or "authentic" as to be appropriate to the question." See pp. 82-83.

Bahāʾī) as “the Quran in the Persian language.” This characterization is widely cited, being printed as “a frontispiece in many nineteenth-century Indian lithographs of the texts.”[16] Mystics in general, and Rūmī in particular, are interpreters of the Quran. Rūmī presents Quranic injunctions, ethics and morals in an enjoyable way, wrapping the message in attractive parables, anecdotes and allegories that speak even to part of the American public. Rūmī internalizes Islam and offers different layers of Quranic interpretation. One study has shown that a quarter of the *Mathnavī* consists of “direct translations or paraphrases” of the Quran.[17]

The *Mathnavī* is characterized by the way Rūmī connects themes such as love, the intellect, the heart and the soul, human psychology, piety and so forth with the Quran and *ḥadīth*s. Due to its immense size, it is often considered as an ocean, from which each reader takes a droplet, according to need. As Frank Lewis observes, Rūmī’s poetic oeuvre of “Sixty thousand lines is more than Homer, Dante, Milton or Shakespeare produced.”[18] Rūmī emphasizes that there is no single path to Truth: there are as many ways to God as there are human beings. An example of this injunction is the story of Moses and the shepherd. Moses hears a shepherd talking intimately with God:

دید موسی یک شبانی را براه   کو همی‌گفت ای خدا و ای اله
تو کجایی تا شوم من چاکرت   چارقت دوزم کنم شانه سرت
جامه‌ات شویم شپش هایت کشم   شیر پیشت آورم ای محتشم
دستکت بوسم بمالم پایکت   وقت خواب آید بروبم جایکت
ای فدای تو همه بزهای من   ای بیادت هی هی و هیهای من

16 F. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West; The Life, Teaching, and Poetry of Jalāl al-Din Rumi*. Oxford: Oneworld, first edition 2000, (2003, 2005, 2008, 2011) p. xx of 2011 edition; see for instance the 18th-century manuscript in which the lines by Sheykh Bahāʾī are written on the first page Mowlānā Abū ‘l-Barakāt Munīr Lāhūrī, *Risāla-yi Inshā-yi Munīr*, p. 1 (the ms is made available by Iran-Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies, ms number 558, containing 182 pages).

17 F. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, pp. 396-399. This and all the other references to this book are to the edition of 2000.

18 *Ibidem,* p. 314.

Moses saw a shepherd on the way
Repeating to himself 'O Lord, my God,
Where are You, that I may become Your servant,
That I may sew Your shoes and comb Your hair?
That I may wash Your clothes and kill Your lice,
And bring Your milk to you, Your Eminence,
And kiss Your little hand and rub Your foot –
When bedtime comes I'll sweep around Your bed.
I give You all my goats in sacrifice
O You whose memory I swoon and sigh for.'[19]

When Moses hears this, he runs in annoyance to the shepherd and rebukes him, emphasizing that God cannot be addressed in this way. The shepherd leaves with a broken heart. At that moment, Moses hears a voice that tells him that his task as a prophet is to bring people to God, and not to make them leave, and that God looks at one's heart and not at one's tongue. The appeal of such a story is that Rūmī returns it to a theological interpretation of how to commune with God, how to form a relationship with the divine, defending the fact that an ordinary person can individually, without the mediation of a prophet, reach God. The simple language put in the shepherd's mouth, such as sewing God's shoes, combing his hair, washing his clothes, killing his lice, and giving him milk, is a thorn in the flesh of theologians who see such characterization of God as a human being as sheer blasphemy. In fact, Moses shouts at the shepherd, saying what is this blasphemy, put cotton to your mouth.[20] Even more shocking for a theologian could

19 Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnavī-yi maʿnavī*, Vol. 2, ed. Muḥammad Istiʿlāmī, Tehran: Zavvār, 1372/1993, p. 85, lines 1724-1728. Translation is by A. Williams, *The Masnavi of Rumi: A New English Translation with Persian Text and Explanatory Notes*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2020, pp. 109-110. For a complete translation of the poem see *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, edited and translated by R.A. Nicholson, 8 Vols., Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1925-1940.

20 The following translation is by A. Williams, *The Masnavi of Rumi*, Vol. II, p. 110:
این چه ژاژست این چه کفرست و فشار

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Rūmī, Mathnavī-yi maʿnavī*, copied by Viṣāl-i Shīrāzī, facsimile edition, published in Tehran: by sāzmān-e asnād-i kitāb-khāna millī-yi īrān 1385/2006, p. 73.*

be the repetition of the diminutive suffix *-ag*, somewhat lost in the English translation, as it is a suffix of endearment and is commonly used in speaking to a child. Not only does Rūmī say that the shepherd is a true lover of God, but he is actually criticizing the institution of prophethood, teaching the reader that a prophet's task is to unite, not to separate. A few verses wrapped in God's direct speech to Moses says enough about religious moderation and how a shepherd can achieve a high spiritual rank through his sincerity:[21]

تو برای وصل کردن آمدی   یا برای فصل کردن آمدی
هر کسی را سیرتی بنهاده‌ام   هر کسی را اصطلاحی داده‌ام
(…)
در حق او مدح و در حق تو ذم   در حق او شهد و در حق تو سم
(…)
هندوان را اصطلاح هند مدح   سندیان را اصطلاح سند مدح
من نگردم پاک از تسبیحشان   پاک هم ایشان شوند و درفشان
ما زبان را ننگریم و قال را   ما روان را بنگریم و حال را[22]

Have you come to lead people to union
Or have you come to tear them apart?
For every person I have designed a way
For every person I have given a way of expression
…

پنبه‌ای اندر دهان خود فشار
گند کفر تو جهان را گنده کرد
کفر تو دیبای دین را ژنده کرد

What piffle's this? What blasphemy and guff!
Go stuff some cotton wool into your mouth!
Your stinking unbelief stinks out the world!
It has reduced religion's robe to rags!

21 See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pp. 157-158; on Rūmī's antinomian philosophy see Seyed-Gohrab, "Rūmī's Antinomian Poetic Philosophy," in *Mawlana Rumi Review*, Issue IX, (2018), No. 1-2, E.J. Brill, pp. 159-199.

22 Rūmī, *Mathnavī*, p. 81, line 1755.

For him it is praise, for you it is criticism
For him it is nectar, for you it is poison
…
For Indians Hindi is the language of praise
For Sindis Sindi is the language of praise
I do not become pure through their devotion
It is they who become pure and throw pearls [of words]
We look neither at the language, nor the noise
We look both at the soul and one's inner state.[23]

Moses runs to the shepherd to tell him to talk to God in any way he wishes. But when he finds him, the shepherd says that Moses' words were whips, making the horse of his soul jump above the heaven and that his soul is with God now. Through this story Rūmī emphasizes that the purity of a saint's heart is loftier than the status of a prophet. When Rūmī meets his beloved Shams, Shams asks him whether the prophet Muḥammad is greater than the mystic saint Bāyazīd. Rūmī says, "Muḥammad." To test Rūmī, he says how is it that the Prophet said to God, "We have not worshiped You as befits you, nor have we known You as befits You," while Bāyazīd says "Glory be to Me, how Great is my Glory," emphasizing his union with God.[24] While Shams probably used this question to test people on whether they loved a Sufi saint more than the prophet, the question belongs to a central theme in Sufism reflecting on the rank and status of prophets and saints.[25]

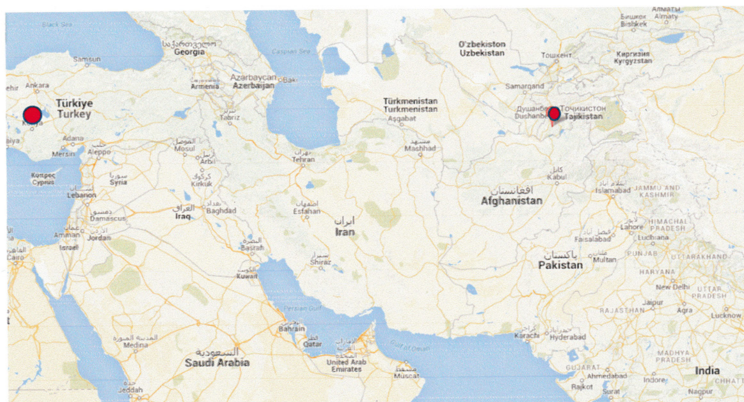
23 This is my almost literal translation. For a literary translation see Alan Williams, *The Masnavi*, Vol. II, pp. 110-113. "Did you come to create a sense of union, / or did you come to generate division?"

24 See Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, p. 156; also see Shams, *Maqālāt*, p. 499; see also *mathnavī*, Vol. IV, pp. 105-107, lines 2103-2154, see also the explanatory notes on pp. 304-305; Farīd ad-Dīn, ʿAṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-owliyā*, ed. H. Khalīlī, Tehran: Manūchihrī, 1370/1991, pp. 139-177, on his saying see p. 144; see also the English translation by Paul Losensky, *Farid al-Din 'Attar's Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and sayings of Sufis*, New York: Paulist Press, 2009, pp. 188-243, on the saying see p, 194

25 For a discussion on this theme see B. Radtke, "The Concept of Wilāya in Early Sufism," in *The Heritage of Sufism: Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London / New York: Khaniqahi Nimatollahi Publications, 1993, pp. 483-496; also see J. Spencer Trimingham who refers to Moses and al-Khiḍr

The Persian literary and religious historian Zarrīnkūb says that the personification of God by the people who approach God through love is no less unacceptable than the sanctification of the people who approach God through the Sharīʿa. Love transcends all laws and religions, as Rūmī says, “the people of love are other than all religions. (*millat-i ʿishq az hama dīnhā judāst*).”[26]

Rūmī’s life, his flight from Central Asia to Anatolia, and his transformation from an austere theologian into a mystic captivated generations of Muslims, who contrived anecdotes, made paintings, and in modern times composed plays, novels and operas about his life. After a dispute between his father, Bahā al-Dīn, a theologian, and the philosopher Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.ca. 1209), the family fled the city of Balkh in 1212, a few years before the Mongol attacks.



to explain that “the inner light of *wilāya* [sainthood], is parallel to and contrasted with, the apostolic-legalistic aspects of prophecy signified by Moses.” See *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 158. Also see Jamālī of Delhi, *The Mirror of Meanings: Translated with an introduction and glossary by A.A. Seyed-Gohrab*, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2002, pp. 82-84.

26 I have summarized Zarrīnkūb’s argument. See *Baḥr dar kūza: naqd-u tafsīr-i qiṣṣa-hā va tamthīlāt-i mathnavī*, Tehran: Sukhan, third print 1368/ 1989, p. 60; For the performative aspects of this story see Iraj Anvar and Peter Chelkowski, “From Rūmī’s Mathnawī to the Popular State,” in *The Philosophy of Ecstasy: Rumi and the Sufi Tradition*, ed. L. Lewisohn, Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2014, pp. 187-196.

After he had suffered years of hardship, travelling from town to town as refugees, the Saljuq prince ʿAlā al-Dīn Kay Qubād invited the family to Konya in 1228. Rūmī's father died three years later. Rūmī succeeded his father as a popular teacher of religious sciences until a wandering libertine dervish arrived at Konya in 1244. He made such an overwhelming impression on Rūmī that Rūmī abandoned his theological studies and teaching, and became a disciple of Shams ("Sun"). This could be regarded as a symbol of exchanging outward Islam for inward Islam. One of the many myths says that when Shams entered Rūmī's lecture room, all the books caught fire. This is a metaphor for saying that truth cannot be found in the letters of the Quran, but rather in the heart. Rūmī's puzzled students found it strange that their master was enamoured of a libertine dervish, and treated Shams so badly that he left Konya. This prompted Rūmī to compose love poems for Shams. The majority of his 3,500 ghazals are 'signed' with variations on Shams' name.[27] For Rūmī, this wandering dervish was the personification of Love, a prefiguration of the highest mystic stage. These poems are very different from his didactic *Mathnavī*; they are personal, full of emotion and longing. In fact, it is probably possible to read these poems as a reflection of his psychological state during his loving relationship with Shams. I give just a few excerpts from some of these poems to show the jubilation at being with Shams, tremendous grief when he left him and disbelief that he was murdered.

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27 For more information see M.R. Shafīʿī-Kadkanī's introduction to *Ghazaliyyāt-i Shams-i Tabrīz*, Vol. 1, Tehran: Sukhan, 1388/2009. Also see F. Lewis, who rightly states that several of the poems are wrongly attributed to the poet, yet his poetic output is certainly impressive. He says, "As we shall see in chapter 8 ("Metrics"), because of the number of syllables in the average Persian line of verse, the 60,000 lines of Rumi's Persian would actually equal about 120,000 lines of verse in English. The *Masnavi* measures out around 570,000 syllables, roughly the same number of syllables found in 57,000 lines of English pentameters, and therefore equivalent to approximately 4,000 sonnets. By way of comparison, Shakespeare's 154 sonnets contain only 2,156 lines, or 21,560 syllables." F. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present,* p. 314.

مرده بدم زنده شدم گریه بدم خنده شدم   دولت عشق آمد و من دولت پاینده شدم
(...)
گفت که دیوانه نه‌ای لایق این خانه نه‌ای   رفتم دیوانه شدم سلسله بندنده شدم
گفت که سرمست نه‌ای رو که از این دست نه‌ای   رفتم و سرمست شدم وز طرب آکنده شدم[28]

I was dead, I came back to life; I was in tears, now I have turned to a smile
Love's fortune came and turned me into an everlasting delight
…
He said: "You are not mad; you do not deserve this home."
I went mad, I became crazy fettered in chains.
He said: "You are not drunk, go you are not of our sort."
I went, I became drunk, fully filled with joy …[29]

The intensity of the relationship aroused jealousy among Rūmī's followers. They harassed Shams so much that he left Konya. This generates much longing in Rūmī:

عجب آن دلبر زیبا کجا شد   عجب آن سرو خوش بالا کجا شد
میان ما چو شمعی نور می‌داد   کجا شد ای عجب بی‌ما کجا شد
دلم چونِ برگ می‌لرزد همهِ روز   که دلبر نیم شب تنها کجا شد[30]

Strange, where did that ravisher of hearts go?
Strange, where did that pleasing tall cypress go?
He was like a candle, illuminating us with his light
Strange, where did he go, where did he go without us?
My heart trembles like a leaf the whole day long

28 Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Dīvān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, ed. B.Z. Furūzānfar, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1378/1999, Vol. 3, ghazal 1393, pp. 180-181.

29 For a poetic translation of this ghazal see F. Lewis, *Rumi: Swallowing the Sun: Poems Translated from the Persian*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2007, p. 88, ghazal 1393.

30 Rūmī, *Dīvān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, Vol. 2, ghazal 677, p. 79.

Where did the heart-ravisher go in the middle of the night?[31]

A large number of poems were written when Shams had left Rūmī. Here he bemoans separation. A very short example is the following excerpt:

من از عالم تو را تنها گزینم   روا داری که من غمگین نشینم
دل من چون قلم اندر کف توست   ز توست ار شادمان وگر حزینم[32]

I choose only you from the entire cosmos,
Is it right that you leave me with this sorrow
My heart is in your hand like a pen
It is up to you whether I weep or laugh.

When Shams fled to Syria. His absence intensified Rūmī's love and combined it with boundless sorrow. Rūmī sent his son to Syria to bring Shams back:

بروید ای حریفان بکشید یار ما را   به من آورید آخر صنم گریزپا را
به ترانه‌های شیرین به بهانه‌های زرین   بکشید سوی خانه مه خوب خوش لقا را
وگر او به وعده گوید که دمی دگر بیایم   همه وعده مکر باشد بفریبد او شما را[33]

O friends! Go and bring my beloved to me
Bring that fugitive idol to me.
Through sweet excuses, through burning songs
Bring that fair-faced moon to me.
If he promises: "I will come later,"
All his promises are just tricks, he is misleading you.

31 For a literary translation see F. Lewis, *Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*, p. 57.

32 Rūmī, *Dīvān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, Vol. 3, ghazal 1521, p. 250. For a Dutch translation of this ghazal see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Een karavaan uit Perzië: klassieke Perzische poëzie*, Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 2002, p. 237.

33 Rūmī, *Dīvān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, Vol. 1, ghazal 163, p. 105.

Shams returns, but the resentful followers mistreat him. Finally Shams mysteriously disappears, on 5 December 1247. He was probably killed. In many of his ghazals Rūmī mourns Shams' disappearance, refusing to accept his tragic death:

کی گفت که آن زندهٔ جاوید بمرد   کی گفت که آفتاب امید بمرد
آن دشمن خورشید در آمد بر بام   دو دیده ببست و گفت خورشید بمرد

Who says the immortal man has died
Who says the Sun of hope has set?
A foe of the Sun went up on the roof
Closed his eyes and said the sun is dead.[34]

This brief glimpse into Rūmī's life and work shows why Muslims (and in recent decades non-Muslims) have been captivated by and have followed Rūmī as their teacher. The word *mowlānā* (Turkish *Mevlānā*) means "our master." His life has fascinated Muslims, especially when we look at the performance of the "Whirling Dervishes," and the commemoration of his death, called *shab-i ʿurs*, or "Wedding Night," which is celebrated from Turkey to India on 19 December. His poetry is a didactic instrument for telling entertaining anecdotes while also making theoretical reflections on the core tenets of Islam. The appeal of his poetry is that people can meditate on it, not only using it for education across a vast area, but applying it in religious rituals. Its appeal also has an aesthetic layer which creates ecstatic experience and delight in the reader.[35] In sum, his life and poetry create a cultural model, configuring norms and values, and establish ethics of moderation embodied in the unbiased human person. Due to his popularity in the West, he is claimed by many countries in the Middle East as a rare example of a humanist Muslim.

34 Rūmī, *Dīvān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, Vol. 8, pp. 90-91, quatrain 533. Translation is by F. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, p, 198.

35 See De Bruijn, "The Preaching Poet: three homiletic Poems by Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār," in *Pearls of Meanings*, p. 194; For an excellent terse study of Persian mystical poetry see De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems*, Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1997.

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While Rūmī epitomizes humanism and love, Ḥāfiẓ (1315-1390) is the embodiment of scepticism and ambiguity. His impact in the Islamic world has been enormous. Shahab Ahmed introduces him exuberantly:

> When the most widely-copied, widely-circulated, widely-read, widely-memorized, widely-recited, widely-invoked, and widely-proverbialized book of poetry in Islamic history – a book that came to be regarded as configuring and exemplifying ideals of self-conception and modes and mechanisms of self-expression in the largest part of the Islamic world for half-a-millennium– takes as its definitive themes the ambiguous exploration of wine-drinking and (often homo-)erotic love, as well as a disparaging attitude to observant ritual piety, is that canonical work and the ethos it epitomizes *Islamic*? … The *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ was, in the period between the fifteenth and the late-nineteenth centuries, a pervasive poetical, conceptual and lexical presence in the discourse of educated Muslims in the vast geographical region extending from the Balkans … to the Bay of Bengal that was home to the absolute demographic majority of Muslims on the planet ….[36]

36 Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 32; also see L. Lewisohn, "The Religion of Love and the Puritans of Islam: Sufi Sources of Ḥāfiẓ's Anti-Clericalism," in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: I.B. Tauris, pp. pp. 107-21. Lewisohn rightly observes that the "most important and largest

Ḥāfiẓ allows himself to insert provocative statements into his poetry.[37] He creates an ambiguous space to negotiate piety and what it means to be a good Muslim. This space is not a mere equivocal semantic field, but an encoded system in which an internalized personal religiosity is recommended. Like mystic poets before him, Ḥāfiẓ created a religious and ethical system in which concepts such as faith, piety, mosque, pilgrimage to Mecca, and even Islam itself were critically questioned. By giving negative connotations to such concepts and positive significations to their counterparts such as unbelief, the wine-house, Christian or Zoroastrian monasteries and disbelief, the poet criticizes the holiest rituals and tenets of Islam, questioning the piety of the religious jurists, the ascetics and the organized Sufis. One could argue that with Ḥāfiẓ the definitions of faith, piety and religiosity were changed forever, and the positions of centre and periphery, normal and abnormal, sacred and profane, and inward and outward appreciation of norms and values were also altered forever.

In his poetry, the mystic lover is commonly advised to listen to a Zoroastrian guide (*pīr-i mughān*), an embodiment of honesty, who resides in a wine-house on the outskirts of the town. His comport contrasts with that of the representatives of the official Islamic orthodox

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amount of commentaries on his *Dīvān* were written" in Mughal India. The famous mystical commentaries in Ottoman are written by Surūrī (d. 1561) and Şemʿī (d. 1591). Sūdī of Bosnia's (d. 1597) popular commentary is a "sober literary and grammatical commentary" which became the source of early European translations of Ḥāfiẓ. See L. Lewisohn, p. 14. Sūdī was the source of the German translations by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856) of Ḥāfiẓ, a champion of Goethe, inspiring him to produce his *West-östlicher Divan* (1818). Also see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph Freiherr Von. Also see *The Persian Dīvān of Yavuz Sulṭān Selīm: A Critical Edition*, ed. Benedek Péri, Budapest: Research Centre for the Humanities, 2021, especially the pages in which the sultan imitates ghazals of Ḥāfiẓ, pp. 26-30; E.G. Ambros, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, s.v. Surūrī; J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, s.v. Shemʿī; K. Burrill, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, s.v. Sūdī; also see Murat Umut Inan, "Crossing Interpretive Boundaries in Sixteenth Century Istanbul: Aḥmed Sūdī on the Dīvān of Ḥāfiẓ of Shiraz," in *Philological Encounters*, 3, 2018, pp. 275-309.

37 Antinomian motifs in lyrical poetry started with Ḥakīm Sanāʾī, to be elaborated by poets such as Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār and Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī and perfected by Ḥāfiẓ.

hierarchy, who are portrayed as hypocrites. Time and again Ḥāfiẓ advises his audience to follow the Zoroastrian guide and to abandon the representatives of orthodox Islam. In his very first ghazal he says that one should "colour the prayer-mat with wine if the Magi Elder asks it." Ḥāfiẓ scorns characters such as the preacher of conventional piety (*vāʿiẓ*), the Sufi Shaykh, the judge (*qāżī*), the enforcer of Islamic morality (*muḥtasib*) and jurist of Islamic law (*faqīh*).[38] Ḥāfiẓ's poetry has been used in various cultural domains, including visual arts from an early period. Today it is used in Social Media to condemn the behaviour of the theocratic regime in Iran or the Taliban in Afghanistan. Ḥāfiẓ dehumanizes these characters, calling them subhuman and non-Muslims for their "hypocrisy and sham piety."[39] Elsewhere Ḥāfiẓ says that preachers are fault-finders, expressing prejudices about people. They seek to bind the feet of freemen (*āzādān*) who frequent a monastery (*khāniqāh*), not knowing that the freemen's feet cannot be bound.[40] The only way to become human and a good Muslim is to follow the ways of the libertines (*qalandar*s), to drink wine and to imitate the ways of the rogues (*rind*).[41] Ḥāfiẓ leaves the mosque and the sermon and joins people in the tavern, because the sermons of hypocrites are long and dull and time is passing.[42] In many other places

38 See L. Lewisohn, "The Religion of Love …," pp. 159-160. Also see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Hafez, iii. Hafez's Poetic Art. For discussions on a wide range of controversial debates between the clerical hierarchy and mystics see *Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World*, ed. R. Tabandeh & L. Lewisohn, California, Irvin: Jordan Center for Persian Studies, 2020.

39 Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, ed. P. Nātil Khānlarī, Tehran: Khᵛārazmī, 1362/1983, p. 456, ghazal 220, line 2: *rindī āmūz u karam kun ki na chandān hunar ast / ḥayavānī ki nanūshad mey-u insān nashavad* or "learn profligacy and act generously, for it is not much virtue / for an animal that does not drink wine to become a human being."

40 Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, p. 182, ghazal 83, line 7: *eyb-i Ḥāfiẓ gū makun vāʿiẓ ki raft az khānqāh / pā-yi āzādān nabandand ar ba jāʾī raft raft* or "Say to the preacher, 'Find no faults in Ḥāfiẓ, for he has left the monastery: the feet of the free cannot be chained if s/he has gone from a place, he has gone.'"

41 Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, p. 456, ghazal 220, lines 2 and 4. On this motif see F. Lewis, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Hafez, viii. Hafez and Rendi.

42 Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, p. 336, ghazal 160, line 4: *gar zi masjid ba kharābāt shudam khurda magīr / majlis-i vaʿẓ dirāz ast-u zamān khᵛāhad shud*, or "If I leave the mosque for

Ḥāfiẓ criticizes the clerics' ascetical piety, scorning them and claiming that they would even trick God on Judgment Day.[43]

This censure of outward piety is also visualized by the painter Sheykhzāda, who depicted a splendid preaching scene in a mosque in Herat (present-day Afghanistan) around 1526 or 1527. Some of the listeners have reached a state of ecstasy and others have to calm them. This points to the preacher's eloquence and effective sermon. One Western interpretation of this painting has resulted in a strange title, "A Moving Sermon."[44] But this is not what the painter wants to convey. While the ecstatic movements of mystics capture our attention, the painter invites us to look for the cause. Our eyes are drawn to the preacher in the pulpit, who has assumed a humble pose, bowing his head. From there our attention moves to the text above his head and above the main archway, top centre in the painting. It is the key to the event: to unlock this (and many other Persian visual artifacts) we need to decode the poetry. It is a couplet from Ḥāfiẓ. Text and image interact, and one realizes that there are several layers of interpretation within the painting. Michael Barry suggests that the painter is addressing "several themes at once, themes recurrent throughout the *Dīvān* and regarded as important in sixteenth-century tradition."[45]

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tavern, do not sneer at me / These Sermons are long and time is moving on."

43 Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, p. 404, ghazal 194, line 3: *gūʾīyā bāvar nimīdārand ki rūz-i dāvarī / k-īn hama qalb-u daghal dar kār-i dāvar mīkunand*, or "it is as if they do not believe in Judgement Day, that they play so much tricks and deceits with the Judge."

44 Several art historians have analysed this painting, including Stuart Cary Welch in the 1970s and 1980s. See E. Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1996, pp. 249–250, 254-255; Priscilla Soucek, "Interpreting the Ghazals of Hafiz," *RES*, 43, 2003, pp. 155–58; *eadem*, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Hafez and the Visual Arts. The most recent examination I am aware of is by M. Barry, "The Allegory of Drunkenness and the Theophany of the Beloved in Sixteenth-Century Illustrations of Ḥāfiẓ," in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: I.B. Tauris, 2010, pp. 214-226, and see also the bibliography offered by Barry.

45 M. Barry, "The Allegory of Drunkenness and the Theophany of the Beloved in Sixteenth-Century Illustrations of Ḥāfiẓ," in ibid. (*Hafiz and the Religion of Love*, ed. L. Lewisohn), p. 215.

برو به کار خود ای واعظ این چه فریادست　　　مرا فتاد دل از ره تو را چه افتادست

Oh preacher! Go and mind your own business! What is all this shouting?
My heart has fallen off the road, what has befallen you?[46]

Incident in a Mosque. By Shaykh-Zāda, probably painted in Herāt, AD 1526 or 1527. Painting (recto, text; verso, folio 77r) from a Dīvān of Ḥāfiẓ, *left-hand side of a bifolio. Harvard Art Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of Stuart Cary Welch, Jr., 1999.300.2. Photo: Allan Macintyre © President and Fellows of Harvard College.*

46 Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, p. 404, ghazal 194, line 1. My translation draws on two literary translations: Dick Davis, *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz*, Washington

The text is presented as if it were a verse from the Quran or some other holy source, as is usually the case in a mosque. The white letters on a black ground almost imitate the script of Arabic texts in religious buildings. But the reader discovers that the verses are, ironically, Persian and that they are criticizing the preacher, who has caused such mystical delight in his audience.

The scene gives no visual clue that this outward piety is just hypocrisy. It is only after decrypting the verses that one realizes the ambiguity and even contradiction in the scene. This does not end here, as that first verse leads the viewer to read another verse at the top left of the painting, prominent in black ink on a white sandy background. The lines run:

واعظان کاین جلوه در محراب و منبر می‌کنند   چون به خلوت می‌روند آن کار دیگر می‌کنند

> These preachers, who shine in the prayer niche
> and the pulpit,
> Practise other things when they go in private.[47]

While the very first couplet, cited above, is imperative, telling the preacher to go away and stop making so much noise, this couplet universalizes the traits of the clergy by using the plural 'preachers' (*vāʿiẓān*). The two verses are from different ghazals by Ḥāfiẓ, implying that the painter and his public are thoroughly familiar with Ḥāfiẓ and know the remainder of each poem.

There is a third poem, of one hemistich, above the window on the left-hand side, resembling the first couplet. It reads:

رواق منظر چشم من آشیانه توست   کرم نما و فرود آ که خانه خانه توست

D.C., Mage Publishers, 2012, p. 18 and M. Barry, "The Allegory of Drunkenness and the Theophany of the Beloved in Sixteenth-Century Illustrations of Ḥāfiẓ," in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love* (see previous notes). p. 215. See also Bahā al-Dīn Khurramshāhī, *Ḥāfiẓ-nāma*, 7th edition, Tehran, 1375/1996, Vol. I, pp. 241-244.

47 Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, p. 404, ghazal 194. Dick Davis, *Faces of Love*, p. 78. Khurramshāhī calls this poem one of the most brilliant ghazals combating deceit and revealing hypocrisy. See Khurramshāhī, *Ḥāfiẓ-nāma*, Vol. I, pp. 723-726.

ravāq-i manẓar-i chashm-i man, āshiyāna-yi tust
[karam namāy u furūd ā, ki khāna, khāna-yi tust]

The arch of my eye's orbit is your very nest:
[Show mercy and come down! For this eye's house – is yours.][48]

It is as if the painter has made his point about an outward show and an inward reality. The word *ravāq* points to the main arch in the painting, while the 'eye' is the vision to see the meaning of the verse. After understanding the main verse engraved in the arch, the viewer feels at home and understands what is taking place. The viewer who has read the verses, from top right to top left (as Persians do, unlike Europeans) and down to the text above the window, understands the deceptive nature of such a daily event presided over by a cleric. The eye movement corresponds to the movement of a key to crack the lock. Within the mosque's arch, on top of the closed door, we see another inscription, but in Arabic: *Yā mufattiḥ al-abvāb* or "Oh Opener of Gates," a religious supplication directed at God. Does the closed door symbolize that such a sermon does not lead to redemption, or does it imply that those who can follow Ḥāfiẓ's message will find salvation? Does it suggest that reading Ḥāfiẓ's poetry is the key to opening the Gates? After all, Ḥāfiẓ's popular title is *lisān al-gheyb* or "the Tongue of the Unseen."[49]

The modern use of these verses is intriguing. While the opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran uses these lines in pop music in Los Angeles and imports them into Iran, the proponents respond quite positively to the verses, taking the verse "These preachers,…" as

48 Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, p. 86, ghazal 35. The translation is by M. Barry, "The Allegory of Drunkenness …," p. 215. Barry rightly explains that the verse literally means "'the arch of the window of the eye of me'; that is, to the eye's orbit, and more sharply, to just what that eye sees and to what vision lodges within that same eye's orbit."

49 Bahaʾ-al-Din Khorramshahi and EIr, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Hafez, ii. Hafez's Life and Times.

a translation of a verse from the Quran.[50] On the conservative website Quranology, when someone asks whether these verses are referring to Ayatollahs, the webmaster, probably a theologian himself, answers, “I don’t know what Ḥāfiẓ means exactly but it is wrong to compose such a poem. What a preacher or any other person does in private is his own business. It is not one’s right to comment on how preachers or other people behave.”

Ḥāfiẓ appears time and again in political contexts. An example is President Hasan Rouhani’s twitter account. Disillusioned Iranians posted messages to express their disappointment with the president’s promises. This voter has given up, and no longer believes that the president will fulfill his wishes:

> I crave for union while he is set for separation;
> I say farewell to my desires so that the beloved gratifies his wish.

50 Quran, 2: 44, “Do you preach righteousness and fail to practice it yourselves.” أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنسَوْنَ أَنفُسَكُمْ (بقره/44). For an elaborate commentary on this ghazal seeAbu ‘l-Ḥasan Khatmī Lāhūrī, *Sharḥ-i ʿirfānī-yi ghazalhā-yi Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. B. Khurramshāhī, Tehran: Qaṭra, 1381/2002, pp. 1600-1607.

میل من سوی وصال و قصد او سوی فراق
ترک کام خود گرفتم تا برآید کام دوست

He was subsequently blocked, and again this twit was shared with the message: “Loving verse of a twitterer is blocked on the official Twitter account of the Minister President.”

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Antinomian Motifs and Secularism

Ḥāfiẓ, Rūmī and other poets used these antinomian motifs to challenge the religious hierarchy, to criticize outward piety which could easily lead to hypocrisy. There is another perspective offered by antinomian motifs in Persian poetry, not provoking or challenging others but rather leading to contemplation. I am referring to the corpus of poems attributed to ʿUmar Khayyām (1048-1131). As a scientist, mathematician and astronomer, Khayyām is credited with just a few quatrains (*rubāʿiyyāt*), but the number has increased substantially from the twelfth century to the present day. The authorship of many of these is problematic, but what is interesting is a trend – one may even cautiously call it a movement – of writing poems with certain themes and attributing them to Khayyām. These poems are personal contemplations on the nature of God, His creation, predestination, the existence of heaven and hell, and man’s imprisonment in the web of time. A random example is the following poem:

گویند که دوزخی بود عاشق و مست
قولیست خلاف دل در آن نتوان بست
گر عاشق و مست دوزخی خواهد بود
فردا بینی بهشت همچون کف دست

They say, “there is a hell for drunks and lovers”;
Do not set your heart on this; it contradicts itself

If there were a hell for drunks and lovers,
Tomorrow, Paradise would be as empty as an open hand.

(Attributed to Khayyām, Ṭarab-khāna*, preserved at Kitāb-khāna-yi majlis-i Sinā, Tehran: No 14317/537, folio 12)*

They are transgressive by inviting the audience to reflect on the implications of religion and faith. Khayyām advises time and again to seize the day (*carpe diem*), to drink wine and to spend time with a loved one.[51] These poems could be characterized as antinomian with philosophical content, questioning God and religion. Shahab Ahmed, who characterizes virtually anything in an Islamic context as "Islamic," does not mention Khayyām and this corpus. He says the antinomian motifs should be read "not as *anti*--nomian–*against* the law, but as *para*-nomian–that is, *beside* the law, or as *supra*-nomian–that is, *above* the law,"[52] but many of these poems are composed to oppose the tenets of religion and redefine the implications of certain injunctions of the Sharīʿa. In the reception history of these poems, especially in the last one hundred years, the secular features have been emphasized. Khayyām was controversial in his own time for transgressing the boundaries of orthodox Islam. Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Qiftī said that his poems were like serpents to the Sharīʿa.[53] In modern times, Khayyām became a champion for secularism in modern Iran, and intellectuals such as Ṣādiq Hidāyat presented him as a modern materialistic scientist who did not believe in religions and even rejected religion as illogical and superstitious. The association of secularism with Khayyām is so strong that the poet has been thoroughly rejected by the clerical class, which has written polemical pieces against him. Does antinomianism, seeking new values at liminality, invite individuals to reshape their religion and even become atheistic and secular?

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51 A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Omar Khayyam's Transgressive Ethics and Their Socio-Political Implications in Contemporary Iran," in *Iran-Namag*, 2020, Volume 5, Number 3, pp. 68-93.

52 Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 97.

53 See Seyed-Gohrab, "Khayyam's Universal Appeal: Man, Wine, and the Hereafter in the Quatrains," in *The Great Umar Khayyam: A Global Reception of the Rubáiyat*, Leiden: Leiden University Press, p. 12.

In the examples I have just presented we see the centrality of non-conformist ideas. These are merely three brief examples of a convoluted dynamic system that has conceptualized Islam. In my ERC project, *Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam*, my team and I will examine how mystics became central in refashioning modes of piety in Islamic intellectual history. We will analyse the breadth and depth of these movements, examining diverse periods and geographical areas from the Balkans to the Indian subcontinent, and from the 9th century to the present. What has enabled these mystics to appeal to generations of people for a thousand years, such that they are still cited to express what true piety entails? To address such questions we must understand the origin of the non-conformist movements, the transfer of their behaviour into poetic motifs, metaphors and stories, and the ways in which intellectual and political influencers employed these literary figures to voice their own convictions and behaviour. We should also understand how the transgression of Sharīʿa became symbolically central, while remaining highly controversial. The current public debate in Europe on Islam is dominated by orthodoxy. The pluriformity of Islam is neglected and almost all attention is given to problematic Sharīʿa-centred Islam. While we know that there are numerous paths of Christian religiosity, many suppose that for Islam there is one 'correct' path to take to be pious, and that the Sharīʿa is central to it. It is even proposed that Islam needs an 'Age of Enlightenment', or a Lutheran revolution, with the implicit assumption that questioning orthodoxy and the centrality of the Sharīʿa would be new in Islam, and would have to be based on European examples. My team and I would like to illustrate in many ways that the first assumption is untrue, while the second is naturally taken as Eurocentric and sparks little enthusiasm among Muslims. As Ahmet Karamustafa observes, many scholars operate on the false assumption that there is a strict separation between popular religion and low culture, on the one hand, and the official, high and normative religion of the elite on the other. My examples from Rūmī, Ḥāfiẓ and Khayyam show that the reverse is true, especially because these poets are used by ordinary people, theologians and even

politicians.[54] As G. Böwering (2013) surmises, Sufism had “a powerful impact on the fabric of Islamic polity that contemporary scholarship has widely overlooked.”[55]

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope these few examples have shown why one should study Persian. Like Adriaan Reland in 1701, I recommend engaging with Persian sources to understand a sophisticated culture that has inspired many people in the Balkan-Bengal nexus over many centuries, a culture which still inspires Muslims to explore new domains in order to give meaning to their faith, to find ethical and practical wisdom in their daily lives, and to give meaning to religious life, to comment on socio-political conditions, while also finding aesthetic delight in entertaining stories. Reland’s invitation to study Persian sources derived partly from his curious spirit and partly from the need to arm Christian students to debate Islamic doctrines but, as Henk Rinsum observes, from his scholarly activities it appears that he actually wanted to “do justice to (the study of) religions and their adherents.”[56] We do not know how Reland would have responded to the awarding of this Chair to a nonreligious person with an Islamic Shiite background with the name of Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab. Would he turn in his grave or blissfully embrace the idea that Utrecht University welcomes specialists of various cultural and religious backgrounds to contribute to the scientific landscape of the Netherlands? From what I know of him, I think the latter. Together with my colleagues in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, I will do my best to advance and disseminate knowledge about Persian and Iranian Studies.

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54 A.T. Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period 1200-1550*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994, p. 5.

55 G. Böwering, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

56 Henk J. van Rinsum, “Adriaan Reland (1676–1718) …,” p. 39.

Dankwoord

Aan het einde van mijn rede gekomen wil ik graag het college van bestuur van de Universiteit Utrecht bedanken voor hun bereidheid mij te benoemen. Die dank gaat natuurlijk ook uit naar allen die eraan bijgedragen hebben dat Utrecht weer een leerstoel Perzisch heeft. In het bijzonder dank ik het faculteitsbestuur onder leiding van decaan Professor Keimpe Algra en het departement van Filosofie en Religiewetenschappen.

Ik dank al mijn collega's in Utrecht voor hun warme ontvangst, met name Christian Lange, Daniel Cohnitz, Paul Ziche, Lucien van Liere en Janneke van Dis. Mischa Peters, Biene Meijerman, en Anne van Dam maken mij uitstekend wegwijs in Utrecht. Ook noem ik hier de ondersteuning van FenR.

Hooggeleerde heer de Bruijn, beste Hans,
U kunt niet hier zijn vandaag. Ik heb veel van u geleerd, niet alleen intellectueel en hoe we naar de Perzische cultuur als een onafgebroken traditie van zo'n 3000 jaar kunnen kijken maar vooral van u als mens. Uw integriteit zal een voorbeeld voor me blijven.

Hooggeleerde heer Ter Haar, beste Johan,
Eerst als student en vanaf 1997 als collega ben ik je veel dank verschuldigd, niet alleen voor de stimulerende colleges over het Sjiʿisme, Sjiitische volkscultuur en het Soefisme, maar ook voor je generositeit en vriendelijkheid. Ik heb veel van je geleerd, zoals het maken van keuzes in mijn academisch leven.

Hooggeleerde mevrouw Kruk, beste Remke,
Ik ben je zeer erkentelijk, meer dan ik kan zeggen voor je niet aflatende steun in al die jaren in Leiden. Niet alleen voor het leren omgaan met de 'Leidse manieren,' maar ook voor de manier waarop je, samen met Professor Erik-Jan Zürcher, en wijlen Professor Wim Gerritsen, hebt ingespannen voor mijn carrière. Het had Wim denk ik zeer verheugd dat

ik uitgerekend aan zijn universiteit hoogleraar Perzisch ben geworden. Ik ben blij dat zijn vrouw Gisela hier is, samen hun dochter Professor Anne Gerritsen, collega uit Leiden, om deze dag samen te vieren.

Hooggeleerde heer Zürcher, beste Erik-Jan,
Je bent voor mij een toonbeeld van bestuurlijke creativiteit. Ik denk dat we hier het best je rol kunnen noemen in het creëren van een in eerste instantie deeltijd-leerstoel Perzisch in Utrecht. Hierdoor leerde ik hier al mijn collega's kennen en werd de keuze om mijn carrière in Utrecht voort te zetten steeds logischer. We hebben ons samen sterk gemaakt voor meer diversiteit in de wetenschap, en het uitbannen van vooroordelen. Ik heb daarbij steeds jouw steun gevoeld. Ik hoop een steentje bij te kunnen dragen aan het creëren van een divers academisch landschap, waarin meer vrouwen en mensen met een migratie-achtergrond hoge bestuurlijke posities bekleden als rolmodel voor studenten en jonge wetenschappers. Mijn dank aan jou is groot.

Hooggeleerde heer De Groot, beste Rokus,
Onze samenwerking begon in 2004 met de opera *Leyli en Madjnun* om diverse etnische groepen in Amsterdam bijeen te brengen. Onze samenwerking is een hechte vriendschap geworden waarin muziek en poëzie centraal staan. Ik wil je bedanken voor je enorme steun en inspiratie. Die betekenen heel veel voor mij.

Beste Koushyar Parsi,
We zijn bijna gelijk in Leiden aangekomen in 1990. Ik als student, jij als docent. In al die jaren was je voor mij een onuitputtelijke bron van kennis over de Iraanse journalistiek en moderne literatuur. Onze relatie is gegroeid van student-docent, tot collega's en daarna als vrienden. Ik wil je bedanken voor je inspirerende vriendschap.

Ook ben ik dank verschuldigd aan mijn fantastische collega's uit Leiden, voor jullie collegialiteit en vriendschap. Ik kan niet iedereen noemen. Hier noem ik de mensen met wie ik de laatste twee jaar intensief mee gewerkt heb: Petra de Bruijn. Amin Ghodratzadeh,

Nico Kaptein, Ronald Kon, Sybille Lammes, Nicole van Os, Maaike Warnaar, Siavash Rafiee Rad, Noa Schonmann, Saeedeh Shahnahpour, en Hans Theunissen. Jullie hebben me allemaal op zoveel verschillende manieren en momenten geïnspireerd en gesteund. De afstand van Leiden naar Utrecht is gelukkig maar 43,8 kilometer – in vogelvlucht weliswaar – dus ik weet zeker dat we elkaar nog vaak gaan treffen.

Ook wil ik mijn Leidse en Utrechtse studenten bedanken voor jullie enthousiasme om nieuwe domeinen van kennis te ontdekken. Als student realiseer je je misschien niet altijd hoe belangrijk je bent als inspiratiebron voor een docent. Iedere vraag die jullie stellen, zet ook mij weer aan het denken.

Mijn dankwoord kan niet volledig zijn zonder mijn ouders, mijn broer, mijn nieuwe Nederlandse familie, de Wielinga's en Van Stadens hartelijk te bedanken. Mijn dochter Nora en mijn zoon Sam, jullie zijn de lichtstralen in mijn leven. Mijn liefste Miriam: je hebt in Nederland een stukje Perzisch paradijs voor me gemaakt, laat ik je bedanken met mijn favoriete dichter Saʿdī:

همه عمر برندارم سر از این خمار مستی
که هنوز من نبودم که تو در دلم نشستی
تو نه مثل آفتابی که حضور و غیبت افتد
دگران روند و آیند تو همچنان که هستی

Levenslang word ik niet nuchter, ik blijf in een dronken waan,
want jij hebt mij overweldigd voor ik ontwaakte in dit bestaan
Jij bent niet zoals de zon, die nu schijnt en dan verdwijnt,
Andere komen, andere gaan weer, jij zult altijd zo bestaan.

(vertaling J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Een karavaan uit Perzië,*
Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 2002, p. 244)

Ik heb gezegd

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Curriculum Vitae

Asghar Seyed-Gohrab came to the Netherlands in 1986. He studied English Language and Literature at the *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam and Persian Language and Culture in Leiden. He completed his PhD thesis on Persian literature and Islamic mysticism at Leiden University in 2001, having been appointed assistant professor in 1997. In 2010 he became associate professor. From 2004 to August 2021 he was track-leader of Persian Studies program. In 2007 he was elected a member of The Young Akademie of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). He has been the recipient of several prizes such as a VENI and a VIDI grant from the Netherland Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), and in 2021 he received an ERC-Advanced Grant for *Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam*. He has published extensively on Persian literature, mysticism and religion. He is passionate about knowledge utilization and knowledge dissemination, teaching courses on Persian culture and religion, and regularly giving talks for the general public. He has participated in (inter-)university workgroups, such as the Council for the Humanities (KNAW).

In September 2020 he was appointed chair of Persian and Iranian Studies at Utrecht University, first part-time, and then full-time from September 2021, in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies (Islamic and Arabic section).

He has published widely for both specialists and the general public. He has written eight monographs on subjects ranging from classical Persian

poetry to Sufism and the role of mysticism in Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) poetry and how peaceful religious injunctions are used to justify violence. In addition, he has published 25 articles in international journals, 41 book chapters, 10 blogs, 8 translations of poetry, and 49 book reviews. He has edited 12 books on subjects ranging from manuscript traditions to literary reception theory to the changing pictures of the 'others' as enemy. He is the founding general editor of the Iranian Studies Series at Leiden University Press with currently 28 book titles available. His recent publication is *Martyrdom, Mysticism and Dissent: The Poetry of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021).

Colofon

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Vormgeving: Communicatie & Marketing, faculteit Geesteswetenschappen, Universiteit Utrecht
Afbeelding titelpagina: *Rūmī,* Mathnavī-yi maʿnavī, *copied by Viṣāl-i Shīrāzī, facsimile edition, published in Tehran: by sāzmān-e asnād-i kitāb-khāna millī-yi īrān 1385/2006, p. 53.*
Portretfoto: Ed van Rijswijk