Wearing the Belt of Oppression: Khāqāni's Christian Qasida and the Prison Poetry of Medieval Shirvān

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Wearing the Belt of Oppression: Khāqāni's Christian Qasida and the Prison Poetry of Medieval Shirvān

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Abstract

This article examines how the Persian prison poem (*habsiyāt*) incorporated Islamic legal norms for governing non-Muslim peoples into its poetics. By tracing how Khāqāni of Shirvān (d. 1199) brought the aesthetics of incarceration to bear on Islamic legal regulations pertaining to non-Muslim communities (*ahl al-zemma*), I offer a new perspective on the politics of poetry in Persian culture. As I delineate the intertextual references to legal stipulations (*shorut*) pertaining to non-Muslims that suffuse Khāqāni's Christian *qasida*, I demonstrate how the Persian poetics of incarceration coalesced into a powerful internal critique of Islamic law.

Keywords

form – genre – prisons – Persian – political aesthetics – incarceration – Caucasus literatures – Shirvānshāh – *zemmi* – Azerbaijan – Islamic law

Over the course of the 6th/12th century, a genre small in volume but large in ambition, both stimulated in and shaped by the materiality of the prison, flourished in the outermost regions of a vast terrain of Persian literary culture that stretched from Lahore to Azerbaijan. This genre, called *habsiyāt* (from the Arabic root *ḥbs*, meaning confinement, detention), is the medieval Islamic world's most aesthetically compelling corpus of texts dealing with incarceration. Originating during the Ghaznavid period (977-1186), *habsiyāt* flourished particularly under the Shirvānshāhs (861-1538), a dynasty that ruled northern Azerbaijan and parts of southern Daghestan from their capital in Shirvān

for most of the Middle Ages.[1] From Shirvān, *ḥabsiyāt* later spread across the Persianate ecumene, encompassing the regions we now call Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia.

Due in part to its origins on the peripheries of the Islamic world, the Persian prison poem has been relegated to a subchapter in most histories of Persian literature (Sharma, 68-106; Akimushkina). This genre's peripheral status has obscured its significance for the study of the relation between politics and aesthetics, globally as well as locally within Islamic literary culture. I have elsewhere examined the prison poem's global and multilingual geography (Gould 2012). This article by contrast focuses on the political discourses informing the Persian literature of incarceration. In particular, I explore here how one poet, Khāqāni of Shirvān (1121-1199), bound himself in what he terms the "belt of oppression" by incorporating into his poetics a discriminatory discourse for dealing with non-Muslim peoples. I also ask how this discourse was reframed through his prison poetry.

An anecdote concerning Khāqāni will help to set the stage for the journey through texts, politics, and narratives that follows. As recorded by the nineteenth century historian ʿAbbāsqoli Āqā Bākikhānuf (1794-1847), who based his account on the fifteenth century Persian literary history of Dowlatshāh of Samarqand, Khāqāni was "a man of learning" who decided to "renounce worldly life and embark on a pilgrimage [*hajj*] to Mecca and Medina" (Dowlatshāh, 77-83; Bākikhānuf, 105). Khāqāni's ruler and patron, Manuchehr III (r. 1120-1160), denied the poet's request for permission to leave. Khāqāni, however, had a "taste for poverty [*zowq-e faqr*]" and would not let any ruler's dictates get in the way of his spiritual ambitions. Refusing to wait for permission (*bi ejāzat-e khāqān*), Khāqāni departed Shirvān. The ruler's agents captured the poet in the city of Baylaqān, not far from Shirvān, and compelled him to return and face the consequences of having violated the wishes of the great king.[2]

Although Bākikhānuf does not say whether the poet was imprisoned for insubordination after he was captured by Manuchehr's agents, Dowlatshāh states that this escape attempt was followed by five months of imprisonment

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1 Although Islamic geographers ascribe the title Shirvānshāh ("ruler of Shirvān") to Ardashīr (180-242 CE), the founder of the Sasanian dynasty (e.g., Ebn al-Khordādbeh, 43), the Shirvānshāhs discussed in this essay date from the Islamic period. They succeeded the Arab Yazidis (3rd/9th cent.), the first Islamic dynasty to rule for an extended period of time in the Islamic Caucasus, who bore the title "Shirvānshāh" towards the end of their reign. Further disambiguations are offered in Ashurbeli, 60-74; Minorsky 1958, 20, no.3; Kemper, 71.

2 The language of the preceding three sentences is from Dowlatshāh (78-79), not Bākikhānof. The rest of this account is based on Bākikhānof.

(*maqayyad o mahbus*) in the fortress of Shābarān, in the region of Shirvān and
near ancient Darband (Dowlatshāh, 79). Suffused with sorrow (*deltangi*), these
months of incarceration also stimulated the poet's verse. The poet's refusal to
let his peregrinations be contingent on his ruler's will became habitual, and
led to many similar subsequent imprisonments. Not long after his first failed
escape attempt, Khāqāni succeeded in leaving Azerbaijan and embarked on a
lengthy journey through the two Iraqs (ʿErāq-e ʿArab and ʿErāq-e ʿAjam), that
led him all the way to Mecca.[3] When he returned to Shirvān, the poet was
immediately thrown in prison, from which location he composed a series of
poems that extended Persian literature. Characteristically of the contradictory
fluctuations within the prison poem's political trajectory, Bākikhānuf prefaces
his account of the poet's rebellion by stating that Khāqāni celebrated the glory
(*shokuh*) of his patron-ruler, Manuchehr III, in his poems. Here as elsewhere in
the Persian literature of incarceration, the regimes against which prison poets
rebelled were also the regimes they glorified elsewhere in their oeuvre.

Khāqāni was neither the first nor the last Persian poet to memorialize his
incarceration in verse. But because Khāqāni's disputes with his ruler were poet-
ically generative and politically subversive in equal measures, this exploration
of the genre that was brought to its apogee of excellence in Shirvān begins with
the recurrent tensions between the poet's desire for freedom to travel and his
ruler's desire to confine his most gifted poet to a prison cell. While the prison
functioned at times in the Persian literature of incarceration as a synecdoche
for the general confinement within which the most promising literary talents
of the era were trapped, neither the prison cell nor the manifold rules and reg-
ulations that were intended to police the movements of poets across medieval
borders could succeed in silencing poetry's subversive utterance. To the con-
trary, these external constrictions stimulated the genesis of the prison poem as
a genre. The more constricted the conditions under which prison poets wrote,
the more the prison poem acquired force, salience, and necessity.

The prison poem deserves greater attention than it has yet received, includ-
ing in Persian scholarship.[4] Among other matters of historical significance,
the genre's rapid dissemination across vast territories reveals how a cohesive
Persian literary culture was constructed through courtly, mercantile, and reli-
gious networks (see Gould 2015a). As they inaugurated a new era in literary his-
tory, Persian poets of incarceration used their literary allegiances to transcend
differences in language, ethnicity, and, above all, religion. Most saliently for the

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3 One result of this journey was Khāqāni's masterful autobiography in verse, discussed below.

4 The most important Persian studies of the *habsiyāt* include Ẓafari; Mehr; Yusofi. For the
   parallel (although far from identical) Arabic literature of incarceration, see Marẓiah Ābād.

study of the relations between poetry and polity in medieval Islamic society, Khāqāni's prison poems incorporate the language and imagery of a corpus of Islamic legal texts that stipulated how religious minorities were to be treated under Islamic law.

Fredric Jameson's account of literature's "political unconsciousness" in *The Political Unconscious* (1982) is calibrated to modernity's archetypal genre, the novel. Yet his recognition of genre as an historical process makes his model usable for premodern literatures, and I draw on it to locate political agency in the Persian poetic imagination. In this paper, I use Jameson's theory of narrative to gain a better understanding of the work done by the prison poem, politically, by reconfiguring a specific aspect of Islamic governance, and geographically, by enacting this political reconfiguration on Islamic borderlands.

Inaugurating the Prison Poem

The *habsiyāt*'s genesis and dissemination can be condensed into three transformations in twelfth-century Persian literary culture that contributed to the birth of the prison poem. The first was a shift in the concept and practice of sovereignty that resulted from the decreasing power of the Baghdad-based caliphate and the expansion of Persian dynasties across the new Islamic peripheries of South and West Asia. In his masterful study of medieval Shirvān, Vladimir Minorsky argued that "with the advent of the Abbasids, the grip of the caliphs on the Caucasian frontier gradually weakened" (Minorsky 1958, 19). The source on which this observation was based, an anonymous early twelfth-century Arabic work entitled *History of Darband* (*Ta'rikh al-bāb*) dated the decay of Abbasid sovereignty to the reign of al-Motavakkel (r. 232-47/847-61), who was one of the most vigorous persecutors of non-Muslim communities. In the poem discussed in detail below, Khāqāni reinforces the anonymous historian's impression concerning the decline of traditional centers of Islamic sovereignty. "I ask no help from the Abbasids," he declared, "From the Saljuqs, I expect no friend" (Khāqāni, 25, v. 4). As Khāqāni recognized, the decay of caliphal power entailed a recentralization of Islamic sovereignty, away from imperial centers and towards the increasingly central peripheries of South, Central, and Western Asia.

The second factor in the emergence of the prison poem is connected to these shifts in the circulation of political power. This is a new authorial agenda, most fully reflected in the changed relations between the normative poetic form of courtly literature, the *qasida*, and non-courtly genres. As the form in which most *habsiyāt* were written, the *qasida* figures broadly into any narrative history of the Persian prison poem, but in the era of the prison poem, the

qasida came under greater influence from genres which it had previously kept its distance, most notably the *ghazal* (lyric poem), which laid greater stress on the interiority of the poet's self.[5] The oeuvre of the first prison poet, Masʿud-e Saʿd of Lahore (1059-1121), strikingly illustrates this tendency. Masʿud-e Saʿd's prison poetry combined the *qasida*'s vatic authority with the *ghazal*'s emphasis on affect. In keeping with its dual purpose of at once dismantling and sustaining hierarchies of class and status, the prison poem productively engaged with the political panegyric, while also inverting its values through parody (*hajw*), inversion (*maqlub*), and other literary forms and devices that entailed subversion.

The third factor that helped to constitute the prison poem as a genre is the translation of the discipline of ʿ*elm al-balāgha* (the science of rhetoric), from an Arabophone into a Persophone idiom (see Gould forthcoming). The introduction of a new linguistic medium for this discipline crucially shifted the terms of poetic discourse. Each of these three developments imparted cogency and substance to the prison poem as a genre.

Already in early twelfth-century Lahore, prison poetry resonated with the ambiguities that attended the genre in its latest phases. The Lahore poet Masʿud-e Saʿd (1059-1121) stipulated that his Ghaznavid ruler, Malekshāh, should be imprisoned in lieu of himself because the Saljuq king's capacity to harm Sultan Ebrāhim's domain exceeded that of any court poet (Nezāmi ʿAruzi, 50-52). In announcing that it is the ruler and not the poet who should be in prison, Masʿud-e Saʿd configures incarceration as a privilege. When he states that the poet's chains (*band*) should wear down the king's sovereignty (*tājdāri*), the poet underscores the fragility of the sultan's power. Material sovereignty, the poet suggests, is constituted through incarceration. Paradoxically, the first prison poem in Persian literary history declares fidelity to its patron through words that approach the threshold of rebellion. As we will soon see, Masʿud-e Saʿd inspired even more politically charged overtones in the prison poetry of Shirvān.

Inverted Forms, Subverted Content

Persian literary-historical sources from the earliest period regard Masʿud-e Saʿd as the first prison poet.[6] His prison poems, which tend towards brevity, were

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5   For prison poems that were not *qasida*s, see Beelaert, 25, who notes that "a fairly large part of prison literature . . . consists of complaints."

6   This tradition is initiated in Nezāmi ʿAruzi's *Chahār maqāla* (e.g., 50-52), from which subsequent sources, such as Dowlatshāh and Vatvāt, take their cue.

followed by lengthier poems dealing with incarceration in figurative and literal terms. Entailing in the New Persian context a tripartite structure that opens with praise of the ruler-patron, the literary form of the *qasida*, within which the majority of prison poems were composed, has often been understood to reflect coercive relations between ruler and ruled.[7] Although prejudiced, this view has historical foundations: in contradistinction to lyric genres such as the *ghazal* that aimed to render the poet's subjectivity, the panegyric has tradition- ally glorified the sovereign.

What happens when the legitimacy of a ruler who has unjustly imprisoned his poets is compromised by his inability to compel or inspire his glorifica- tion in literary form? Genres acquire new political meanings when the sources of sovereignty are reconstituted. The erosion of political legitimacy reconfig- ures old genres and gives rise to new ones, which become ideologically laden through new forms. Actualized as they are through ideologies, genres may be predominantly associated with the same forms, but more frequently, as with the prison poem, they traverse a range of forms while negotiating what Jameson called the "dialogical organization of class discourse."[8]

In keeping with this attenuated relation between genre and form, the prison poem inverted the *qasida*'s panegyric structure by replacing praise of the patron with praise of the poet. That such inversions were immanent in the *qasida* from its inception is evidenced by the trope of boasting (*fakhr*) that pervades pre-Islamic Arabic poetry (Jameson, 84).[9] The prison poem sys- tematized *fakhr* and made inversion intrinsic to its structure. By rearranging tropes that had long animated the *qasida*, the prison poem further ideologized this traditionally panegyric form. The *habsiyat*'s achievement of ideological resignification more thoroughly than other genres makes it useful for tracing the historical relation of genre to form.[10] The forms used for the prison poem, in particular the *qasida* and the *dobeyti* (double distich), were old, but the

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7   In modern Persian literary criticism, this trend is exemplified by Nāder Vazinpur. For endeavors to move beyond the denigration of the panegyric, see the essays collected in Sperl and Shackle, eds., and Gould 2015b.

8   For further on the genre/form distinction from the perspective of Marxist aesthetics, see Williams 1977, 180-91. The distinction assumed here between *genre* as an ideological con- struct and form as a rubric for organizing literary texts according to their stylistic features roughly corresponds to what in *balāgha* are discussed as *gharaz* (pl. *aghrāz*) for genre and *fann* (pl. *fonun*) for form. Gould 2013, 43-83, argues for distinguishing between genre and form for the study of Islamic literatures.

9   For *fakhr* before the prison poem, see Papoutsakis, 22-24.

10   Other genres to which the prison poem might be compared include the hunting poem (*tardiyāt*), the drinking poem (*khamriyāt*), and the ascetic poem (*zohdiyāt*). While such

habsiyāt genre was generated by the new distributions of political power that reshaped the twelfth-century eastern Islamic world.

Within classical Persian literature, the poet most renowned for his boasting is Khāqāni of Shirvān. Located in northern Azerbaijan on the border with Arabophone Daghestan, Shirvān was a center of twelfth-century Persian literary culture and a seat of power for the Shirvānshāh dynasty. Alongside Khāqāni, the most eminent literary beneficiary of Shirvānshāh largesse was Nezāmi Ganjavi (1141-1209), author of the most famous verse narratives (*mathnavi*) in Persian literary history. Nezāmi shared at least one patron with Khāqāni: the Shirvānshāh ruler Akhsatān (r. 1160-1197), son of Manuchehr III. In his autobiographical travelogue, *Tohfat al-ʿErāqayn*, Khāqāni called himself "a parrot creating meanings [*maʿānī āfirīn*]" and compared Shirvān to a tyrannical iron cage in which he was imprisoned (Khāqāni 1978, 29, v. 11; 212, v. 12). Throughout this verse travelogue, the poet is "in a state of captivity: he is trapped in Shirvān, trapped in the sublunary world" (Beelaert, 31).[11] Khāqāni's encounter with incarceration, however, generated its richest yield in the *qasida* form.

Khāqāni expressed his debt to Masʿud-e Saʿd on numerous occasions while also revising the legacy he inherited from the Lahore poet. Whereas Masʿud-e Saʿd was imprisoned for suspected dual loyalties and for mocking his ruler in jest, Khāqāni found himself behind bars on multiple occasions for more overt insubordinations. After he departed on a pilgrimage to Mecca without first obtaining his ruler's permission, Khāqāni refused to hand over a ring that he had received as a gift during his sojourn in Baghdad and which was said to confer on its wearer the power of invisibility. When he returned to Shirvān, the Shirvānshāh ruler Akhsatān demanded that the poet surrender the ring. Khāqāni refused. As a result of the poet's insubordination, Akhsatān had Khāqāni imprisoned.[12] In the context of Persian literary history, Khāqāni's magical ring can be read as a metonym for the prison poem's displacement of royal sovereignty onto what Persian poets of Khāqāni's era referred to as *sokhan* (poetic discourse).[13]

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comparisons elucidate aspects of this genre, the ideology of form that structures the prison poem is more politically attenuated than in other genres.

11   On Khāqāni's prison *qasida*s generally, see Qazvini, 185-226.

12   For the ring episode, see Khāqāni 1978, 47-51. While this is not the only version of the reasons for Khāqāni's imprisonment, that it is the poet's own explanation makes it most relevant to an account of the genre's ideology.

13   For a delineation of this concept in the poetry of Khāqāni's contemporary, Nezāmi, see Talattof.

As Beeleart notes, Khāqāni's verse travelogue itself exemplifies the *habsiyāt*. In the *Tohfat*, the poet configures himself as "someone in a state of captivity: he is trapped in Shirvān, trapped in the sublunary world" (Beelaert, 31).[14] Khāqāni's encounter with incarceration, however, generated its richest yield in the *qasida*. In one of his boldest acts of literary rebellion, Khāqāni composed a text that later came to be known as the "Christian *qasida* [*qasida-ye tarsā'iya*]," in recognition of its extended engagement with Eastern Orthodox theology. In his groundbreaking study of this poem published over half a century ago, Vladimir Minorsky suggested that the addressee for the Christian *qasida* was the future Byzantine Emperor Andronicus Comnenus (r. 1183-1185), who visited Azerbaijan as a guest of the Georgian king George III (r. 1156-1184), during the latter's expedition to Shirvān (Minorsky 1945; also see Storey and de Blois, v, 385). Although alternative identities for Khāqāni's dedicatee have since been posited, all suggestions point to a Christian ruler, either of Byzantium or Bagratid Georgia.[15]

During the expedition to Shirvān, George III successfully recaptured Shābarān fortress, which had been temporarily taken over by Daghestani tribes, for his cousin Akhsatān, Khāqāni's patron and ruler. Shābarān fortress has been discussed in sources from this period as the original capital of the Shirvānshāh kingdom, and its construction has been traced to the Sasanian ruler Shāpur II (r. 309-379).[16] It was from this location, deep in the ancient fortress of Shābarān, that Khāqāni likely conceived his Christian *qasida* in 1173. The same Akhsatān who imprisoned Khāqāni also contributed to Persian literature by commissioning *Leyli va Majnun* from Nezāmi, who effusively praised his Shirvānshāh patron.[17]

Whether or not Andronicus Comnenus was the Christian *qasida*'s intended dedicatee, Khāqāni's familiarity with this Byzantine prince is unsurprising, given their shared connections to the Shirvānshāh court. Just a few years prior

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14 On Khāqāni's prison *qasida*s generally, see Qazvini, 185-226.

15 Beelaert argues that the dedicatee "is not even a Comnenos at all . . . but a scion of the Bagratid dynasty" (9, n. 40). Following Kändli, Beelaert identifes the dedicatee as Amir Esfahsālār 'Ezz al-Dowla.

16 *Hodūd al-ʿālam*, pp. 35-36 (text), p. 404 (commentary). An overview of sources is offered by Alikberov (88), who adduces several alternate spellings for Shābarān in Arabic and Persian sources: Shābirān, Shāburān, and Shāpurān.

17 For Khāqāni's relations with his patrons, see Kendli-Harischi, 239-318. Nezāmi's praise for Akhsatān can be found in his *khamsa* (quintet), which I have consulted in the Tehran lithograph edition dated 1270/1853-1854 (no publisher). This edition is not paginated, but the relevant section is nine pages from the beginning of *Leyli va Majnun*, the third *mathnavi* in Nezāmi's *khamsa*.

to his sojourn in Georgia and Azerbaijan, Andronicus Comnenus had himself escaped from twelve years of imprisonment for conspiracy against the emperor of Byzantium, Manuel I (r. 1143-1180).[18] Had Khāqāni been aware of this convergence between his biography and that of the Byzantine prince, it may have stirred his feelings of solidarity. Whether or not such sympathy animated his imagination, the Christian *qasida* was the most political engagement with Christian theology to date within classical Persian literature.[19]

Finally, as a text written by a Muslim poet whose Nestorian Christian mother had converted to Islam, the Christian *qasida* is notable for pushing the doctrinal boundaries of Islam while still giving voice to Islamic piety.[20] The Christian *qasida* elaborately figures the incarcerated Muslim poet as Jesus Christ, the Islamic prophet and Christian savior. Beyond the particular conceit of the poet-as-prophet, which is a *topos* of the Persian prison poem generally, the Christian *qasida* adds a new political charge to the genre's complex entanglement with sovereignty: it incorporates the discourse of *osul al-feqh* (the rules of Islamic jurisprudence) into its poetics, rhetoric, and tropology.

Minorsky's masterful exegesis of the Christian *qasida* serves as the foundation for all subsequent scholarship on this poem, including in Persian.[21] Minorsky did not, however, document the substantial intersections between *ʿelm al-shorut* texts pertaining to the *ahl al-zemma* (non-Muslim communities, namely, Christians, Jews, and sometimes Zoroastrians) and Khāqāni's poem. Nor did he explore the influence of Islamic legal discourse on Persian poetics. Like other modern readers of Khāqāni, Minorsky thereby left unexplored the political dimensions of Khāqāni's poetics. Indeed, I am unaware of any prior scholarly consideration of the Christian *qasida* in light of the *shorut*, although my hypothesis has been stimulated by the Persian commentaries cited *in passim*. With respect to why the intertextual links between Khāqāni's text and the *shorut* have not been systematically accounted for, it may simply be that the legal nuances of his lexicon (especially *zonnār* and *nāqus*, on which see below) seemed obvious to Muslim readers. I go beyond simply pointing out Khāqāni's intertexts, however, by identifying sources for his critique in the

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18   For Andronicus Comnenus' imprisonment and his escape, see Nicetas Choniates, 58-61.

19   In his *Manteq al-tayr*, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAttār also makes of Christian learning in the story of Sheykh Sanʿān, but Khāqāni's poem is distinctive in its involvement with the poet's self.

20   For further commentary on Christian imagery in the Christian *qasida*, see Moʿin 1985, 201-16.

21   Zarrinkub (70-120) published his translation of Minorsky's article along with important additional commentary. For the commentarial tradition on the Christian *qasida*, see Anusha, ed., 103-105.

Islamic legal discourse on non-Muslims. Beyond considering what it meant for a Muslim poet to configure himself as a Christian, I consider what it meant for a Muslim poet to engage critically with Islamic law.

By bringing Minorsky's engagement with Khāqāni's poetics into conversation with the primary and secondary sources pertaining to the Pact of ʿOmar, the remainder of this article traces a dialectic between the Persian poetry of incarceration and normative Islamic legal theory. This dialectic suggests that prison poets such as Khāqāni were acutely conscious of the literary (which is to say rhetorical) status of Islamic legal conventions concerning the regulation of non-Muslims. The interface between prison poem poetics and Islamic jurisprudence eloquently demonstrates the ways in which, in medieval Islamic society, poetry and law inhabited conceptually proximate spheres of intellectual inquiry. This proximity extended poetry's political scope, while also infusing the social discourse of Islamic law with an ethos of poetic creation.

Khāqāni's engagement with Islamic legal discourse illuminates how religious difference was negotiated along the borders of Islamic empires, and by Muslims on intimate terms with non-Muslims. Like the prison poem, which was a minor genre in Persian literary history, twelfth-century Shirvān was a minor geography within the vast topography of Islamic sovereignty. This kingdom's peripheral location fostered an environment propitious for the *habsiyāt*'s aesthetic of dissent as well as for its critique of *shorut* regulations, particularly in their Shāfeʿi and Hanafi iterations. A close reading of the Christian *qasida* reveals how Shirvān's geographic marginality generated a hitherto unarticulated critique of *shorut* regulations. As a figure from the margins, the son of a Christian mother and a poet who had to earn his livelihood at the court, Khāqāni used his peripheral social position to stage an unprecedented critique of normative Islamic law.

Both by virtue of his non-Muslim parentage and his residency in a heterogeneous geography dense with Eastern Orthodox Caucasian Albanians, Zoroastrians, and Nestorians following different creeds, Khāqāni was well acquainted with the regulations that Islamic rulers had crafted for non-Muslim populations since the early days of the Islamic conquest. Two major works within this tradition are the *Ketāb al-kharāj* (Book of Taxation) by Hārun al-Rashid's vizier Abu Yusof (d. 798), and the *Ketāb al-omm* (The Exemplar) by the jurist al-Shāfeʿi (760-820), founder of the legal school that was dominant in Daghestan from the twelfth century onwards.

Al-Shāfeʿi's *Ketāb al-omm* contains "the fullest statement of the limitations imposed on the People of the Book," in the form of a version of the so-called "Pact of ʿOmar," a text attributed to ʿOmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634-644),

a companion of the Prophet and the second Islamic caliph (Tritton, 12).[22]
Although modern scholarship associates the institutionalization of discrimi-
natory regulations against non-Muslims with the reign of a later ʿOmar, ʿOmar
b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (r. 717-20), and no earlier, a different narrative circulated in the
medieval Islamic world.[23] According to Tritton, al-Shāfeʿi's version of the Pact
of ʿOmar originated as "an exercise in the schools of law to draw up pattern
treatises" (12).[24] Tritton argues that the function of the Pact of ʿOmar was more
literary than practical. While Tritton's argument that the stipulations concern-
ing the *ahl al-zemma* were not enforced has been challenged, more recent
scholarship has demonstrated that the Pact of ʿOmar was a text "whose lit-
erary form everyone, including non-Muslims, understood, because they were
intimately familiar with the administrative process underlying it" (Cohen 129).
This text's normative status, so the argument runs, means that its injunctions
should be read as idealized rules rather than historical facts. In what follows,
I read the Pact of ʿOmar alongside the Christian *qasida*, and thereby encounter
anew how poetry shapes the historical artifact.

As Khāqāni was later to do in his Christian *qasida*, the text of the *shorut*
speaks on behalf of Christians in the first person plural. In this ventriloquized
speech, the Christians of Syria agree to abide by a long series of negative restric-
tions. In the version recorded by Khāqāni's contemporary Ebn ʿAsāker (1105-76),
these stipulations include "not raising voices during the recitation" of sacred
texts, "not displaying our crosses in our churches (*saliban ʿelā kenāʾesnā*),"
"yielding the road to Muslims," "not learning to read the Qurʾān or teach it
to our children," "not preventing others from converting to Islam (*al-dokhul
fiʾl-Eslām*)," "not resembling Muslims in their clothing . . . or [by using] saddles,"
and "not imitating them [by carrying] their weapons (*lā nataqled al-soyuf*)"
(Ebn ʿAsāker II, 174-75). Generally, the stipulations aim at preserving distinc-
tions between Muslims and non-Muslims as distinct social classes, and at pre-
venting Christian practices from spilling over into the Islamic public sphere,

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22   For a comparative study of these documents with close attention to their historical gen-
     esis, see Levy-Rubin 2005, 170-206; idem 2011, 58-87.

23   For the question of dating, see Levy-Rubin 2011, 88-98. The text of the so-called Pact
     of ʿOmar is preserved in later centuries by, among other sources, the Andalusian jurist
     al-Tortushi's (c. 1059-1126) work on Islamic ethics, an eleventh-century chronicle of
     Jerusalem by al-Mosharraf b. al-Morajjā (fl. 1030-1040), and an enumeration of laws per-
     taining to non-Muslims by the Syrian jurist Ibn Qayyem al-Jawziya (1292-1350). In each
     of these texts, which are ethical, historiographic, and juridical respectively, the injunc-
     tions appears in the form of a putative letter from the Christians of Syria to the Umayyad
     governor of the region, Abu ʿObayda.

24   Tritton is joined in this argument, *inter alia*, by Fattal.

while also guaranteeing the right of non-Muslims to practice their faith in certain spaces (such as churches) that are clearly demarcated as non-Muslim.

Al-Shāfeʿi offers a distinctive variation on the *shorut al-ʿomariya* textual tradition. He reframes the stipulations in other *shorut* by transposing them into the second person voice, such that they become orders delivered by Muslims to Christians. The imperative mode and second person voice impose a burden of responsibility on both sides. Rhetorically, these modes of speech have the paradoxical effect of obliging Muslims to honor the terms of a pact that was devised to constrain and regulate Christian behavior. The responsibilities imposed on Muslims by the terms of the pact are enumerated in greater detail in al-Shāfeʿi's version than in other *shorut*. In addition, al-Shāfeʿi advises Muslim rulers to incorporate into their treatises with Christians, made as part of a payment of taxes (*jezya*), a statement to the effect that: "we grant you…safety (*amān*) so long as you…maintain the regulations that we impose on you, that you obey the rules of Islam (*hokm al-Eslām*) and no others, and that you do not refuse to do what we ask you" (al-Shāfeʿi, IV, 280). The burdens on non-Muslims are substantial, but so are the obligations on Muslims to protect non-Muslims' lives and property, presuming that remain loyal to the Islamic state.

While the Shirvānshāhs ruled according to the Hanafi *mazhab*, the region in which they governed was suffused with Shāfeʿi texts and methods. The early Ghaznavids followed the Shāfeʿi rite, although "Hanafism [had] gained ascendency" by the time Masʿud-e Saʿd began to write (Ziad, 294).[25] Although the Ghurids who succeeded the Ghaznavids were Hanafis, the Shāfeʿi rite was gaining a steady foothold across the Caucasus, particularly Daghestan and northern Azerbaijan, during the same years that the prison poem spread from Lahore to Shirvān (Alikberov, 379). Bākikhānuf captured the oscillation between the two schools of law in his ethno-history of Islam in the Caucasus. "Here there are two branches [of the religion]," Bākikhānuf wrote from his home in Quba in northern Azerbaijan (near Daghestan), "one is Hanafi and the other Shāfeʿi. In Quba, Sheki, and Shirvān [the faith] is mixed. The region of Samuriya, all of Tabasaran, the Sunni part of Darband, and all of Daghestan are Shāfeʿi" (Bākikhānuf 22-23).

Given the intermingling of religious schools in this borderland region of the Caucasus, it is impossible to characterize Khāqāni's milieu as either exclusively Shāfeʿi or Hanafi. That Khāqāni attacked philosophers (*falāsefa*), deniers of the attributes of God (*moʿattela*), and rationalists (*moʿtazela*) in his verse suggests

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25   The Indo-Persian historian Hardy states (145) that "Shāfiʿī[sm] was strong under the later Ghaznavids and the Ghurids," but the present author follows Ziad here.

at least a rhetorical opposition to theological dialectics (*kalām*), as well as sympathies with the traditionist Hanafis than with the more theologically audacious Shāfeʿis (Bausani, 286).[26] But Khāqāni's fluid poetics acknowledges no authority in the realm of dogma.

Notwithstanding the Shirvānshāh's nominal Hanafism, which, if we follow Madelung, would place them in the camp opposed to *kalām*, many texts pertaining to the Shāfeʿi *mazhab* circulated in the regions under Shirvānshāh control (Madelung, 38). The circulation of al-Shāfeʿi's version of the *shorut* throughout Shirvān is a case in point. Khāqāni could easily have encountered this text in a local *madrasa*. Furthermore, his immersion in Arabic learning would have facilitated his familiarity with *shorut* texts, and confronted him with a political discourse he felt compelled to critique.[27]

Dressing in Chains

The Christian *qasida* begins by describing the situation of the poet in prison. Chafing against his confinement, the poet compares the circulation of the stars in the sky (*falak*) above him to the "Christian," which is to say the Greek, script (*khatt-e tarsā*), written from left to right, unlike the right-left Arabic script in which his verse is inscribed. The crooked course followed by the Christian script already indicates that something is awry in the functioning of the world. This intimation of impending disaster is elaborated through the tortured account of Jesus' life and death that follows (vv. 3-5, 14-15, 20-21).

Rather than consecutively narrating the major events in the life and death of Jesus Christ, Khāqāni assumes familiarity with this story on the part of his readers, and so limits himself to learned allusions, to the needle (*suzan*) with which Jesus ascended to heaven (v. 3);[28] to the birth pangs that drove Mary to seek relief near a palm tree shortly before Jesus was born (v. 15; Q. 19:23-4); to Jesus healing the blindness of Lazarus (v. 63); and to Jesus' statement prior to his ascent to heaven: "I desire my Father above [*āhang-e pedar dāram be bālā*]" (see John 16:28). *Hadith* and other Islamic textual traditions concerning the life of Jesus were incorporated into prison poetry before Khāqāni took this

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26   For a more detailed discussion of Khāqāni's religious allegiances, see the section on "Akhlāq o ʿaqāʾed-e Khāqāni" in Qarib's introduction to Khāqāni's *Tohfat*.

27   Although Persian was the primary language of his composition, Khāqāni's Arabic poetry, collected and edited by Kazzāzi, reflects his deep familiarity with the Arabic literary tradition.

28   The needle motif guides the exegesis of this poem by Kazzāzi.

tradition of rhetorical engagement to a new level by engaging directly with the Christian tradition.[29] But Khāqāni's allusions demonstrate unambiguously the poet's familiarity with Christian teachings directly from Christian sources.

After demonstrating his command of Christian teachings concerning the life of Jesus, Khāqāni returns to himself and his predicament. The poet proposes to travel to Byzantium, where he will "open a school [*dabirestān*] in the center of Byzantium" and "make fresh [*motarrā*] the laws of the Metropolitan [*matrān*]" (v. 44-45). These verses announce a plan to infuse Islam with the poet's individual brand of Christianity. By implication, they substitute a political system that vests power in the caliph with an aesthetics based on the poet's sovereignty. While transferring sovereignty to himself, the poet calls for praying in the direction of Jerusalem, as Mohammad did following his migration to Medina.[30] Provocatively, Khāqāni asks:

> What if I search for the threshold of infidelity
> and stop seeking the path of the faith of the supreme leader?
> Here is the gate of the Abkhazians open.
> There is the Greek sanctuary ready to receive me.
> (Khāqāni, ed. Sajjādi, 25, vv. 34-36)

In order to appreciate the significance of Khāqāni's threatened apostasy, it is useful to recall the prohibitions that circulated in the poet's milieu against conversion to Christianity. The fourth clause of the *shorut* in al-Tortushi's *Light for the Rulers* has Christians stipulate that "We shall not manifest our religion publicly nor preach it to anyone."[31] Khāqāni proposes to violate the terms of this pact in quite explicit terms. Beyond proposing to convert to Christianity himself, the poet threatens to persuade others to follow his new religion. In dissenting from the regime that incarcerates him, the poet's threats exemplify the process through which the *qasida*'s panegyric form was transposed into the ideology of incarceration, thereby giving birth to a new genre.

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29   For Christian imagery in Mas'ud-e Sa'd's *habsiyāt*, see Mo'in 1947, 32, and Sharma, 143. For deployments of the cross later in the *habsiyāt* tradition, by a seventeenth century Iranian poet who would soon become a fixture at the Mughal court, see Kalim Hamdāni (Kāshāni), 103-104. Kalim opens this *qasida*, also composed from prison, by invoking *falak* (the sky, heavens) as a metonym for his fate (*qadar*), and thereby alluding to Khāqāni's Christian *qasida*.

30   See Rubin, 103 n. 29 (basing his account on Tabari, Ebn Heshām, and Beyhaqi).

31   Tortushi, 229.

"After fifty years of Muslim piety," the poet continues, "my feet do not deserve this crucifying chain [*salibi band*]" (v. 37). Khāqāni here invokes the chain (*band*) used by Masʿud-e Saʿd decades earlier in the quatrain that is commonly taken to mark the advent of the prison poem. The crucial addition of the cross (*salib*) intensifies this image's political charge. Khāqāni's aesthetics of incarceration climaxes with a litany of further threats, located in a hypothetical present, that engage with Islamic law from a subaltern Christian position:

> I kiss the church bell from this law.
> I wear the *zonnār* because of this oppression.
> I prepare a Syriac commentary on the Gospel.
> I explore the Hebrew script's mysteries.
> (vv. 38-39)

Among the many striking images in these verses, one resonates with particular potency, especially in light of the *shorut*'s competing legal discourses concerning the treatment of non-Muslims. While Khāqāni's threat to convert to Christianity can be read as a challenge to the Muslim ruler's fear that his subjects will betray the religion of his state, the poet's rushing to "kiss the church bell [*ravam nāqus busam*]" directly cites and inverts the *shorut* as recorded by al-Shāfeʿi (IV, 293).

The bells invoked by Khāqāni in v. 37 (sing. *nāqus*; pl. *nawāqis*) are also associated with Christian religious celebrations. The belt (*zonnār*) that Khāqāni promises to wear is the belt all non-Muslims were legally required to wear, at least according to the *shorut* text.[32] The political charge of the *nāqus* in the Christian *qasida* is a function of its symbolic challenge to sovereign Islamic power. As Levy-Rubin notes, the fact that the right to beat the drums, especially for prayer, was reserved for the caliph meant that "the beating of the *nāqus* loudly and in public was an infringement on royal authority" (Levy-Rubin 2011, 160).

The challenge posed by the Christian *nāqus* to Islamic sovereignty is reflected in the *habsiyāt* as well in *ʿelm al-shorut* (the sub-discipline that developed around these regulations). In the version of the *shorut* preserved by al-Tortushi (p. 230), the relevant clause reads "We shall only ring bells in our churches quietly [*khafifan*]". Ebn al-Morajjā, in his *Fazāʾel Beyt al-Maqdes* (Virtues of Jerusalem; 56), and Ebn Qayyem al-Jawziya, in his *Aḥkām ahl*

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32   *Nāqus* also signifies the wooden clapper used to ring bells in Christian churches. I translate *nāqus* here by "bell" for simplicity's sake. For the dual signification of *nāqus*, see Constable, 66; for the *zonnār*, see Dozy, 196; Ahsan, 60-62.

al-zemma (Laws for the non-Muslims; 11, 659), add to the stipulation against ringing church bells in al-Tortushi's version that Christians will not display their crosses on their bells (*lā nazaraba nāqusan* and *lā nazaraba ba-nawāqesnā*, respectively).

Al-Shāfe'i transposes the stipulations that in the *shorut* are stated in the first person into the second person voice, and delivers them as injunctions, rather than in the form of promises found in other versions. "You may not display the cross (*al-salib*) in Muslim territories (*al-amsār al-moslemin*)," the text stipulates, "nor proclaim polytheism (*al-sherk*), nor build churches or meeting-places for your prayers, nor strike the bell, nor proclaim your polytheism concerning Jesus, son of Maryam, or anyone else, to a Muslim" (IV, 282). Although al-Shāfe'i's version is distinguished from other comparable regulations in that it elaborates "the rights of the *zemmis* side by side with their obligations" (Levy-Rubin 2011, 84) with respect to the restriction on beating the *nāqus*, al-Shāfe'i's version is stricter than its predecessors. Rather than enjoining Christians to beat the *nāqus* softly, he categorically prohibits the ringing of bells.

As noted above, the anonymous author of *Ta'rikh al-bāb* argued that caliphal power on the Caucasian frontier declined dramatically during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Motavakkel. Bākikhānuf points to the next stage in the history of Islamic sovereignty in the Caucasus when he states that mass conversions of the inhabitants of Shirvān and Daghestan transpired during the consolidation of Saljuq power, when "Islamic rulers [*omarā-ye Eslām*] everywhere were tyrants [*estebdādzādeh*]." Externally these Saljuq rulers obeyed the caliphs, Bākikhānuf continues, "but the caliphs lacked the power [*qadr*] to defend themselves against the rulers [*omarā*] and were compelled to grant them a title [*laqabi*] to their kingdom" (76). The consolidation of Saljuq power in the Caucasus heralded a new kind of sovereignty in this region and may have contributed the proliferation of *shorut* pertaining to non-Muslims, to which the prison poem as a genre responded through its deployment of Christian imagery.

Among the many extant versions of the *shorut*, al-Shāfe'i's is closest to Khāqāni's *qasida*. Hence, al-Shāfe'i's version stimulated Khāqāni's most direct intertextual subversions. Alone among the versions mentioned here, al-Shāfe'i's text unites the prohibition on ringing the church bell explicitly with the prohibition on propagating Christianity to Muslims, an activity that the Christian *qasida* proclaims as the poet's mission. Even more demonstrative of Khāqāni's debt to al-Shāfe'i is the stipulation that immediately follows the joint prohibition on the ringing of the *nāqus* and the propagation of Christian teachings concerning Jesus. "You shall wear *zanānir* (pl. of *zonnār*) over all

your garments [*men fowq jami'*]," al-Shāfe'i stipulates, "your cloaks and the rest, so that these belts are not hidden [*hattā lā takhafi al-zanānir*]" (al-Shāfe'i, IV, 282).[33] Inasmuch as al-Shāfe'i's sartorial injunction is poetically central to the poet's decision to wear the belt of oppression (v. 38), a brief exploration of the semiotics of the *zonnār* is appropriate here.

As a New Persian rendering of the Byzantine Greek *zōnarion/zōnē, zonnār* signifies the belt worn by non-Muslims, and in particular by *ahl al-ketāb* (people of the book) who followed sacred scriptures and adhered to monotheistic creeds.[34] The Byzantine term was thoroughly resignified when it came to be deployed as *zonnār* in Islamic societies. Whereas the original Greek *zōnē* was worn "by the believers of various confessions of their own will," the Islamic *zonnār* was a mandatory garment that non-Muslims were compelled to wear because they were required by law to distinguish themselves from Muslims (Levy-Rubin 2011, 157). Indeed, far from treating the *zonnār* as a mark of shame, a legal stipulation promulgated by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (527-65 CE) during the first year of his reign officially prohibited non-Christians from wearing this item of clothing. "We order," Justinian declared with respect to heretics, pagans, Jews, and Samaritans, that "none . . . shall share in any honor whatsoever, nor shall he put on an official belt (*zōnē*, ζωνην), neither civil nor military, nor belong to any office" (Linder 1987, 75-76).[35]

With the eastward movement of Persian culture to South Asia, *zonnār* acquired new meanings, and became associated with the Brahmanical thread (*yajñopavīta*) worn by Indian ascetics.[36] Through this circuitous path, *zonnār/zōnē* came to signify as positively as it had prior to Islamicization. Anticipating the ambiguous status of the *zonnār*'s signification in Indo-Persian early modernity, Khāqāni's Christian *qasida* is one of the earliest instances in Persian, and in Islamic poetry generally, of an affirmative reinscription of *zemmi* sartorial accouterments, whereby the belt of shame was transformed into a badge of cross-confessional solidarity. Khāqāni's threat to wear the *zonnār* of oppression marks a high point in the Persian rhetoric of incarceration. The poet implies that he is subjugated when he wears the *zonnār*, but his very assertion

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33   Ebn 'Asāker also list the stipulations concerning beating the *nāqus* and wearing the *zonnār* closely together, in the manner of al-Shāfe'i (II, 177), and this may have been a source for Khāqāni as well, but the *Ketāb al-omm* was probably more widely read than *Ta'rīkh madinat Demashq* in twelfth-century Shirvān.

34   For the Byzantine *zōnarion/zōnē*, see Sophocles, p. 558.

35   For Greek text of Justinian's edict, see Linder 2012, 167 n. 86.

36   Some examples of the *zonnār* in Indo-Persian poetry are analyzed by Pello, 21-46.

of agency mitigates against the implication of servitude. For Khāqāni, wearing the *zonnār* enables the poet to contrast the aesthetic vigor of poetry to the subservient ethics of Islamic legal regulations.

As a pious Muslim who used his poetic gifts to advance his theological convictions, Khāqāni aestheticized the *zemmis*' legal status without becoming *zemmi* himself. Notwithstanding the shock value that Khāqāni cultivates for its rhetorical effects, his poetic intervention is articulated from the standpoint of a pious Muslim. Although he draws on Christian teachings concerning the life of Jesus and alludes to Syriac and Hebrew versions of the Biblical story, he writes as a Muslim addressing a community of believers. At the same time, the poet's identification with a Christian minority, which was partly biographical given his mother's genealogy but predominantly imaginary, intensifies the ideological power of his verse. In terms of the Persian poetics of incarceration, wearing the *zonnār* was tantamount to embracing incarceration. Khāqāni's sartorial imagery helped to aestheticize the violence entailed in the historical expansion of the carceral system throughout the twelfth century eastern Islamic world.[37] This historical process was reflected in genre terms when the *qasida* joined forces with the prison poem.

The *shorut al-ʿomariya* also elucidate the poet's proposition to split the cross panes of his window with his morning horn (v. 7), and thereby to break the silence imposed on him from within his prison cell. The Pact of ʿOmar in al-Tortushi's version has *zemmis* stipulate that "we shall not raise our voices during the recitation [of sacred texts] or in the presence of Muslims, nor shall we raise our voices when accompanying our dead [during burial processions]" (Tortushi, 230). By contrast with the *shorut al-ʿomariya*'s legal prohibitions on protest and lament, the Persian aesthetics of incarceration is preeminently a literature of complaint. *Habsiyāt* frequently feature in rhetorical manuals under the guise of *shekāyāt* (poems of complaint) (see Vatvāt, 318). Characteristically of this milieu, another major poet of Shirvān and a rival of Khāqāni, Mojir al-Dīn Baylaqāni (d. 1198), composed a series of *shekāyāt* that are demarcated as such in his *divān* (see Beylaqāni, 251-282). Mindful of the prohibition on mourning in the *shorut*, Khāqāni insists on projecting his voice loud enough from his prison cell to shatter the cross that functions as a metonym for the bars confining him to his cell.

Nearly two centuries after the institution of the Pact of ʿOmar, the Abbasid Caliph al-Motavakkel, whose reign, as we have seen, inaugurated the decline of Abbasid sovereignty in the Caucasus, undertook even

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37   For the proliferation of carceral punishment in eastern Islamic societies during this period, see Lange, as well as further bibliographic references in Gould 2012.

more drastic measures to persecute the people of the book. As recorded by the thirteenth-century Arabic historian Ebn al-Athir, during the year 849, two centuries prior to the composition of the Christian *qasida*, al-Motavakkel promulgated a series of harsh regulations against all non-Muslims. Ebn al-Athir uses the politically charged, although by that period standardized, term for non-Muslims, *ahl al-zemma* (generally used to reference groups that were "protected" by Islamic law) to chronicle their plight:

> And in this year al-Motavakkel ordered the *ahl al-zemma* to wear brown clothing with *zanānir* ... and on the backs of their saddles they put circles made of wood. *Zemmi* women had to wear honey-colored girdles (*al-manāteq*) when leaving [the house], while men had to wear another. [Al-Motavakkel] then ordered the destruction of all new churches and synagogues. He also ordered that wooden pictures of demons (*shayātin*) be placed on their doors. And he forbade the Sultan from helping the *zemmi*s. Also, no one taught them. They were not allowed to wear crosses (*salib*) in their hair and they were forced to build roads. Al-Motavakkel ordered the gravestones of all *zemmi*s to be made level with the earth. These proclamations were inscribed everywhere in his domain (*al-āfāq*).
>   (Ebn al-Athir, VI, 126-127)

This same event chronicled by Ebn al-Athir was reported earlier in *Mojmal al-tavārikh wa'l-qesas* (Collection of Histories and Stories, ca. 1126; 361), an anonymous Persian text contemporary with Khāqāni (as well as with many versions of the *shorut*). Frequent allusions to al-Motavakkel's persecution across Arabo-Persian historiography demonstrate just how alive was the memory of the oppression of the *zemmi*s in subsequent centuries. Far from converting Christians to Islam, the *shorut* consolidated religious difference.

Ebn al-Athir additionally demonstrates that the *zemmi* community's financial obligations redounded to the benefit of Muslim rulers. *Zemmi*s were obliged to pay a poll tax (*jezya*), to serve Muslims in particular ways, and to host for up to three days any Muslim traveler who passed through the area as a guest. For these reasons, although religious conviction may have motivated certain Islamic rulers to encourage their non-Muslim subjects to convert, most Islamic sovereigns recognized that mass conversions to Islam were not in their best interest. With the rise in power of regional Ghaznavid and Shirvānshāh sultanates and the weakening of the Baghdad caliphate from al-Motavakkel onwards, Islamic rulers had more to gain from *zemmi*s who remained faithful to their own creeds, and who accepted their second-class status within a Muslim-majority society, than they did from unreliable converts to Islam.

The regulations enumerated in the Pact of ʿOmar and later implemented by al-Motavakkel also indicate why a poet such as Khāqāni with an identity rooted in both Islamic and Christian traditions clung steadfastly to a Muslim identity. Further, these laws make evident how the everyday ideological tensions in medieval Islamic societies were inscribed into the *qasida* when this form was ideologized through the genre of the prison poem. Being *zemmi* in medieval Islamic society meant more than performing the rituals prescribed in the *shorut*. It meant systematically acknowledging one's alien status vis-à-vis mainstream society, and making one's dress, hair, linguistic habits, mode of transport, education, and even mourning rituals conform to this difference.

Aestheticizing Incarceration

Transposing Jameson's Marxian approach to this pre-capital period, we might wish to ask what unresolvable social contradictions the prison poem sought to resolve. How, in medieval Persian literary culture, did the emergence of genres conceal "ideologies linking those genres to pragmatic history" (Khan, 540)? The medieval Persian prison poem added to the conventional dialectic of ruler and ruled a new tension between the poet and his patron-jailor, who was often also the poet's sovereign. The ideological force exerted by the prison poem across Persianate borderlands in part accounts for the genre's ability to haunt writers, thinkers, and readers in contemporary Iran while also explaining the proliferation of prose prison narratives across the contemporary Arab world (see Sharif Abou Shariefeh, 16-58). Thus, Miller has linked prison poems composed in the US detention facility at Guantánamo with the *habsiyāt* (Miller, 8). In these and other examples, the classical Persian prison poem that was revitalized, although not created, by Khāqāni powerfully informs contemporary Islamic literatures of incarceration.

Islamic norms of governance and, with them, Persian literary culture, spread across South Asia and the Caucasus during a period when sacral power was being reconstituted following the dissolution of caliphal sovereignty. The reconstitution of sovereign power caused the panegyric *qasida* to change patrons, audiences, and functions. Instead of rulers dictating the content of literary forms, as had earlier been the norm, poets suddenly began to advance diverse and contradictory agendas. Poets' agendas did not necessarily correspond, and at times they openly conflicted with, the interests of their patrons, jailors, and rulers. And yet even as the *qasida* was transposed into a variety of different genres, including the prison poem, it continued to stimulate oppositional poetics. Far from being destroyed, the *qasida* was internally reconstituted by the Persian aesthetics of incarceration.

Most intensively from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, the primary agenda of Persian literary discourse was to exalt the poet: sometimes as prophet, sometimes as a (metaphorical) king (*pādshāh*), always as a source of superior knowledge and authority. This shift is reflected in the proliferation of literary forms, notably the *ghazal*, in non-courtly contexts, and in the suffusion of literary discourse with a new way of writing that was less invested in praising sovereign power. Like many lyric genres, prison poems were composed by poet-courtiers who distanced themselves discursively from centers of power. Just as Mas'ud-e Sa'd's *dobeyti*, which furnished the initial medium for the prison poem's rhetoric of incarceration, illustrates a new sociological dimension within this literary culture, so do the quatrains (*rubā'iyāt*) of 'Omar Khayyām, composed a few decades prior to the apotheosis of the prison poem in Shirvān, indicate a new cognitive and political dissonance between the poet and court.[38] Most striking, however, with respect to the relation between ideology and form is the fact that the prison poem remains formally aligned to the panegyric rather than to the lyric, even when it thematically rejects the panegyric ethos.

Far from being vain exercises in self-aggrandizement, the new genres that flourished during these centuries delivered powerful political messages in literary form. As the ruler's divine aura came to be corroded and replaced by less exalted idioms of power, the sultan was increasingly associated with corruption.[39] Prison poets' recognition of the ruler as a flawed and fallible individual whose claims to sovereignty were open to contestation rather than an emissary of God facilitated the prison poem's ideologization of the *qasida* form. This dawning awareness had long been in evidence in many spheres of political life, but only in the twelfth century did it come to permeate Persian poetics, partly through the mediation of texts such as the *Seyāsat-nāma* (Book of Governance), attributed to the Saljuq vizier Nezām al-Molk, but likely written in part by the Saljuq court poet Mo'ezzi Nishāburi.[40]

The take-home lesson of the astonishing attraction exerted by the prison poem on the medieval Persian imagination, and particularly on the borderlands of the Ghaznavid and Saljuq empires is captured well by another theorist of the dialectic between politics and aesthetics, Theodore Adorno, who wrote within the Marxian tradition while also contesting many Marxist premises. "There is no material content," argued Adorno, "no formal category of an artistic

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38 For the political implications of 'Omar Khayyām's *Robā'iyāt*, see Davidson, 133-47.

39 The relation between the erosion of the ruler's perceived divinity and the development of the prison poem is traced in detail in Gould 2013, 233-82.

40 Khismatulin deserves the most credit for questioning the authorship of the *Seyāsat-nāma* in his commentary to his translation of al-Ghazāli's *Kimiā-ye sa'ādat*, 11, 315-367; Eng. version, 2008a, 30-36, and 2008b, 3-29. These works are discussed in Gould 2013, 234-251.

creation, however mysteriously changed and unknown to itself, which did not originate in the empirical reality from which it breaks free" (199). Adorno's point, that genres originate in empirical forms that condition, constrain, and enable them, does much to elucidate genre's dialectical relation to the *qasida* form as exemplified by the historical evolution of the Persian prison poem.

More locally in terms of Persian poetics, the tension Adorno recognized between the text and the world, and genre and form, was captured by the first theorist of the prison poem, Nezāmi ʿAruzi, a critic and courtier who shifted the locus of sovereignty from the patron to the poet when he adduced Masʿud-e Saʿd's *dobeyti* as the first prison poem, thereby coining a neologism, *habsiyāt*, that inaugurated a new relation between genre and form in medieval Persian literary culture. Of interest here, in concluding, is Nezāmi ʿAruzi's account of poetry's capacity to affect how the objects of aesthetic representation are constituted. By means of the ambiguity (*ihām*) specific to literature, claims Nezāmi ʿAruzi, the poet stirs up the "irascible and concupiscent faculties (*qovvathā-ye ghazabāni va shahvāni*)" and thereby causes "great affairs in the order of the world (*omur-e ʿezām rā dar nezām-e ʿālam*)" (30). Poetry, Nezāmi ʿAruzi teaches, achieves its effects by the disturbances it creates. It produces change by generating unease, and transforms reality by stirring dissent. Nearly a millennium prior to Jameson and Adorno, the twelfth-century Persian literary theorist anticipated Marxian aesthetics by revealing the interdependency of aesthetic recognition and political consciousness.

Marxian literary criticism as fashioned by Adorno, Williams, and Jameson, and as anticipated by Nezāmi ʿAruzi, moves in several counterintuitive directions. Reversing the relation between base and superstructure, between utterance (*lafz*) and meaning (*maʿni*), and between reality and figuration, this critical approach at its best excavates the "literary conventions or . . . social relationships" that have been "alienated to components or to mere background" (Williams 1973, 16). Genres such as the prison poem, that enter literary history through the confluence of ideology and form, are uniquely enabled to make insignificant things significant (*maʿni-e khord rā bozorg gardānad*) and significant things insignificant (*maʿni-e bozorg rā khord*), to paraphrase Nezāmi ʿAruzi (30). As such literary genres enable us to discern family resemblances between Marxian criticism and classical Islamic rhetoric.

The subversive work done by genre, as articulated by both Williams and Nezāmi ʿAruzi, returns us to Jameson: Marxist literary theory blasts apart the conventional relation between form and content, which is itself a residue of bourgeois aesthetics, and which assigns to genre an epiphenomenal relationship to the polis. Divided from bourgeois prose genres such as the novel by vast gaps of space and time, the *habsiyāt* parallels the anti-bourgeois genres of

literary modernity by resisting the tendency of realist aesthetics to depoliticize form through subservience to content. Whether conceived as an intervention into Islamic pasts or as an anticipation of post-capitalist futures, the ideology of genre functions simultaneously as a textual hermeneutics and a political agenda. In this reflexive political situation, literary genres such as the prison poem sustain and make possible the "active and self-renewing Marxist cultural tradition" that finds a worthy predecessor in the classical Persian poetry of incarceration (Williams 1973, 16).

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