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Khaqani's Late Style: The Mada'in Qasida

Rebecca Ruth Gould
Professor, Islamic World & Comparative Literature College of Arts & Law, University of Birmingham, England
r.r.gould@bham.ac.uk

Abstract

This article discusses Khaqani Shirvani's poem Aivan-i Mada'in (The Mada'in Qasida), from the vantage points of literary history and the theory of ruins. The Mada'in Qasida is a product of Khaqani's "late style" in multiple senses, including the meaning that Edward Said attached to the term when discussing Adorno and Beethoven. While offering a close reading of The Mada'in Qasida, I consider how Khaqani refashioned his poetic persona within a prophetic lineage and set forth the terms of his argument for poetry's discursive authority. In the case of this poem, Khaqani used his late style to critique the injustice of rulers past and present.

Keywords: Khaqani, poetry, ruins, comparative literature, literary criticism

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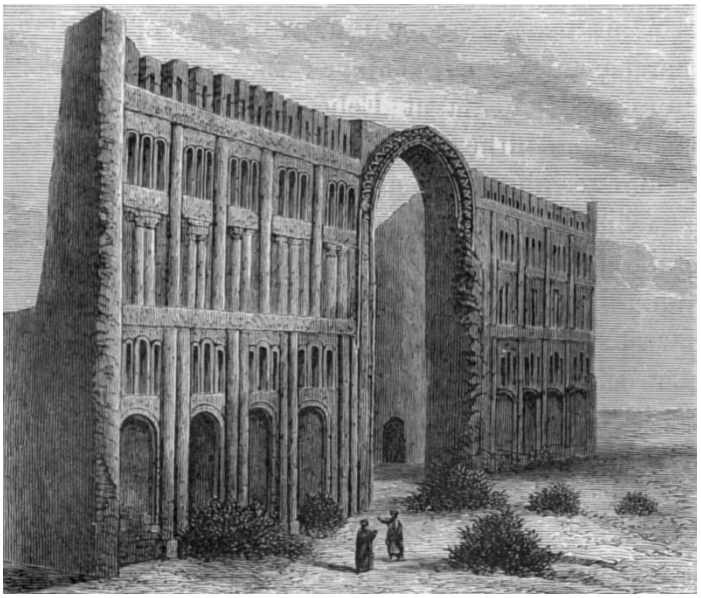
The Mada'in Qasida is a product of Khaqani's late style in multiple senses. First, as we know from the chronogram that concludes this poem, it was composed in 1166, when Khaqani was in his mid-forties, after he had composed his most notable works, and at a juncture in his life when he had little to lose by critiquing his rulers.[۱] By 1166, he had already composed the six poems that belong to the core corpus of the prison poem genre. He had refashioned his poetic persona within a prophetic lineage and set forth the terms of his argument for poetry's discursive authority. Second, and following from the placement of the poem within the overall chronology of his work, the Mada'in Qasida attests to a mature stage in the poet's reflections on poetry. Third, the poem is "late" in Edward Said's sense that it renders "disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them."[۲]

The process through which poetic speech became sovereign had nearly attained its fulfillment, bringing closure to the prison poem in this particular juncture of its historical trajectory. Khaqani's poem is a thrillingly incautious attempt by a court poet to cognize the full extent of his entanglement with his patron's corruption and of the poet's dependency on the sovereign's corrupt power. It outlines a political theology of the poet's prophetic body in contrast to that of the worldly sultan. Explicitly and implicitly, through sophisticated deployment of multiple poetic devices, the Mada'in Qasida suggests that the poet, acting in the guise of a mad prophet, will inherit the kingdom the sultan has forsaken. This poem makes the poet's authority sovereign.

A few words are in order concerning the historical site that gave rise to this elegy (used here in the topical rather than formal sense; formally the poem is an ode—a *qaṣida*—not an elegy). Built during the reign of the Sasanian king Khusrow Nushirvan (r. 531-579), the *aiwan* (palace) of Ctesiphon, a mud brick vault "thirty-five meters high covering an audience hall eleven hundred square meters in area" thirty-five kilometers southeast of present-day Baghdad, is still regarded as a "crowning achievement of ancient architecture."[۳] Still standing, albeit in ruins (as in figure 1), the original parameters of this structure are known primarily through the recollections of poets and other travelers who made their way to Baghdad's environs. For many Persophone travellers, such as the eighteenth-century Qajar author Mir ʿAbd al-Laṭif Khan Shushtari, the encounter with Sasanian ruins was mediated by Khaqani's poem.[۴]

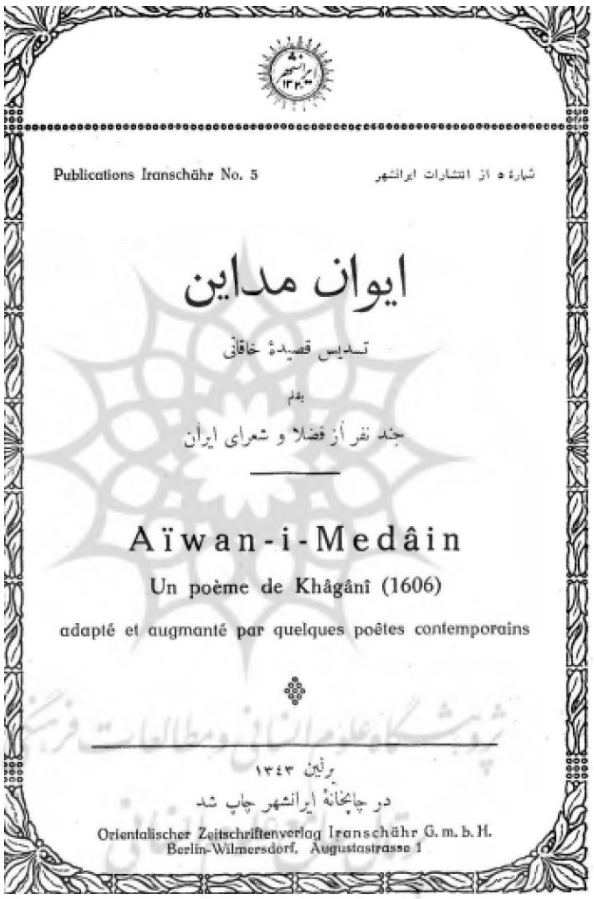


(**Figure 1**) "Ancient Ctesiphon," in John Philip Newman, *The Thrones and Palaces of Babylon and Nineveh from Sea to Sea: A Thousand Miles on Horseback* (Harper & brothers, 1876), 90.

Mada'in ("two cities"), the Arabic word by which Ctesiphon is known and which is the source of the title assigned by later scholars to this poem, is grammatically similar to the dual Ka'ba (*ka'batayn*) that occurs in prison poem three. *Mada'in* is the dual plural form of the word for city (*madina*). Mada'in refers to the two Sasanian cities on the banks of the Tigris: Ctesiphon and Seleucia. Together, these cities comprised a bishopric within the Nestorian Church. Ctesiphon itself dates back to the Arsacid dynasty (247 BCE- 228 CE), during which period it became the major administrative center in Semitic Mesopotamia.[۵] The capital of the Parthian and Sasanian empires for a total of eight hundred years, Ctesiphon was considered by Edward Gibbon as the successor to Babylon and "one of the great capitals of the East."[۶] Although Nushirvan did not found Ctesiphon, with which he is forever associated through his palace, he augmented the city architecturally, most notably through the iconography of royal sovereignty. This in turn set the stage for the city's post-Sasanian appropriation under Saljuq rule and its new identity as Mada'in.

One striking evocation of these ruins occurs in a book-length collection of poems and reflections on Khaqani's poem published in 1924 by the Berlin-based publisher Iranshahr (figure 2), best known for the eponymous journal that it published from 1922 to 1927. This book includes three poems received in response to the magazine's call for nationalist reconstructions of the Mada'in Qasida in the form of six-line stanzas (*tasdis*). These versions were intended to influence young readers, new to Khaqani's poem. The creators of these reconstructions are, respectively, the Turkish-born Persian writer Ḥosseinkhan Danish, the famed constitutionalist Yahya Dowlatabadi, and the newspaper editor Golshan.[۷] The book appears to have modeled

its form, parts of its content, and its nationalist orientation on a Turkish translation of Khaqani's Mada 'in Qasida by the poet Hüseyin Daniş, best known in Turkish literature as the translator of Omar Khayyam, that had been published in Istanbul a decade earlier.[۸] In particular, the Turkish introduction by Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı (d. 1949), a Turkish philosopher who impressed British Orientalist Edward Browne with his "attainments in the learning of both East and West," is translated into Persian for the Iranshahr edition.[۹] Giving visual form to its poetic vision, the book includes images of the ruins of Mada'in (figure 2).


Publications Iranschähr No. 5

شمارهٔ ۵ از انتشارات ایرانشهر

ایوان مداین

تسدیس قصیدهٔ خاقانی

بقلم

چند نفر از فضلا و شعرای ایران

Aïwan-i-Medâin

Un poème de Khâgânî (1606)

adapté et augmanté par quelques poètes contemporains

برلین ۱۳۴۳

در چاپخانهٔ ایرانشهر چاپ شد

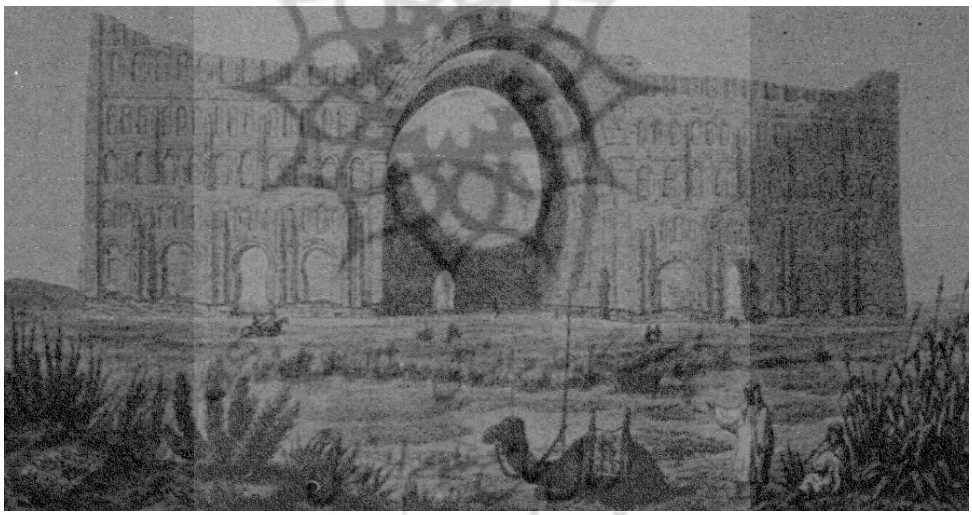
Orientalischer Zeitschriftenverlag Iranschähr G. m. b. H.
Berlin-Wilmersdorf, Augustastrasse 1

(**Figure 2**). Cover of *Aiwan-i Mada'in: tasdis-i qaṣida-i Khaqani, bi qalam-i chand nafar az fuḍala' wa shu'ara'-i Iran=Aïwan-i-Medâin: un poème de Khâgâni (1606), adapté et augmanté par quelques poètes contemporains* (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Iranschähr, 1343).

The preface to this volume signed by the publisher Ḥussein Kaẓimzada Iranshahr inaugurates the nationalist interpretation of the Mada'in Qasida that was to frame many modern renderings of the text. Locating the poem within an extended genealogy of appeals to pre-Islamic Iranian sovereignty, the editor begins by programmatically declaring that "love for one's people [*millat*] is greater than love for one's mother and children."[۱۰] According to the Iranshahr volume's nationalist interpretation, Khaqani

is a poet who, like Ferdowsi, stands among the ruins that frame his poem and gazes with tearful eyes at the little that has remained from the days of Iran's glory (*sar bolandi-yi iran*).[۱۱] A poem by one ʿAbd al-Rahim Hindi, published the following year in the journal *Iranshahr,* continues the tradition of poetic imitations of the Mada'in Qasida and develops an even more conclusively nationalist reading of Khaqani's poem.[۱۲] Appealing to a concept of Iranian ethnic identity that transcended national borders while also enshrining them in the past, these Berlin-based publications were part of an effort by émigré Iranian intellectuals to revive traces of Iran's pre-Islamic glory, for modern nationalist ends. New poetic possibilities were born with this modernist and nationalist reconfiguration, but many aspects of Khaqani's political theology, particularly his opposition to all forms of worldly power, were lost amid the temporal translation.

The proto-nationalist reading adopted by *Iranshahr* (both the publisher and the journal) has dominated the poem's reception for more than a century. Meanwhile, many other aspects of the Mada'in Qasida—in particular its exposure of the corruption of the ruler's body and of the poet as a transcendental prophet who speaks the truth as if from another realm—remain underexplored.



(**Figure 3**). Depiction of Mada'in-Ctesiphon in *Aiwan-i Mada'in: tasdis-i qaṣida-i Khaqani,* p. 41.

More even than as a result of its own glory, poets including al-Buḥturi and Omar Khayyam, and historian-chroniclers including al-Masʿudi and al-Ṭabari, inscribed the ruins of Nushirvan's palace on Muslim cultural memory both before and after Khaqani set himself to the task.[۱۳] Khaqani's elegy is in many respects continuous with its predecessors. Al-Buḥturi anticipated Khaqani when he glorified the "generals and troops, / as far as the eye can see" in his homage to the ruins.[۱۴] Al-Buḥturi had already noted on gazing at the palace and imagining its inhabitants that "It was built up for joy forever, but / their domain is for commiseration and consolation now." Khayyam

went even further in locating this chain of references within global literature. Along with its intertextual links to the Arabic tradition of urban elegy (*ritha' al-mudun*) and laments on ruins (*aṭlal-nasib*), the Mada'in Qasida participates in the global medieval literary genre of the *ubi sunt*. During the Latinate Middle Ages as well as globally, *ubi sunt* poems contrasted the transience of life to the permanence of mortality.[۱۵] Named for their association with the refrain that occurs in poems belonging to this genre—*ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere*, meaning "where are they who have gone before us"—*ubi sunt* poems offered much material for reflection on the contingency of creaturely existence.[۱۶] This Latinate genre elaborated what might be called a poetics of the mortal body before the bifurcation of the king's two bodies conferred a new prominence on the poet. With regard to their focus on the speakers' mortality as stimulated by a vision of ruins, both the early Arabic and the medieval European *ubi sunt* poems converge with Khaqani's prison poems on the cosmos and the dual Ka'ba.

A quatrain by Khayyam in the *ubi sunt* mode plays on the multivalent meanings of the name of the king Bahram Gur, whose sobriquet (*gur*) alluded to his fondness for hunting the wild ass (more precisely the onager, *gur*), a term that also coincides with the Persian word for grave:

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

[۱۷]

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

In the poet's present, the palace where Bahram raised his goblet (*jām*), a symbol of Iranian sovereignty associated with the mythical Iranian ruler Jamshid, has now become a grave for the much-revered king. Khayyam's *ubi sunt* extends across three temporalities: first, the temporality of Bahram's reign, when the Sasanian king excelled in capturing onagers and displaying his sovereign power; second, the intermediate temporality when the palace was reduced to ruins, and became a habitation for lions and of procreation for foxes; third, the temporality of the poet who gazes on the past as a traveler gazes on a foreign country. This third temporality has done the poet's work by burying the great king Bahram Gur, slayer of onagers (*gur*), now taken captive by a very different kind of *gur*, a grave. Khayyam's *ubi sunt* is but one of many texts in this genre that relies for its meaning on an interplay of homonyms, a poetic device

known in Arabo-Persian rhetoric as *jinas*.[۱۸] The frequent recurrence of this mode of verbal juxtaposition in so many *ubi sunt* poems indicates how the genre's poetics is premised on a linguistic antinomy that is temporal as well as spatial.

Even before poets turned their mind to the task of representing the ruins of Ctesiphon, early Muslim orators such as the famous Muʿtazili leader Waṣil b. ʿAṭa' (d. 748) had already engaged with this image to suggest the fleetingness of worldly power. "Where are the kings," asked Wāṣil b. ʿAṭa', "who built Mada'in?" He then enumerates their royal deeds: after the kings "strengthened palaces and fortified gates…trained purebred horses…and possessed all the lands" the world "crushed them with its breast" and "chomped on them with its canines. It gave them in exchange for vast space, narrow confines; for might, humility; for life, perishing." The kings "went to reside in graves. Maggots ate them." Now, the orator says, "you see only their abodes, and you find only their signposts [*maʿalimahum*]…You do not hear a single sound from them.[۱۹] Typically for the *ubi sunt*, Waṣil b. ʿAṭa' contrasts the king's body, which is subject to physical corruption, with the orator's words, which will outlast the body of the king. His oration on the sovereign's demise resonates with a speech delivered by the Sasanian king Ardashir (r. 379-383) to the Persian ruling elite in Ferdowsi's epic:

کجا آن بزرگان با تاج و تخت
کجا آن سواران پیروزبخت
کجا آن خردمند کندآوران
کجا آن سرافراز و جنگی سران
کجا آن گزیده نیاکان ما
کجا آن دلیران و پاکان ما
همه خاک دارند بالین و خشت
خنک آنک جز تخم نیکی نکشت

[۲۰]

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

As with the Latin genre, Ferdowsi offers a parallel, at the opening of each hemistich, to the *ubi sunt* refrain: *koja* ("where?"). Ferdowsi deploys anaphora (repetition at the beginning of successive phrases) rather than epistrophe (repetition

at the end of successive phrases), but the effect is the same. From the reflections of Waṣil b. ʿAṭa' to al-Buḥturi to Khayyam and Ferdowsi, Persian and Arabic poets used ruins to depict a king's body undergoing decay. They contrasted this decay with poetry, a discourse characterized by perpetuity. Uniting the polarities of perpetuity and contingency, the poet's body became the vehicle for this emergent opposition to earthly sovereignty.

Just as the prison poem rearranges space to bring into relief the tension between the power of poetry and the power of kingship, the *ubi sunt* rearranges time. The contrast between the power of the king and the authority of the poet inspired al-Buḥturi to insist on the equality of races and peoples, thereby challenging hierarchical discourses of cultural difference, including those that structured Sasanian ideologies of kingship and ʿUmar's Covenant. He declares: "I find myself thereafter in love with noble / men of every race [*sinkhin*] and origin [*issi*]" (v. 56). Al-Buḥturi's discourse of oppositional poetics was absorbed by the Persian prison poem. Drawing on centuries of poetry concerned with exile and displacement in Arabic and Persian, Khaqani brought a world literary genre concerned with the poetics of ruins into conversation with the prison poem. The result was the further contestation of the sovereign's legitimacy, the exposure of his corrupted and decaying body, and the revelation of the poet's prophetic authority.

From medieval Europe to the Middle East, the *ubi sunt* is inflected by the "ever present theme of death" characteristic of global medieval literature, which reaches well beyond any specific national tradition.[۳۱] The Mada'in Qasida pays homage to the temporal contrasts intrinsic to the genre when Khaqani asks in v. 13 "What is there to be surprised about [*che ʿajab dari*]? In the world's garden / the owl follows the nightingale [*bulbul*] just as a lament [*nuḥeh*] follows a sweet song [*al-ḥan*]." In the poem's second section (vv. 26-35), the focus shifts. Khaqani introduces a political theological dimension to the *ubi sunt's* revelation of the fleetingness of worldly existence and the eternal repetition of birth and death, anticipating and indeed superseding the genre's later practitioners. Turning to ekphrasis, the poet evokes a panorama of ruins, onto which is projected a tableau comprised of images from Iran's past.[۳۲]

Instead of outlining a panorama of ruins, the poet evokes the past. As with the prison poem generally, the poet's evocation of the past is not fashioned in response to a royal mandate. Instead of chronicling the achievements of Sasanian kings, but in keeping with the prison poem's political theology, Khaqani exposes the king's body as corrupted. Here and elsewhere, the conceptual severance of power and authority follows from the poet's carceral aesthetics. The opening hemistich of the Mada'in Qasida further develops the rhetorical shift initiated by his earlier prison poems. Readers are asked to receive an admonition (*ʿibrat*) from the ruins which is the text of the poem itself, a mirror (*ayineh*) to the passage of time:

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

۲۳

Beware, oh my lesson-taking heart, gaze with your eyes, beware!
See the *iwan* of Mada'in as a mirror of lessons.

This verse simultaneously addresses the poet and the regime that determines the horizons of the poet's vocation. This duality of address is a hallmark of the prison poem, which developed its mode of political critique through a poetics of indirection. Radically transforming the courtly panegyric, the prison poem innovated in the dimensions of form, topos, and discourse to rewrite Persian poetics.

We have witnessed this duality of address—and its consequent bifurcation of political and poetic meaning—in the first recorded Persian prison poem, by Mas'ud Sa'd addressed to Sulṭan Ibrahim, concerning the poet's attempted betrayal of his king. As shown in Chapter Two, this quatrain was introduced by 'Aruzi as the inaugural prison poem. While 'Aruzi presented a formal account of the genre in the poetry of Mas'ud Sa'd, Falaki of Shirvan, in greater geographic proximity to Khaqani, situated his contribution to the prison poem within an ambiguous duality of address crystallized by the Persian term for admonition, *'ibrat*. Similarly, in opening the Mada'in Qasida, Khaqani instructs himself and his readers to make an *'ibrat* from the ruins of Mada'in. A few decades earlier, Falaki had described his poetic discourse as an *'ibrat*, counterpoised to the ruler's sword:

بار عبرت نمای من تیغ است
گر ازین بار اعتبارم نیست

If I get no respect in your court,
I'll be worthy of no lesson but the sword.

On the one hand, the poet seems to suggest that his legitimacy as a poet is dependent on respect from the court. On the other hand, he demeans the insignia of courtly legitimacy: the sword. The Khaqani's and Falaki's intersecting prison poems show how the renunciation of the sovereign's aura of legitimacy is written into the genre.

While 'Umar's Covenant offered a quasi-legal legitimation for discrimination against religious minorities, the prison poem pioneered a political theology of religious difference. While Khaqani protested the *dhimmi* covenant, the prison poem conferred discursive sovereignty on the poet, by virtue of his imprisoned body and his chains. Dual address—whether through apostrophe, double entendre, or other rhetorical devices—offered a range of strategies for achieving the prison poem's contract with

the reader, ruler, and patron. The concept of *'ibrat* was one of many means through which Persian prison poets developed the genre's political theology.

From the hemistich "The earth is drunk. It has drunken deep" (v. 26) onwards, the poem's otherworldly idiom becomes inflected by this-worldly critique. This poem, a masterpiece of Khaqani's late style, is less concerned with the fleetingness of time than with the corruption of earthly power, as epitomized by the corrupted corpse of a celebrated Sasanian king. Instead of simply invoking a generalized human mortality, the poem describes the earth as drunk (*mast*) with the blood of Nushirvan that flows from his son's cup (*kas*). Goblets are typically symbols of regal power, but this poem makes of them vessels for the king's blood. The image that follows shocks the reader with its double entendre (*iham*) on *pand*, a word meaning counsel and also referring to the bird (specifically a kite), that feeds on carrion[۲۴]:

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

So many hawks [*pand*] shined on his crown.
Now one hundred precepts [*pand*] are hidden in his brain.

Paralellisms (numerous hawks, one hundred precepts) and contrasts (shining on a crown versus hiding in a brain) intensify the power of this verse. Just as the crown is a metonym for the king's sovereignty, so is his brain a metonym for his corrupted body. This tableau of bodily decay reflects the ruinous state of Mada'in after its conquest by Arab armies. Khaqani's imagery reveals how power breeds corruption in its most grotesque form: a specter of birds feasting on the brains of Nushirvan. As indicated in the translation above, *pand* is used both in the sense of counsel and to refer to birds who feast on human flesh. Khaqani's double entendre on *pand*—meaning both royal counsel and the bird that feeds on rotting flesh—calls into question the social order on which medieval kingship is founded. Sacralized across medieval literature, especially in the *qaṣida* genre, the king's sacred body is reduced in this late example to rotting carrion. The Mada'in Qasida can be read as a challenge in this respect to more than medieval Persian concepts of kingship; broadly it undermines the entire ideological infrastructure of the sovereign's sacralized body, which has shaped global medieval literature.[۲۵]

Following the semiotically exhilarating pun on *pand*, the critique moves even further. The poem's rhetorical question "where have they gone (*koja raftand*)?" (v. 30) briefly returns to the *ubi sunt* genre. Unusually, the poet answers his rhetorical question. When the Sasanian king departed, it was not to heaven: the earth's belly, the poet says is pregnant (*abestan*) with the kings' rotting flesh. The observations that follow collectively generate a case study of how genres are most fully realized in the act of their transgression. Walter Benjamin pointed out that the most significant works violate existing genre boundaries. At the same time, every text that transcends its genre

continues to be accountable to it. "A major work either establishes a genre [*Gattung*] or abolishes it," argued Benjamin. "A perfect work does both."[۲۶] As simultaneously an exemplar of the global *ubi sunt* genre and as this genre's antithesis, written long after the poet's release from prison, the Mada'in Qasida seals the prison poem genre by centering its political theology around the poet's prophetic body rather than around the sovereign's corrupted body.

"Giving birth [*zayidan*] is difficult," the poet continues, "but sowing seed [*notfeh sutudan*] is easy." Alongside their destruction of the ideal of the king's sacralized body, and their extension of the remit of the prison poem, these words at once extend the thematic focus of the *ubi sunt*, as exemplified by al-Buḥturi, Ferdowsi, and Khayyam, and sharpen its political agenda, directing it against the sovereign's power. Suddenly, the poet's subject is less the fleetingness of earthly existence than the corruption of the king and poetry's discursive sovereignty. Nushirvan and Hormuz, the deceased kings whose bodies are interred the earth, perform the masculine labor of sowing seeds (*notfeh sutudan*), an activity that is here configured as fruitless and weak. While kings who sow their sperm indiscriminately are corrupted by the cycle of decay, the Mada'in Qasida aligns poetic creation—and thus the poet—with the feminine work of giving birth. The poem's fertility imagery recalls the river of sperm in Khaqani's prison poem six that "floods the womb" and "births a pearl in the sea of me" (6: 52). Rather than feed his body to the earth by lusting after worldly glory, Khaqani vows with his verse to create discursive sovereignty from poetry. Fashioned in the idiom of the medieval *ubi sunt*, the Mada'in Qasida's final apostrophe—"How many tyrants' bodies [*tan-i jabbaran*] has the earth eaten so far?" (v. 34)—signals the apotheosis of a certain king of literary form. It also reveals the perpetuity of poetry, for the cycle of violence that cannibalizes the king's power knows no end. The voracious earth will never be sated (*sir nashod*) by human blood.

Other poets who contributed to the *ubi sunt* genre place a cosmic valuation on the fleetingness of worldly power. Whereas prior (and future) poets would use the genre's refrain (*Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere*?) to suggest that nothing on earth is permanent and to present worldly existence as a shadow among shadows, Khaqani offers a counterweight to the sovereign's corrupted body. Inaugurating section three (vv. 36-42) with an apostrophe to himself, the poet instructs himself to learn the lesson (*'ibrat*) of Nushirvan's court, in the expectation that the balance of power between poet and ruler will be reversed. The hemistich that follows uses a chiasmus to reverse the balance of power between poet and ruler:

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

If today the beggar seeks food from the sultan,
tomorrow the sultan will seek food from the beggar.

This prophecy of an inversion in the social order is immediately followed by a verse that arguably links the *Gift from Two Iraqs* with the Mada'in Qasida, composed several years later. The repeated use of the word gift (*tuḥfeh*) in the verse below suggests the connection with the *Gift from Two Iraqs* (known as *Tuḥfat*).

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

۲۷

Since viaticum from Mecca is a gift [*tuḥfeh*] for other cities,
take this viaticum from Mada'in as a gift [*tuḥfeh*], for Shirvan.

Perhaps more significantly, this verse draws a parallel between the pious pilgrim who brings from Mecca food—translated here as *viaticum*, the Latin term for provisions for those undertaking long journeys—to share as a gift (*tuḥfeh*) with the cities he passes through on his journey home, and the poet who shares his poems with the inhabitants of Shirvan. Like the Christian Qasida, the parallel verges on apostasy, since it involves a comparison between the poet who creates poetry in Mada'in and the Prophet (this time Muhammad rather than Jesus), whose activities in the region of Mecca made it into a site of pilgrimage. Khaqani's creation of poetry in Mada'in is analogized to the activities of a pilgrim in Mecca. In the Islamic tradition, pilgrimage to Mecca is considered the highest achievement for a Muslim. In the above-quoted line, creating poetry is deemed equal to that lofty goal. Both acts have purifying effects, that remove the taint of sovereign power.

Khaqani's verses are neither an offering nor an homage. In the best tradition of the prison poem's critique of sovereignty, they are an admonition (*ʿibrat*) to the sultan to follow the path of justice. The above-cited verse from the Mada'in Qasida relates pilgrimage to poetry creation, thereby configuring both acts as potential types of political insubordination. Like the pilgrim, the poet's body is suffused with a spirituality that prevails over the carrion-infested and mortal body of the king.

In words that are simultaneously self-effacing and self-aggrandizing, Khaqani calls his poem a fragment (*qiṭʿeh*)—athough the poem is in fact a finished work—while figuring himself as a miracle-worker who wields licit magic (*siḥr-i ḥalal*) through his verse:

بنگر که در این قطعه چه سحر همی راند
مهتوک مسیحا دل، دیوانه‌ی عاقل خوان

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

This poem marks the end of the second phase of the Persian prison poem's trajectory by transmuting political resistance into spiritual authority. Whereas in the Christian Qasida, as in Khaqani's five other prison poems, the poet seeks the patron's material support and the patron requires the poet's verbal eloquence, the Mada'in Qasida treats this dependency as obsolete. Born from within the patronage nexus, the prison poem here transcends its political genesis by envisioning a world in which the king's corrupted body cannot compete with poetry's prophetic authority. At the moment of its apotheosis, Khaqani brings about prison poetry's obsolescence, for a ruler cannot imprison a poet whose power exceeds his own.

Having studied prison poetry's appropriation of prophecy, its polemical reworking of ʿUmar's Covenant, and, finally, its apotheosis in a poetics of ruins that exposes the corruption of the king's body, we are in a position to conclude our account of Khaqani's role in shaping the prison poem. The Mada'in Qasida merges the ethos of the lyric ode introduced in Chapter Two with the anti-panegyric idiom of the Christian Qasida encountered earlier in this chapter. Analogously, licit magic merges here with the prison poem's Christology. In this late verse, the itinerate poet figures himself as a dead man with the heart of Christ who is uniquely endowed with the ability to speak the truth to power. In the Mada'in Qasida's concluding verse, which also gives the date of the poem as 1166 in the form of a chronogram, the poet, driven mad by the king's corruption, suddenly discovers that his own words can function as a source of prophetic power.

While the Christian Qasida developed the prison poem's political theology by drawing on the discourse of prophecy, the Mada'in Qasida developed a poetics of ruins that performed a similar political role by undermining worldly power. Like Khaqani's earlier poems, the Mada'in Qasida sets forth a conception of poetry's sovereignty. Poetry is the court from which the sultan must seek the nourishment (*tusheh*) and counsel (*daryuze*) of those he is mandated to protect (v. 37-38). The legitimacy of the sultan's sovereignty depends on his willingness to heed the admonitions of the poets at his court. Political treatises composed in Persian courts, including by ʿAruzi, the first theorist of the prison poem, instructed princes to heed poetry's lessons; here the poet instructs himself to learn from the ruler's flaws. In the world of Khaqani's poems, the poet always triumphs. The political theology generated by his body prevails over competing forms of power.

The Mada'in Qasida rewrites tales of kingly glory, including Persian epics such as the *Shahnama*, in the service of an aesthetics that treats poetry, rather than kingship, as the most exalted form of sovereignty. Khaqani was keenly aware of his dependency on the court. But he also perceived that the path to worldly power was paved with bloodshed and hypocrisy. The poet's twilight vision of a rapacious earth bloated with the blood gushing from the corpses of Sasanian kings exposes the fraught dialectic between the sovereign and the poet that underwrites the prison poem's political theology. Rather than simply turn away from worldly power, the poet critiques the

material grandeur of royal kingship, and the splendor of the ruins of Mada'in, through his verse. The sacralized idiom of the sovereign's body is undermined by the image of his carrion-infested corpse, which has neither posterity nor perpetuity. The sultan's corrupted power is replaced with the vatic capacity of poetry, and the poet's prophetic body replaces the king's mortal flesh.

By the end of Khaqani's poem, al-Buḥturi's nostalgic *ubi sunt* has been superseded. Al-Buḥturi excused the travesties promulgated at Mada'in by invading Arab armies in 637 CE with reference to human fallibility. He shed "tears of affection for the cycles of history" while turning a blind eye to the destruction wrought by his own people on Persian civilization.[۳۸] Khaqani by contrast sheds no tears for anyone, including himself and his fellow poets. Notwithstanding the still prevalent nationalist reading of this text, the Mada'in Qasida does not weep for the Sasanian kings. Nor does it weep for the poet's self. The Mada'in Qasida's poetics of ruins simultaneously celebrates and overcomes the condition of the imprisoned poet.

Over the course of his work and especially through his engagement with the topoi of imprisonment, Khaqani demonstrated poetry's authority over other discourses of power. He turned Mas ud Sa d's lyric ode into a discourse on poetry-as-prophecy that could challenge the sultan's abuses of power. Learned as he was in Christian traditions, Khaqani was likely aware, from one of the Arabic versions of the Christian gospels used by Nestorian Christians, the statement that Jesus appropriated from the Psalms in establishing his new discursive order: "The stone that the builders rejected will become the chief cornerstone" (Psalms 118:22: Luke 20:17). When we substitute—as Khaqani did—Jesus' prophetic authority for the poet's vision, we can trace the trajectory of the political theology of the prison poem under Khaqani's tutelage.

As he went about crafting his political theology, Khaqani conjured a time-space of the ruin, where poetry could prevail over the power of rulers, jailors, and patron. He thereby intervened within a long tradition within world literature of using the temporality of ruins to enhance the power of poetry.[۳۹] From the battlements of Iwan Kisra, rendered through the same toothless mouths and mouthless teeth that spoke from hallowed-out skulls of prison poem two, Khaqani predicted that rulers who wielded their power without regard for justice and with increasing distance from its sacred justification would ultimately be judged by poets, acting in the capacity of prophets. "You are dust," the poet states from this otherworldly realm, following the destruction of the king's body, "We are now your earth" (v. 11).

Notes:

1 See O. L. Vil'chevskii, "Khronogrammy Khakani."
2 Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 148.
3 Scott John McDonough, "Power by Negotiation" (PhD Diss., U of California Los Angeles, 2005).

4 Mīr ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Khan Shūshtarī, *Tuḥfah al-ʿālam va ẕayl al-tuḥfa* [c. 1799], ed. S. Muvaḥid (Tehran: Ṭahūrī, 1984), 76-81. For discussions of Shūshtarī and other Qajar-era travellers, see Abbas Amanat, "Through the Persian Eye: Anglophilia and Anglophobia in Modern Iranian History," *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, eds., Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 136-7, and Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 73-5.

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

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

7 *Aiwān-i Madā'in: tasdīs-i qaṣīda-i Khāqānī, bi qalam-i chand nafar az fuḍalā' wa shuʿarā'-i Īrān=Aïwan-i-Medâin: un poème de Khâgâni (1606), adapté et augmanté par quelques poêtes contemporains* (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Iranschähr, 1343), 45-64.

8 *Medayin haraberleri* (Istanbul: Cemʿi Kütüphanesi, 1330/1912); the text is unpaginated, but it is 6-19 of the version available at http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.l0104594429; translated into Persian in *Aiwān-i Madā'in*, 33-44.

9 Edward G. Browne, *A history of Persian literature under Tartar dominion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 375.

10 *Aiwān-i Madā'in*, 4.

11 *Aiwān-i Madā'in*, 11.

12 ʿAbd al-Rahīm Hindī and Mīrzā Ismāʿīl Aṣaf, "Dū shakār ṣinʿat," *Irānshahr* 2.3 (1925): 282-292

13 For Persian and Arabic poets who have composed elegies to Madā'in, see Sayyid Aḥmad Pārsā, "Derangī bar Īwān-i Madā'in-i Khāqānī," *MDAT* 41/54-5 (1385): 5-18. For comparisons of Buḥturī and Khāqānī's poems on Madā'in, see Amīr Maḥmūd Anvār, *Aiwān-i Madā'in* (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tehrān, 1383/2004) and Jerome W. Clinton, "The *Mada'en Qaṣida* of Xāqāni Sharvāni, II: Xāqāni and al-Buhturī," *Edebiyât* 2.1 (1977):191-206

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

15 For links with Arabic literature, see Muhjah Amīn Bāshā, *Rithā' al-mudun wa-al-mamālik fī al-shiʿr al-Andalusī: ittijāhātuh, khaṣā'iṣuhu al-fannīyah : dirāsa* (Damascus: Shirā' lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2003) and Ibrahim Musa Al-Sinjilawi, *The 'atlal-nasib in early Arabic poetry: a study of the development of the elegiac genre in classical Arabic poetry* (Irbid, Jordan: Yarmouk University Publication, Deanship of Research and Graduate Studies, 1999). For a comparable, if undertheorized, Persian genre, see Maḥmūd Haydarī and Fātemeh Taqīzadeh, "Marsiya-yi shahr dar shiʿrī fārsī va ʿarabī," *Majalleh-yi būstān-i adab dāneshgāhi Shirāz* 14 (1391): 22-42.

16 The most comprehensive study is Mary Ellen Becker, "The Ubi Sunt: Form, Theme, and Tradition" (PhD Diss.: Arizona State University, 1981). For the Arabic *ubi sunt*, see Carl Becker, "*Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere,*" in *Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Sprachgeschichte vornehmlich des Orients* (Breslau: Marcus, 1916), 87-105.

17 *Tarānehayi Khayyām*, ed. Ṣādeq Hedāyat (Tehrān: Jāvīdān, 1352), 71, *rubāʿī* 74.

18 For the first comprehensive study of *jinās* in English, see Hany Rashwan, *Comparing the incomparable in Post-Eurocentric Poetics: Arabic Jinās in Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2021).

19 Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat, *Jamharat khuṭab al-ʿarab fī l-ʿuṣūr al-ʿarabiyya al-ẓāhira* (Beirūt: Dar al-Matbuʿat al-ʿArabiyah, 1933), 2: 501-3, No. 475 (following, with minor modifications, the translation of Tahera Qutbuddin, "Khutba," in Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson [eds.], *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms* [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 267).

20 *Shāhnāma,* eds. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh and Mahmoud Omidsalar (New York: Bibliotheca Persica: 2005), 6: 230.

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

22 As Clinton has noted, most readings of Khāqānī's Madā'in Qasida end here, neglecting the exposure of the sovereign's corrupted body that transpires over the rest of the poem. For another example of how the Madā'in Qasida is treated in modern Iranian historiography as a proto-nationalist appeal to lost Sāsānian glory, see Mehdī Ma'khūzī, *Ātash andar chang* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1388).

23 Khāqānī, *Dīvān*, 358.
24 The *īhām* on pand is noted by Julie Scott Meisami in her insightful annotations to her translation of this poem in *Qasida poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, eds. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 2: 431-5.
25 See Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), for this concept in a Persianate context.
26 Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels,* 27.
27 Khāqānī, *Dīvān*, 360, following here the variant offered by Sajjadi: تحفه instead of توشه in the first *miṣrāʿ*
28 "Tears of affection" is a leitmotif featuring in the analysis of Ali, "Reinterpreting Al-Buḥturī's Īwān Kisrā Ode."
29 See Andrew Hui, *The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Anne F. Janowitz, *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (London: Blackwell, 1990); and Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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