

Manūchihri's The Raven of Separation: Arabic Poetic Topoi and the Persian Courtly Tradition

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Introduction

Abū 'l-Najm Aḥmad ibn Qows ibn Aḥmad Manūchihri of Dāmghān (d. circa 1040/41) started his career at the court of Falak al-Ma'ālī Manūchihri (r. 1012-1031), a ruler of the Zīyārid dynasty (930-1090) who governed the southern shores of the Caspian Sea.¹ Although

¹C.E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: 994-1040* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 75. Also see G-Ḥ. Yūsufī, *Chashma-ye Rowshan: Dīdārī bā shā'irān* (Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1371/1992), 62-74; 'A. Ḥ. Zarrīnkūb, *Bā Kārivān-i ḥulla: Majmū'-ye naqd-i adabī*, 7th ed. (Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1993), 55-68; C.H de Fouchécour, *La Description de la Nature Dans la Poésie Lyrique Persane du XIe Siècle* (Paris, Peeters, 1969); J.W. Clinton, "Manūchihri," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs.

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the poet took his pen name Manūchihīrī from this ruler, there are no evidence in the poet's writings that Falak al-Maālī was his patron. Later he travelled to Ghazna, in present-day Afghanistan, where he became a prominent courtly poet during the reign of Mas'ūd (1030-1041), son of the mighty ruler Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna. Manūchihīrī's name is usually mentioned with other major court poets in Persian, such as Farrukhī (d. circa 1037) and 'Unṣurī (691-1039).² Manūchihīrī was an able and innovative panegyrist, especially famous for his wine poetry and his introduction of a new poetic strophic poem called *musammaʿ*, which was imitated by several other poets. He wrote eleven *musammaʿs*. His collected works (*dīwān*) consists of 2785 couplets that have survived.

His style is different from the other poets of the period, as his talent lies in his vivid descriptions of nature, that impact strongly on sensory perceptions. He is like an able camera man who zooms in closely on an object and depicts it in minute detail from different perspectives. In his seminal work, *Šuwar-i Khiyāl dar shi'r-i Fārsī*, M.R. Shaḡīr Kadkanī devotes a chapter to Manūchihīrī's ingenious descriptive technique by analysing how the poet depicts one drop of rain from different perspectives in several consecutive lines.³ The diversity of his descriptions is exceptional, from fresh blooming meadows to scorching deserts, from descriptions of the winter and rain to spring gardens, which he usually connects to animating descriptions of wine and wine-making. As Gh-Ḥ. Yūsufī remarks, since Manūchihīrī's poetic experience is personal, his poetry is devoid of any elements of imitations. The images and metaphors are all based on his own imagination. He describes nature for the sake of nature and not, as we see in other Persian poets, as a backdrop to indicate the conditions of a character, or as a symbol for mediations on the spiritual world. His depictions of nature are lively and dynamic as in the following description of the sunrise, in which the sun is presented as a thief

²On these poets see J.T.P. de Bruijn in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Farroḡī Sīstānī Abu 'l-Ḥasan Alī; and editors of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. 'Onṣori.

³Shaḡīr Kadkanī, *Šuwar-i Khiyāl dar shi'r-i fārsī*, (Tehran: āgāh, 1350/1971).

coming out of its dark ambushade, with a wounded head:

The disc of the sun raised its head from behind Mount Alborz

Like a blood-soaked thief showing his head from the hiding
place;

Like a half-dead lamp

To which oil is added moment by moment.

Manūchihri is a cheerful poet who devotes much of his poetry to describing wine, the Persian autumnal and spring festivals, flora and fauna, and merrymaking.⁴ Furūzānfar characterises his poetry as follows:

In all of his poetry, consisting of some 3000 couplets, there is not one depressed word, no sorrowful phrase: all of his poetry is full of cheer and joy. This is one of the strengths of his poetry, less seen in other poets whose poetry, although it may be descriptions of festive courtly gatherings (*majlis*), celebrating joyous and gratifying times, shows traces of heartburning lamentations between the lines. Although their poetry is outwardly smiling, they are inwardly mourning.”⁵

Allegorical descriptions of wine-making in Persian are often based on Rūdakī’s (860-940) famous poem, commonly known as the “Mother of Wine,” but Manūchihri experiments with new ways of presenting the same topic in different poems.⁶ Such poems are literary exercises, displaying his poetic talent, rather than depicting the Persian courtly world. Elsewhere I have shown that Manūchihri’s literary descriptions are so focused on the language, especially the

⁴On Manūchihri’s poems on wine and the grape sacrifice motif, see W.L. Hanaway, “Blood and Wine: Sacrifice and Celebration in Manūchihri’s Wine Poetry,” in *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, no. 26 (1988): 69-80.

⁵B.Z. Furūzānfar, *Sukhan wa sukhanwarān*, 4th ed. (Tehran: Khārazmī, 1369/1990), 134-35.

⁶On ritualistic aspects of Persian wine poetry see D.P. Brookshaw “Lascivious Vines, Corrupted Virgins, and Crimes of Honor: Variations on the Wine Production Myth as Narrated in Early Persian Poetry,” in *Iranian Studies*, no. 47:1 (2014): 87-129.

metaphors and imagery, that his text creates a world of its own.⁷ The focus on metaphors makes several passages in his poems sheer riddles, while other descriptions turn to an animating world in which even the tiniest element such as the seed of a pomegranate comes to life:

This pomegranate is like a pregnant woman;
There are a handful of baby boys inside the pregnant belly.
Unless you smash her to the ground, she will not deliver her babies;
When she delivers her babies, one should eat them.
A mother gives birth to one, two or three babies;
Why is this pomegranate the mother of three hundred babies?
So long as a baby is not out of the womb, the mother
does not put it in bed; this is no secret, everyone knows this.
In her belly, the mother has made yellowish beds for the babies,
And the heads of the babies can be detected within the womb.⁸

Manūchihīrī is also a poet in whose *Dīwān* we hear a rich array of sounds from nature.⁹ In several of his nature descriptions, he catalogues the singing birds. Suffice it here to give two stanzas of one of his strophic poems as an example:

The ring dove clad in ermine has filled its crop with wind,
Partridge has poured musk in the ears,
The nightingales are singing in delight, the doves are cooing

⁷See A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Courtly Riddles: Enigmatic Embellishments in Early Persian Poetry* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), 48-52; also see idem., “The Art of Riddling in Classical Persian Poetry” in *Edebiyāt: Journal of Middle Eastern and Comparative Literature*, no. 12 (2001): 15-36.

⁸Manūchihīrī-yi Dāmghānī, *Dīwān*, ed. M. Dabīr Siyāqī, qaṣīda no. 13 (Tehran, Zawwār, 1996): 160-64, ll.

⁹H.A. Mallāh, *Manūchihīrī-yi Dāmghānī wa mūsīqī* (Tehran: Hunar wa Farhang), 1363/1984.

loudly,

The mouth of the tulip is filled with musk, the mouth of the
palm is full of honey,

Lily smells of camphor, the rose bush is selling pearls,

And spring time is an eternal garden. (...)

A bird is hanging down from a tree branch,

The black crow is sprinkling civet to the wings.

A spring cloud is driving its horse in the distance,

while pearls are trickling down from its hooves on the road.

The wind is scattering black musk and shimmering pearls
in the mouths of tulips.¹⁰

Manūchihri's Panegyric Poem, 'The Raven of Separation'

While much attention has been paid to Manūchihri's depictions of vernal gardens, his panegyrics in which he describes how a grape has become pregnant and how grapes are processed into wine, and his individual descriptions of objects such as his peerless poem on the depiction of a candle, little or no attention has been given to his descriptions of the desert. The topos of the 'Raven of Separation' was part of the description of the desert in classical Arabic poetry.¹¹ Manūchihri adopts the Arabic topos, but does not merely imitate. He tries not only to outshine his Arab counterparts, but also to transform the topos in a Persian way. Hellmut Ritter detected a fundamental contrast in the way Persian and pre-Islamic Arab poets looked at the world around them and translated their views in their poetry. About

¹⁰Manūchihri-yi Dāmghānī, *Dīwān*, 179-181, *musammaʿ* 7.

¹¹See, for instance, A.J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1994) who devotes his attention to Manūchihri's "remarkable Bacchic sequence enigmatically describing a vat of wine" (56-7). For an analysis of this specific poem in the context of *ekphrasis* see Seyed-Gohrab, "Stylistic Continuities in Classical Persian Poetry: Reflections on Manūchihri from Dāmghān and Amir Mo'ezzi" in *The Age of the Seljuqs*, ed. Edmund Herzig and Sarah Stewart (London / New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 131-47.

the Arab poet, he says, he “is above all concerned to catch the details as precisely as possible; his poetic feelings are satisfied when this aim has been achieved” whereas the Persian poet “becomes enthusiastic when the object observed appeals to his creative imagination and takes a pleasure . . . beyond everything else in the fantastic transformation of the objects he observes in themselves. He has another way of looking at things than the Arab.”¹² De Bruijn rightly responds to this, that the Persian style of description and comparison found its way into Arabic poetry of the early Abbasid period (8th-9th centuries), and there is no reason to attribute racial characteristics to the poets.¹³ In addition, many Persian poets wrote in Arabic and a watershed division, especially in the early phase of Persian poetry, remains problematic. As regards the genre of poetic description, Abū Nuwās (d. circa 815) introduced techniques of visual description to Arabic, and there are, of course, numerous instances of the impact of Arabic poetic style on Persian.¹⁴ Persian poets such as Manūchihīrī contrive new imagery and metaphors to depict an object or idea chiefly to outdo their predecessors and contemporary poets, whether Arabic or Persian. The poet’s financial existence depended on his continuing new ways of attracting attention, which was essential to gain financial support from a courtly patron.

Manūchihīrī is exceptional in his ingenious descriptions, his technical skills, and originality, showing his mastery of the Arabic poetic

¹²As cited by J.T.P. de Bruijn, “Arabic Influences on Persian Literature,” in *General Introduction to Persian Literature* (London / New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 378.

¹³J.T.P. de Bruijn, “Arabic Influences,” 378; for other studies on the interaction between Arabic and Persian poetry see B. Reinert, “Probleme der vormongolischen arabisch-persischen Poesiegemeinschaft und ihr Reflex in der Poetik” in *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, ed. G.E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), 71-105; Julie Scott Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry* (London: 2003); Umar Muhammad Daudpota, *The Influence of Arabic Poetry on the Development of Persian Poetry* (Bombay, The Fort Printing Press, 1934).

¹⁴See A.M. Sumi, *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry: Wasf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); J.T.P. de Bruijn, “Arabic Influences on Persian Literature,” in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, 369-384.

tradition.¹⁵ In fact, as Clinton says, his profound knowledge of Arabic poetry made him unique among his contemporaries and was “a defining feature of his work,” yet his “attempts to find a home for the Arabic *qaṣīdah* in Persian were a failure.”¹⁶ He wrote several panegyric odes based on Arabic topoi. In these poems he blends Persian and Arabic elements.¹⁷ Clinton is right when he says that Arabic poetry did not enter into Persian literary tradition in the form of translations of individual poems but rather almost exclusively through the “translation of individual lines, metaphors and images.”¹⁸ Manūchihīrī’s poem with the opening couplet “O raven, croak no more your cry, for you have separated me from my love” is often cited as an example of his Arabism.¹⁹ Even in the medieval times, this particular poem was discussed in Persian rhetorical manuals such as *Shams-i Qays* because of its artificial Arabism.²⁰

Discussing Manūchihīrī’s Arabic orientated panegyrics in the courtly Persian context, Meisami wonders “what world is this? Not merely a hybrid world in which disparate conventions are yoked together, but a world in which the aspiring court poet must constantly struggle and outdo his rivals, prove himself with poetic *tours de force*.”²¹ The urge to outshine rivals and secure a firm position at the court drives

¹⁵See E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, no. 2, reprinted (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956): 30-34 and 153-56; also see V. al-Kik, *Ta’līh-i farhang-i Arab dar ash’ār-i Manūchihīrī-yi Dāmghānī*, Beirut, 1971; Daudpota, *The Influence of Arabic Poetry* (Bombay, The Fort Printing Press, 1934), 72-3.

¹⁶J.W. Clinton, “A Sketch of Translation and the Formation of New Persian Literature,” in *Iran and Iranian Studies: Essays in Honor of Iraj Afshar*, ed. K. Eslami (Princeton / New Jersey: Zagros, 1998), 294.

¹⁷J. Scott Meisami, “Poetic Microcosms: The Persian Qasida to the End of the Twelfth Century” in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 157.

¹⁸J.W. Clinton, “A Sketch of Translation,” 294. Clinton writes, “among all his imitations of Arabic, there is no poem that we can comfortably call a translation of a specific poem by a specific poet.”

¹⁹J. Scott Meisami, “Poetic Microcosm” 157. The translation of the couplet is by Meisami.

²⁰Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Qays al-Rāzī, *al-Mu’ajam fī ma’ā’ir ash’ār al-’ajam*, ed. M. Qazwīnī & M. Raḍawī (Tehran, 1935), 321.

²¹J. Scott Meisami, “Poetic Microcosms”, 157.

Manūchihīrī to draw on Arabic materials to create new and original metaphors and imagery within the literary conventions. Dhabīḥullāh Ṣafā adds to this that by drawing on Arabic panegyrics Manūchihīrī compensated for his youth as compared to established poets such as ‘Unṣurī.²² Although Manūchihīrī employed many Arabic words that were regarded as archaisms at that time, the spirit of his poetry is vivid so that the vocabulary does not decrease our reading appreciation. His innovative and original imagery made him a transitional figure from the inimitably simple Khorasani style to the more convoluted poetic style of ‘Irāq. His new way of composing panegyric odes also makes him a transitional figure. Meisami rightly regards him as a transitional figure “noted for his composition of both ‘Arabic’ and ‘Persian’ qaṣīdahs, and particularly noteworthy for his development of the later type.”²³

This essay will analyse one of Manūchihīrī’s panegyric poems to see how he treats an Arabic topos and how he integrates it within the Persian literary conventions. The poem is *qaṣīda* number 53 of his *dīwān* and is based on the genre of the beloved’s deserted encampment. In this genre, the suppliant lover pursues the beloved, who journeys from place to place in the desert. In the classical Arabic *nasīb*, the crow, which is attracted to the remains of encampments, announces the departure of the beloved’s tribe with its raucous cry. There are several descriptions in Arabic poetry depicting the lover at such an empty spot. The lover arrives too late, sees the traces of the beloved’s ‘abandoned campsite’ (*aṭlāl*), and bursts into tears and sings songs, complaining of the beloved’s infidelity and cruelty.²⁴

²²Dhabīḥullāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i Adabiyāt* (Tehran: Firdows, 1368/1989), 586; on other aspects of his poetry see 580-597.

²³J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 56.

²⁴R.A. Serrano, “Al-Buhturi’s Poetics of Persian Abodes,” in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXVIII, no. 1 (March 1997): 69f, where the author succinctly deals with the language of the abandoned encampments. For a treatment of the *atlal* theme in Arabic *ghazal* and its transference from *nasīb* to *ghazal*, see Renate Jacobi, “Themes and Variations in Umayyad

This association of the bird with the place vacated by the beloved engendered the notion of ‘the raven of separation’ (*ghurāb al-bayn*).²⁵ *Ghurāb* is used for both the raven and the crow. In Arabic ornithomancy and literary tradition it is regarded as an ominous bird.²⁶ The word *ghurāb* appears once in the Koran (5:31).²⁷ Here the crow is sent from Paradise to show the murderous Cain how to bury his brother Abel.²⁸ The crow also appears in a story in which Noah sends it out to explore the land, but when the crow finds a carcass, it does not return. A crow also appears in the Thamūdīc tradition, where it is a messenger sent to Kānūh, the high priest of the Thamūd. Whereas in the Koran the bird is sent to instruct Cain how to bury his brother, in this tradition the same bird sent from Paradise is the messenger of resurrection, awakening Kānūh from his century-long sleep.²⁹

In Islamic mystic cosmology, every bird has its place and symbolic value. The semiotic of the crow is ambivalent. The bird is contrasted to the white falcon, a symbol of the soul, which is exiled in the company of crows.³⁰ The crow also appears as a contrast to the

Ghazal Poetry” in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXIII, part 2 (July 1992); also see Suzanne Pickney Stetkevych, ed. *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

²⁵This topic has been very popular with Persian poets as well. See *Dīvān-i Manūchihri*, 93-4, qasīda no. 53;

²⁶See C. Pellat in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. Ghurāb. In Perso-Islamic eschatology, it is believed that when the end of the world approaches, the sun and the moon lose their light and they are compared to two black and blind ravens. Also see J. Scott Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry, Oriental Pearls* (London: Routledge / Curzon, 2003), 305-06.

²⁷“Then Allah sent a crow digging up the earth so that he might show him how he should cover the dead body of his brother.”

²⁸H. Busse, “Cain and Abel,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University), http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/cain-and-abel-EQSIM_00066.

²⁹J. Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 19.

³⁰A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975),

307-08. See Rumi’s *mathnawī*, 5: 833-38; ‘Attār, *Manṭiq al-tayr*; see also chapter eight of *Kalīla wa Dimna*, on the raven and owls. Abu’l-Ma’ālī Naṣr-Allāh Munshī, *Kalīla wa Dimna*, ed. Mujtabā

nightingale, especially in descriptions of autumnal gardens. With the coming of the cold season, the crows enter the garden, putting the nightingale to flight. In such descriptions, the crow represents worldly existence which sends the soul into exile. The connection to exile is strengthened by the fact that the Arabic root of its name, *ghurāb*, means ‘to go away,’ ‘to depart,’ ‘to withdraw,’ ‘to go westwards,’ and ‘to exile.’ In Ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 1240) philosophy, the crow stands for the Universal Body, i.e., the Perfect Human Being. For Ibn ‘Arabī, the crow is Abraham, God’s intimate friend, possessing all the qualities of the perfect man. Jaffray states, “Permeated with divine qualities, as light permeates inchoate matter, Abraham becomes the manifest locus of the hidden God.”³¹ Because of its jet-black colour, the crow is the keeper of the secrets and the “repository of trust.”³²

In Shiism, the crow is used by ‘extremist’ Shiites, who believe that ‘Alī and Muḥammad were physically as similar as one crow is to another.³³ When the Angel Gabriel brought the revelation, which was intended for ‘Alī, he gave it to Muḥammad by mistake. In the extremist Shiite views, God wanted to appoint ‘Alī as a prophet, but due to Gabriel’s blunder, Muḥammad became the prophet. The adherents of this idea were called *ghurābiyya*. They also believed in ‘Alī’s divinity and that he had the form of a crow in heaven.

The crow appears in old Arabic love poetry. In the romance of *Qays and Lubna* as reported in al-Isfahānī’s *al-Aghānī*, the frustrated lover, Lubna “buys up and kills all the ravens she comes across.”³⁴ In the *Dīvān* attributed to the ninth century poet al-Wālibī, a number of

Mīnavī Tihirānī & Zahrā Kishāwarz Bāqirī (Teheran: Bihzād, 1385/2006), 273-330.

³¹See Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds*, trans. Angela Jaffray (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2006), 99-101.

³²Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, *The Universal Tree*, 102.

³³I. Goldziher in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ghurābiyya”; see also S. Anthony in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Ghurābiyya”, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>.

³⁴See Hilary Kilpatrick, “Ahbar Manzuma: The Romance of Qays and Lubna in the Aghani”, in the *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag, Studien zur Arabischen Dichtung* (Beirut: 1994), 350-61. For the omen drawn from birds see Th. Nöldeke, in *ERE*, s.v. Arabs, 671.

references are made to Majnūn's communion with a crow. In Persian literature, the crow has both negative and positive associations. In modern Persian literature, the novella by Maḥmūd Mas'ūdī, *Sūrat al-Ghurāb* comes to mind, which "recounts contemporary man's quest for the truth," led by a raven.³⁵ Generally speaking, the crow is a bird of ill-omen in Persian literature, but its positive attributes are also referred to. Its representation as a malevolent bird is probably under the influence of Arabic literature. In Niẓāmī's romance *Laylī and Majnūn*, based on Arabic anecdotes, there are several monologues in which the separated lover Majnūn talks to himself or to the wind or the birds to bring his message to Laylī. The poet refers not only to the crow's colour and its function as a courier, but also to the bird's beauty, comparing its black and shining plumage to the locks of Laylī's hairs and to a tenebrous night. The bird's eyes are compared to gleaming lamps.³⁶ Niẓāmī's emulators deal with this scene creatively. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (1414-1492) takes the crow's cawing as a good omen.³⁷ Fuzūlī replaces the crow with a caged pigeon, depicting how Majnūn releases the bird by offering the hunter a pearl.³⁸

Analysis of Manūchihri's Panegyric

Manūchihri's poem consists of 47 couplets and can be divided into several sections. The opening is long, from line one to 34, which in turn

³⁵See my analysis of this novel, "Some Elucidatory Notes on Mas'ūdī's *Sūrat al-Ghorāb*" in *Maks: a Persian Journal of Literature*, no. 1 (1995): 8-21. This article is reprinted in the journal *Baran: Persian Quarterly on Culture, Literature, History and Politics*, no. 14-5 (Winter/Spring, 2007): 99-105; Houra Yavari, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Fiction. ii. Post-Revolutionary Fiction Abroad.

³⁶See Hushang A'lam, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Crow. Also compare Ḥusayn Lasān, "Tafā'ul wa ṭaṭayyur", in *Hunar wa mardum*, No. 183, (1357), 30-57. Niẓāmī always censures 'a flaw detecting eye' (*dāda-yi 'ayb-jū*). In *Makhzan al-asrār*, the poet tells the story of Jesus and the cadaver of a dog in which Jesus looks at the beautiful white teeth of the dog, teaching his followers to detect virtues instead of vices. Likewise, Niẓāmī considers the owl, which is usually regarded as a bird of ill omen, the nightingale watching a treasure: "The owl which is inauspicious in the lore / is the nightingale of the treasure in the ruined place." (*Makhzan*, 106, l. 5). On Niẓāmī's romance and the crow scene see A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 196-98.

³⁷See Jāmī, "Laylī and Majnūn," in *Mathnavī-yi haft ovrang*, 793.

³⁸*Laylā and Majnūn by Fuzūlī*, trans. Sofi Huri (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), 197-200.

is divided into a vivid description of the crow (ll. 1-3), a description of the beloved, her campsite and the lover's condition (ll. 4-8), a description of the camel (ll. 9-11), of the desert (ll. 12-35) and of the night (ll. 24-34). The praise of the patron is blended with the description of the dawn, which is followed by self-praise (ll. 42-45) and the final praise of the patron (ll. 45-47). The opening part describes the crow and its distressing cry. Arriving at the beloved's abandoned campsite, the lover sees nothing but a gathering of cawing crows. The cawing of the crow reminds the lover of his fate. Both the crow's harsh cry and its black colour emphasize the lover's distressed state. In this poem, the 'raven of separation' is introduced in the first three couplets:

1. Woe to this raven of separation and his caw,
whose sorrowful cry has thrown me in mourning.
2. It's not the raven of separation but a Messenger
whose prayer has quickly been answered.
3. The raven of separation has become a flutist
and I've become weary of hearing its flute.³⁹

In lines four and five, the narrator refers to the beloved, who is cruel, indifferent and inconstant. As usual, no reason is given for the beloved's abandonment of the lover. It is part of the poetic genre to depict the beloved as unfaithful. In fact, once the beloved's traits are enumerated, the lover finds himself in a position to blame her. The lover often complains of the beloved's infidelity:

4. The faithless beloved has gone, her habitation
as much a ruin as her loyalty.
5. Where she once stayed, I pitch my camp,
her campsite, instead of her, shows loyalty to me.

In the next lines, the narrator focuses on the lover's condition and draws a number of comparisons. The beloved's campsite, which in the lover's eyes is as sacred as the House of God, has become a

³⁹Manūchihīrī-yi Dāmghānī, *Dīwān*, 93-4.

‘Mecca’ for wild animals that feast on the leftovers, and the lover’s tearful eye is compared to the *zamzam* fountain in Mecca:

6. Since her place is now the Ka’ba of wild creatures
my eyes are like the Zamzam Fountain.
7. The clouds [upon her head] resemble my [weeping] eyes,
the gentle breeze of this place resembles my cold sigh.
8. My body is ruined from weeping for her
Her body s ruined because of weeping.

To reiterate the lover’s loneliness and his lack of companionship, the narrator states that even his camel has gone. Through a series of comparisons, the lover describes the beauty of the camel in the desert.⁴⁰ Its long and powerful legs are likened to the feet of God’s throne. Like a ship cruising in the vast ocean, the lover’s camel is the only vehicle that can transport him in the desert. The narrator’s comparisons of the camel with the ship is indeed original:

9. O, where is my light-footed camel
whose legs are like the feet of God’s throne?
10. Like a boat [under sail] with its oar [extending] from its stern
to her canopy, her buttocks and her back,
Her reins, her gait, her rider,
Her hump, her forelegs, and the riding crop.

The poet then describes the desert and the lover’s forlorn feeling. The desert is another symbolic element that functions not only as the setting, but also as the objectivisation of the lover’s lack of hope for union. The lover knows of the barrenness of the desert and the dangers he must face alone. His physical thirst for water corresponds

⁴⁰On descriptions of camels, see R. Jacobi, “The Camel-Section of the Panegyric Ode,” in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, no. 13 (1982): 1-22; also compare Remke Kruk, “Of Rukhs and Rooks, Camels and Castles,” in *Oriens*, no. 36 (2001): 288-298; idem, “On Animals: excerpts of Aristotle and Ibn Sina in Marwazi’s *Taba’i’ al-hayawan*,” in *Aristotle’s Animals in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Carlos Steel *et al.* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 91-120.

to his thirst for union with the beloved: both are mirages. The narrator makes a pun on the word *sarāb*, which means ‘mirage’ but it can also be read as *sar-āb*, meaning ‘fountainhead.’ The pun shows the lover’s confusion, which is further stressed by inserting the word *āb*, ‘water,’ immediately after the word *sarāb*. The lover has to traverse the desert under a bleaching sun that steals any moisture. The plants do not grow tall, but are frizzy like a black man’s hair. There is no human king to rule such a vast land, instead the rulers are demons and ghouls surrounded by venomous serpents. In *qaṣīdas* in which the court and the courtiers are described, the king is usually in the middle while courtiers are gathered on both flanks in hierarchical order, while dancers and musicians entertain the king and his courtiers, pouring wine and flirting with the guests. Manūchihīrī creates a sharp contrast between this sedentary courtly ambiance and the dreary picture in which its unnamed king, ruling over ruins, is accompanied by venomous serpents and other animals of the desert. The musicians at such a horrifying court are the roaring lions and howling wolves:

12. Where is she so that I can know her familiar
face in this mirage.
13. I shall cut through this rough desert, so large
that the mind is lost in its endlessness.
14. It is so wide that half of it can engulf
the entire heavens.
15. Its earth is as hell and its heat
makes the bushes grow like Ethiopian hair.
16. This waste is as ruined as King Jamshīd’s Empire,
an army of ghouls and demons rule.
17. In the king’s presence, they beat the drum with a whip,
made of a serpent’s skin and the fangs of a dragon.
18. The concubines lined up around the king
are cranes, ostriches and sand-grouse,

19. The sand around its pools and ditches,
is full of Levantine vipers and other poisonous snakes.
20. Its wine is a mirage and a valley is the cup;
its sweetmeats are stones and pebbles.
21. The music played by musicians in this desert
is the lion's roar and the wolves' howl.
22. The incense is hot poison with fragrant herbs;
in the surroundings are the 'Ukāza⁴¹ and Ghaza trees
23. I am frightened in the midst of this desert;
I am fearful of the demons and their howling.

The lover's fear, loneliness and despair are intensified with the fall of night. Having described the setting in which the lover finds himself, the narrator depicts the time of his travel. This is an animating description of the night, presenting several stars and planets and their constellations. Descriptions of night occur quite frequently in Persian love poetry for several reasons. First of all, the lover's poor condition is compared to the blackness of the stars. Often when he identifies a planet, he associates his fate with the planet's auspicious or inauspicious omens. He compares his black fate to the night. Such poetic passages allow the courtly poets to demonstrate their knowledge of astrology and astronomy,⁴² and to outshine other poets by contriving new metaphors within the strictly conventionalized

⁴¹H. Anvarī describes this as a staff which has a sharp iron tip. See *Farhang-i buzūrg-i sukhan*, no. 5 (Tehran, Sukhan, 1381/2002): 5061.

⁴²Mesmerizing depictions of night appear in the works of Firdowsī, Gurgānī and Nizāmī. See Elaheh Kheirandish, "Astronomical Poems from the 'Four Corners' of Persia (c. 1000-1500 CE)," in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, ed. A. Korangy, W.M. Thackston, R.P. Mottahedeh, W. Granara (Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 51-90; P. Kunitzsch, "The 'Description of the Night' in Gurgānī's *Wis* and *Rāmīn*" in *Der Islam*, 1982, 59, 93-110; J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanā'ī of Ghazna*, Publication of the "De Goeje Fund," No. 25, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 190; J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 103-07; D. Davis, *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi's Shāhnāmah* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992), 167-74; A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 314-19.

poetic system. Nizāmī describes a lovely night in more than fifty couplets in his romance of *Laylī and Majnūn*:

1. A shining night bright as day,
through which heaven was fresh like the green of Paradise.
2. The golden necklaces being suspended,
the image of the Wheel had turned into gold.
3. Giving the hands of loveliness to each other,
the planets were dancing upon the spread of the horizon.
4. The meteor was throwing a javelin to the demon (i.e. the black night),
singing from a distance: ‘There is no power.’⁴³
5. The air was perfumed with the musk-bag of night,
and the earth was illuminated by the jewel of the moon.
6. By this jewel and that bag, the six storied Wheel
had made the horizons full of ornaments and fragrance.⁴⁴

Manūchihīrī is skilled in describing the desert and the conditions of the lover. He has described deserts, horses, camels and journeys in the desert in some other poems, but in this poem he elaborates on his descriptions, employing peerless metaphors, imagery and similes to outshine his Arabic counterparts. In such descriptions, he intentionally devotes his attention to the night sky or to gardens in order to demonstrate his knowledge of astronomy.⁴⁵

24. When the sun assumes a darkened hue;
when its light turns as pale as the lover’s face,
25. Night springs from the east,

⁴³The phrase in its entirety reads as follows: ‘There is no power nor strength except in God, i.e. there is no striving against fate, an exclamation uttered at any sudden or perplexing emergency; and to drive away an evil spirit. See F.J. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian English Dictionary* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 1110-1111.

⁴⁴Nizāmī Ganjawī, *Laylī u Majnūn*, ed. B. Thirwatīyān, Tehran, Tūs, 1364/1985.

⁴⁵For comparative descriptions see J.W. Clinton, *The Divan of Manūchihīrī Dāmghānī*, 40-2.

spreading the sun's bed over the horizon.⁴⁶

26. The air becomes like a painter's dress,
Its sand are as golden spots.
27. The sphere is like a mine of lapis lazuli, while Aquarius⁴⁷
Gemini, and the Milky Way resemble the sphere's throat.⁴⁸
28. Dust floats in the air while in the dust
someone has scattered the dust from the mill.
The sign of Orion like Sagittarius in the sky,
was founded from the beginning in the constellation of the Bear.⁴⁹
The polar star with a veil and turban
is like a dot on the Taurus, like a small star in the Lesser Bear.
31. The air has assumed the colour of a dark blue garment
the meteor forms a red belt upon this garment.
32. The Milky Way is like a ray falling though an opening,
its stars are motes of dust, dancing in the ray.

This nocturnal scene is followed by a description of dawn. From this section onwards, Manūchihīrī cleverly connects the description to the praise of the king. At dawn, the traveller has reached his destination, the agony and torment of the hard journey are behind him. The narrator identifies himself with the traveller, and the absent beloved becomes the loving king, the patron for whom the poet has composed this panegyric. The cold dark desert gives way to a warm and light setting in which his "matchless master" is presiding. In this subtle way, Manūchihīrī expresses his intense love for his patron, characterising his poem not merely as love poetry but also as a document revealing his poetic genius, emphasizing how he can write in a completely different genre:

⁴⁶Literally, 'Wheel.'

⁴⁷The eleventh month of the solar year, in recent years replaced by Bahman.

⁴⁸The word *nāy* also means flute and may also refer to this in this line.

⁴⁹*Haq 'a* refers to "three bright stars near one another in the head of Orion, which marks the fifth mansion of the moon." See Steingass, 1504.

33. The moment the dawn brings in the day
the price of dawn's glory goes down.
34. The moon becomes like the eyes of a drunken man,⁵⁰
the dawn will serve as a kohl around the eyes.
35. I have come to the end of the desert,
desert cares have come to an end
36. In the gathering of the matchless master
whose equal God has not created.
37. His sagacity is as one who shoots
a stone in the air with a catapult.
38. Where resolution is desired, a firm decision is his intent;
Where opinion is desired, reasons is his counsel.
39. Who but God almighty has made him
content with His good-pleasure, judging according to His decree.
40. There is no grandeur in the world like his grandeur
there is no greatness like his greatness
41. Were it not watered by his generosity,
the western golf would shrink away.

In the last section, the poet praises himself and his poetic ability. Such passages are commonplaces in panegyrics and are called *fakhr* or *mufākhara* ('self-praise').⁵¹ In old Arabic poetry, the poet wished to delay his beloved's departure (if she was present at all) by listing his exploits and his personal qualities to her. The poet would point to his courage in battle, generosity, intellectual accomplishment and his talent for enjoying the pleasures of life such as wine and hunting, and he would also describe possessions such as his helmet, sword,

⁵⁰Variant reading: "the moon becomes like the eye of a patient."

⁵¹E. Wagner, E. and Farès, Bichr, "Mufākhara," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>.

armour, horse, and camel.⁵² Such self-praise is sometimes interpreted as a type of proposal. In a Persian courtly context, the praise of the poet's talents could be seen as an application for the position of a court poet, or the continuation of one's position.

In couplet 41, the poet alludes to the desert, through a metaphor drawing on the romance of King Solomon (Sulaymān) and Queen Sheba (or Sabā) Belqīs (or Belqeys in Persian). This is a popular theme in Persian and Arabic literature.⁵³ Manūchihri shows his knowledge of the Koran (27:20-44), where it is said that the hoopoe bird reports to Solomon that the people of Sheba, who are ruled by a wealthy woman, worship the sun. Solomon takes action and sends emissaries to invite the Queen and her people to worship God. By comparing his eloquence to the bird, Manūchihri not only refers to his poetic skill and his imaginative power, but also cleverly adds another element to his desert description. The poet's devoted relationship to the patron is implicit.

The poet's allusion to the hills of Şafā and Marwa (line 43) is another way of describing the desert but at the same time starting to praise his patron. This allusion brings to the reader's mind the story of Hagar and the thirsty baby Ishmael.⁵⁴ Hagar sought water for her thirsty infant in the desert, and ran in desperation between Şafā and Marwa seven times, but found no water. When she returned to Ishmael, she saw an angel, who scratched the earth with his wing and brought forth water. This is the story that is commemorated annually by pilgrims to Mecca. By placing himself in the position of Hagar, who is running and praying to God to find water, Manūchihri shows his own position in relation to his patron. If Manūchihri is the caring mother, and the patron is as God, then his poetry could be the child whose existence depends on both the poet and the patron's generosity. The water would be the money that sustains the poet's profession. Such verses

⁵²See E. Wagner, E. and Farès, Bichr, "Mufākhara."

⁵³Ġolām-Ĥosayn Yūsufi in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Belqīs.

⁵⁴See R. Firestone, "Şafā and Marwa," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*; also see M. Radscheit, "Springs and Fountains," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

remind the patron of the reciprocal relationship between the poet and the patron. While the poet preserves the patron's fame and reputation for posterity, the patron's financial support offers sustenance for the poet to continue his craft.⁵⁵

In the subsequent couplets, the poet shows that although he is imitating his Arabic predecessors, he is actually surpassing Arab poets who composed poems on the same topic:

42. My eloquence is like a hoopoe and how far my bird
can fly to attain to Sheba's realm.

43. My running to the hills of Marwa and Ṣafā is that I praise him
Generosity and good cheer are among his good qualities.⁵⁶

44. My disposition is the seat for my poetry
Like to the noble Jamila and Buthayna.⁵⁷

45. "Did not he wake up" is Arabic while I am
composing in Persian 'but flawless.'⁵⁸

46. O, so long as under this rotating sky,
his fortunate stars are in motion,⁵⁹

⁵⁵See J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 44-5.

⁵⁶If we read the words *Marva* and *Ṣafā* as in the previous hemistich it would read "Marva and Ṣafā exist due to his excellence," but we could also consider that the words are puns which then read differently as in my translation.

⁵⁷The second hemistich is problematic and variants such as *jamīla shah*, *jamīl wa shah*, *jamīla bīshīna* and *jamīl wa sa'īd* are given. Dabīr-Sīyāqī states that the latter should be Buthayna emphasizing that the hemistich is not strong. Kazimirski translates the couplet, with the same Persian text, as follows: "lorsque je compose des poésies, c'est mon beau talent que l'on voit et le Roi en est l'ami," W. Kazimirski, *Menoutchehri: Poète Persan du 11ème Siècle de Notre Ere (du 5ème de l'hégire)* (Paris: 1886), 229.

⁵⁸The first words are part of the opening line of an Arabic poem by 'Attāb b. Warqā' Shaybānī. "Didn't he wake up, didn't he learn, didn't he withdraw? / Didn't he see how much gray on the temples grow, remembering him and the boyhood days (wishing to come back though)"
أما صحا أما ارعوى أما انتهى / أما رأى الشيب بفودييه بدا / سقيا لأيام الشباب و له.

⁵⁹It is hard to translate the second hemistich of this couplet with all its puns in a meaningful English. The poet is wishing fortunate times for the praised person by referring to astrological signs. The common meaning of the word *shujā'* is magnanimous, daring, brave, but Steingass

47. May he live eternally and enjoy eternal fortune
and may he be an affliction on all who envy him.

In the final couplets, Manūchihīrī refers to Arabic poetry. The first words in line 44th are an allusion to a poem by ‘Attāb b. Warqā’ Shaybānī, starting with *ammā ṣahā ammā ar‘wā ammā intahā*, which has the same metre as Manūchihīrī’s *qaṣīda*.⁶⁰ This is a favourite metre among the Arab poets, while it is infrequently used by Persian poets. To reiterate the Arabic topos, he cites the Arabic words but emphasizes that he is a better poet, by changing the topos of separation and the bleak depiction of the desert into an eloquent supplication that the patron may prosper, protected from jealous folks.

The Poem’s Modern Reception

This poem is unique in the way Manūchihīrī treats the old Arabic *topos* of the raven of separation, especially his vivid description of the desert, the condition of the beloved and how he combines various poetic elements to praise his patron. In the twentieth century, the poem became popular through the *poet laureate* Muḥammad-Taqī Bahār (1886-1951), who imitated several classical poets, including Manūchihīrī.⁶¹ He recited his poem, entitled “The Owl of War” (*jughd-i jang*), which as Homa Katouzian writes, was his last great *qaṣīda*, to a select audience in 1950 on the occasion of his inauguration as President of the Iranian Peace Association.⁶² It is “lofty as well as well as moving, against war, and in praise of peace.” In this poem,

(735) states that it also means “a species of serpent, a male serpent, a small snake.” As explained by Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī, *shujā’* refers to the seventh of the southern zodiacs, while *ḥayyatu al-ḥawā* alludes to the fourteenth of the northern zodiacs. The compound *ḥayyatu al-ḥawā* refers to the snake in the hands of the charmer of snakes, who is located in the middle, holding the snake with two hands. See *Kitāb al-taḥfīm li awā’il ṣinā’ at al-taqwīm*, ed. J.D. Humā’ī (Tehran: Bābak, 1362/1983), 91-4; see also the English translation of the Arabic version, *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*, trans. R. Ramsay Wright (London: Luzac & Co, 1934-, 71-2).

⁶⁰See the index to Manūchihīrī’s *Dīwān* by Sayyid Muḥammad Dabīr-Sīyāqī, 297.

⁶¹Muḥammad-Taqī Bahār, *Dīwān*, no. 1 (Tehran: Tūs, 1380/2001), second print, 693-96.

⁶²H. Katouzian, “Poet-Laureate Bahar in the Constitutional Era,” in *Iran: Politics, History and Literature* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), 219, 298.

the crow is replaced by an owl which represents ill omen, loss, and ruination in Persian culture, associating the bird with destruction afflicted by war.

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from Manūchihīrī's application of the Arabic *topos* for his courtly Persian reader. What Manūchihīrī is doing in this *qaṣīda* is to showcase his poetic genius by transforming the Arabic *topos* of deserted encampments to a Persian panegyric mould. Persian *qaṣīdas* commonly consists of *nasīb*, *gurīzgāh*, *madīh* and *du'ā*. In the *nasīb* or the opening part, the poet tries to capture the attention of the listener or reader by treating themes such as love, wine and descriptions of nature. The *gurīzgāh* mentions the name of the patron and is a transition to the main part of the poem in which the qualities of the patron are praised. As in his other desert *qaṣīda*, Manūchihīrī is using the conventions of the Arabic *qaṣīda* for his own ends, as he opens the poem with an Arabic *topos* and concludes by praising an unidentified patron in order to secure his own position as a court poet.⁶³ The poet does not refer to the patron's identity. The editor of Manūchihīrī's *Dīwān* does not give any information, and any statement about the object of praise in this poem would be speculative.

The poet uses the Arabic *topos* to emphasize his relationship with the patron. The poem starts with the theme of the lover who arrives at the deserted encampment of the beloved and ends with the arrival of the narrator/poet at the court of the king at dawn. As J. Clinton remarks, "the figure of the poet as lover, singing his beloved's praises and suing her for the gift of love, has a striking similarity to that of the poet as eulogizer, singing the virtues of his patron and hoping thereby to win a generous gift of money."⁶⁴ The analogy between the poet and

⁶³See also J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 59 in which Meisami discusses such manipulation of the Arabic *qaṣīda* for the poet's own ends.

⁶⁴J.W. Clinton, *The Divan of Manūchihīrī Dāmghānī* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1972), 122.

lover and beloved and patron was so common during Manūchihīr's period that no "overt articulation" was necessary.⁶⁵ Manūchihīr creates symmetry between the lover/poet and the beloved/patron. The lover at the beginning of the poem arrives and sees the deserted encampment, and then journeys through the desert for one day and night, but at line 36 the lover is transformed into the poet-lover who arrives at the patron's place at dawn, leaving behind the horrifying journey in a dark and cold desert full of dangers. The warmth, light and ease the poet experiences in the patron's presence stand in sharp contrast to the description of the lover's desolate situation at the beginning of the poem. This transformation of a bleak and despairing love into a courtly and confident reception at the patron's palace indicates a change in the poet's fortunes.

This panegyric is an example of how Manūchihīr transforms an Arabic *topos*, which is chiefly employed to lament the beloved's separation, into a descriptive monument, worthy of being offered to a courtly patron. The poet ingeniously places the gloomy and bleak description of the deserted encampment over against the Persian courtly setting, finishing the poem with a positive note, showing how his knowledge of Arabic poetry enriches Persian poetic tradition. Manūchihīr is a poet who combines pre-Islamic Persian wine rituals and Arabic *topoi* in his poetry, showing creativity, fertility and richness of poetic diversity.

⁶⁵J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 67.