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The Apocalypse of Ecstasy: The Poetry of Shah Ismāʿil Revisited

This article explores the poetry of Shah Ismāʿil Safavī (d. 1524), the founder of the Safavid dynasty of Iran. Established as an important historical source by Vladimir Minorsky during World War II, the issues surrounding the poetic corpus of Shah Ismāʿil have continued to attract the attention of historians of the Safavids. With examples from the earliest and most authentic manuscript, the idea of viewing this body of works as literary sources versus political propaganda is discussed in this article.

Introduction¹

Whether dervish, commander or sultan,
We are all guests in this world for a mere five days, aren't we?²

The condensed edition of the *Bulletin for the School of Oriental and African Studies* (BSOAS, 1939-42) issued during World War II featured the Russian scholar Vladimir Minorsky's study of the poetry composed by the first Safavid shah, Ismāʿil I (1487-1524), written under his pen-name Ḥaṭāʾī ("the one from China").³ Ever since Minorsky's study, this poetry has fascinated historians with the heroic, prophetic, messianic and divine personae the poet claims. The first to exploit Shah Ismāʿil's literary corpus as an historical source, Minorsky worked with a collection housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for his study, asserting this manuscript copy was the most authentic version of Shah Ismāʿil's formal collections of poetry, or *divān*. However, the issue of Shah Ismāʿil's oldest *divān* has become more complex since Minorsky's writing. This discussion revisits this and other issues raised by Shah Ismāʿil's poetry, in particular its notorious self-glorifying expression. While historians established that Shah Ismāʿil convinced the masses of his divinely guided leadership through such poetry, it is argued here that this understanding of these extraordinary statements is not the only possible reading. This article will question the literalist interpretations of the *divān* that have dominated the historiography of Shah Ismāʿil and the early Safavid period. We will then further extend the discussion of Shah Ismāʿil's poetry to include its literary, as opposed to its political meaning.

The court poetry of monarchs does not usually cause much excitement among historians, but Ismāʿil was the author of poems self-referencing in unusual terms. And

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that is how his poetry was introduced to historiography: in the original BSOAS article, Minorsky curated examples of Shah Ismā'īl's verse with an emphasis on poems in which the author speaks in first person as an apocalyptic instrument of divine justice, the unveiled Mahdi, the incarnation of 'Alī, a veritable manifestation of God. It is not an exaggeration to say that Minorsky's selective mining of the Paris *divān* transformed the modern historical narrative of Safavid ascendancy.⁴ Using sources that harkened back to Shah Ismā'īl's grandfather Junayd (d. 1460), historians began to see the Safavids in terms of the personal charisma of its leadership, as in Roger Savory's analysis:

During the last half of the fifteenth century, before the establishment of the Safavid state, there is no doubt whatever that Safavid propaganda asserted that the Safavid leader was not merely the representative of the Hidden Imām but the Hidden Imām himself. ... The evidence of Ismā'īl's own poems is incontrovertible proof that he wished his followers to consider him a divine incarnation.⁵

This explanation continued along similar lines with Hans Roemer's assertion that "If one pursues Ismail's thought to its conclusion and relates it to his political intentions, one realizes he is proclaiming a Shi'i theocracy with himself at its head as a god-king."⁶ Shah Ismā'īl's political intentions are evidenced by his campaigns and conquests, but the chief source Roemer had in mind for Ismā'īl's "thought" was his poetry, where the image of the divine king was struck. This occurred despite the fact that the verses of self-glorification make up a minor portion of the *divān* collections, even within the Paris manuscript used by Minorsky. Recently, the extent to which these words can be presented as the catalyst of Safavid victory has rightly been called into question. Nevertheless, these ostentatious declarations are deliberate and striking. Shah Ismā'īl's poetry certainly contains the most provocative statements of self-glorifying expression we have in the Turkish language from this period, but he was not the first poet to construct exalted images in literary form. In Shah Ismā'īl's poetry, however, this literary expression coalesced with unlikely political achievement.

*Shah Ismā'īl's Divān: Sources*⁷

As Persian came to dominate the language of the state bureaucracy, the language of Shah Ismā'īl's poetry presented a reminder of the dynasty's hard-scrabble past.⁸ Known as Turkmen or Qizilbashī to distinguish it from Ottoman or Rumī Turkish, the dialect of Ismā'īl's poetry was literarily synonymous with the Safavids' tribal vanguard.⁹ In modern times linguists classify this dialect as Azeri, a branch of Western Turkish in contradistinction to Eastern or Chaghatay Turkish. We know that early generations of the Safavid family spoke and composed in Persian and related Kurdish dialects. In time these other-worldly dervishes, known for their contemplative retreats and communal feasts, seemed to abandon Persian in favor of the language spoken by the ruling castes of Anatolia and Western Iran, reflecting their

political alliances with the Turkmen dynasties.¹⁰ It was not exceptional for an upwardly mobile potentate like Ismā'īl to turn to Turkish as a literary language, like many of his contemporaries including mortal enemies of the Safavids such as such as the Aqqoyunlu Sultan Ya'qūb (d. 1490) and the Uzbek Shaybānī Khān (d. 1510). Sovereign authors of the Turkish language from this period also included the founder of the Mughal dynasty, Bābur (r. 1526-30) and the Mamluk Qānṣūḥ al-Ghawrī (d. 1516). The ironic exception to this literary preference among the ruling elite was the Ottoman Selīm I (r. 1512-20), who composed his verse in courtly Persian. Aside from language choice, poems penned by these rulers have not generated much interest from historians. Ismā'īl's poetry, however, would prove to be an exception. Only in Shah Ismā'īl's case is the choice of poetic language assigned political motivation.

As stated above, the Paris (I) version of Ismā'īl's *divān* was considered to be the definitive, authentic copy for decades, due in large part to Minorsky's argument in favor of the manuscript's pre-eminence. It was also the copy from which Turkhan Gandjei published the first complete *divān* in 1959.¹¹ Since that time, and especially in the past decade, the number of Ismā'īl's known *divān* manuscripts has grown to least twenty-five copies, including three early manuscripts (albeit incomplete) which were likely assembled during Ismā'īl's lifetime, that is, before 1524.¹² Although *divān* manuscripts were later produced as Safavid royal commissions and a selection of Ismā'īl's poems are featured in an official Safavid dynastic genealogy,¹³ historians have noted the disparity between the revolutionary religiosity that inspired Shah Ismā'īl's poetic imagination and the staid *ithnā 'asharī* Shī'ism which took its place in Safavid Iran.¹⁴ Their argument notes a disjuncture between the later Safavid establishment and the poetic claims of its founder which can be seen in Ismā'īl's poetic expression of his identity, a central issue of the interpretation of the poetry itself. The idea that Ismā'īl's poetry played a role in the establishment of Safavid rule is a major premise that influenced Safavid historiography in the twentieth century.

In an audacious voice and force familiar to modern students of the Safavid revolution, Shah Ismā'īl develops an ambitious poetic identity throughout the following *gazel*. This particular version of the poem is taken from one of the oldest manuscripts of his *divān*, housed in the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian.¹⁵ This manuscript, though incomplete, is the source preferred here both because of its earlier date (Wheeler Thackston first proposed that it was produced before 1524) and its accessibility.¹⁶ The translation below is taken from perhaps the oldest complete composition illustrating Ismā'īl's prodigious poetic identity (see Figure 1):

1. Intoxicated with the encounter, today I have come,
Always with God, here today I have come.
2. Know me as an intelligence on earth,
As reality and purity, I have come.
3. Beware of deeming me as a separate entity,
As the beloved I have now come.

Divān-i Khaṭā'ī, Freer Gallery of Art and Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC:
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, s1986.60, 38v.



Divān-i Khaṭā'i, Freer Gallery of Art and Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, s1986.60, 39r.



4. Striking the souls of hypocrites with a sword,
Today as a penitent from God I have come.
5. O people of the heart, for the lover's sake,
Today as a sacrifice, I have come.
6. The stranger thinks I am apart from the Truth,
But by knowing His Presence I have come.
7. Know me always as the essence of God,
Apart from that which is apart from Divine Truth, I have come.
8. From the summit of heaven for the people of the West,
As the dust of an intoxicant, I have come.
9. I take a life for the souls who praise,
As Ḥaṭā'ī, offering his life as a sacrifice, I have come.¹⁷

Spectacular poems such as this have made Shah Ismā'īl's literary work central to the understanding of the Safavid ethos during his rise and reign. Composed in the first person, the refrain in the *gazel* above emphasizes the "coming" (*geldim*) of a figure who strikes "the souls of hypocrites with a sword" (4), evoking traditional beliefs surrounding the Mahdi-Qā'im's final military mission in Shī'i eschatology. What marks this poem as the unique voice of Shah Ismā'īl is the poet's alignment with the Divine: "with God" (*bī-ḥūdāyim*, 1); "from the Divine Truth" (*ḥakḳtan*, 4); "by knowing His Presence" (*bihāzret āšnāyim*, 6) and even declaring his own "essence of the Divine" (*aşl-ı ḥakḳ*, 7) as the *gazel* crescendos to a close. This type of self-expression will always be a characteristic of Shah Ismā'īl's unmistakable voice. However, this interpretive speculation which views his poetic statements as reflections of the contemporary beliefs held by his followers has become increasingly insecure. First of all, we cannot date any particular composition within the *dīvān* collections, the contents of which are arranged by convention in alphabetical order.¹⁸ But even if we did have a reliable chronology, poetry is not a systematic theological statement or treatise; its theology comes through a series of literary declarations, making definitive declarations seem less so within the context of the entire poem, especially the *gazels*. Ahmet Karamustafa had recently undertaken a more systematic evaluation of the internal evidence in order to analyze the poetry's theology, characterizing it as a monist system in which the poet shares an "affinity" with the divinized figure of 'Alī.¹⁹ This is a measured refinement of previous and more cursory explanations of Ismā'īl's poetic self-identification.

True to the conventions of the poetic genre, the *gazel* poet, which Ḥaṭā'ī certainly was, communicates through deliberate ambiguity, a major aspect of the hermeneutic for this era of poetry. And while individual poems quoted from the *dīvān*, such as the *gazel* above, carry the divine king motif, external corroboration to the literal belief in Shah Ismā'īl's divine status is problematic.²⁰ The history of the contemporary scholar and chronicler Rūzbihān Khunjī (d. 1521) is cited to support the notion that divine allusions within Ismā'īl's poetry are a window into his followers' beliefs in his charisma at the time. But Khunjī specifically names Ismā'īl's father and grandfather, and not Ismā'īl, as the shaykhs who cultivated their charisma to the point of

deification. Describing the followers of the Safavid shaykhs Junayd (d. 1460) and Ḥaydar (d. 1488), Khunji recounts rumors of their resurrection:

They openly called Shaykh Junayd “God (*ilāh*)” and his son “Son of God (*ibn-Allāh*)” ... with the eyes of certainty they saw that (Junayd’s) weak corpse (*lāsha*) was stuffed with dust and blood. In his praise they said: “he is the Living One, there is no God but he.”²¹

Khunji made his claim, it must also be remembered, as a courtier of the Aqqoyunlu, who saw the treacherous Anatolians as quasi-Christians and “a crowd of error and a host of devilish imagination.”²² Like Khunji’s lurid account, contemporary European sources have also played a colorful role in their alleged witness to Ismā'īl’s rise by virtue of belief in his divinity. Long assumed by historians to be hyperbole, after the discovery of Ismā'īl’s poetry these accounts were then taken as legitimate historical sources. However, Palmira Brummet established that European conjectures of Ismā'īl’s identity were more accurate reflections of their own geo-eschatological complexes. Their collective description of Ismā'īl suggests a deified potentate who would deliver Christendom from the Ottoman menace. The records of the Venetian republic report that Ismail “says he is god,” but according to Brummet, “None of the early tellers actually saw Ismail. Hence, layers of story intermingled with literary convention, entertaining anecdote, rumor, observation, official report, trope and commercial information.”²³ Regaling his European audience, the following testimony of an anonymous Italian merchant states:

The Sufi is loved and revered as a god especially by his soldiers many of whom enter into battle without armor expecting their master Ismail to watch over them in the fight ... The name of God is forgotten throughout Persia and only that of Ismail is remembered. Everyone, and particularly his soldiers, considers him immortal.²⁴

The beliefs surrounding immortality of the subject of the report fall in line with the picture Khunji paints, but there are incredulous discrepancies as well. For instance, the religious identity of “The Sofi” (as Ismā'īl was known in Europe) is occasionally described as Christian or crypto-Christian.²⁵ Such conflation of Ismā'īl’s religious loyalty shows the contemporary sources propagating the young shah’s quasi-divine identity are at the same time some of the most untrustworthy sources of that identity. Yet so much of the value granted Ismā'īl’s *divān* as a historical source has assumed that his followers regarded its claims as accurate representations of the new shah. The European “witnesses” to Ismā'īl’s ascent are generally oblivious to the origin of their stories, but the notion of achieving his power through literary propaganda is also absent in these European accounts, mentioning neither poetry nor songs. We can only speculate about the propagation of Ismā'īl’s poetry outside of the platform of the manuscripts collected during his lifetime, but evidence for any kind of public dissemination has not come to light. The earliest reference to poetry associated with Shah

Ismā'īl that is in direct connection with an audience comes a full dynastic generation after his initial rise to the Tabriz throne in the context of a private Qizilbash ritual.²⁶

But such speculation on its actual effect is tempting given the poetry's forceful words. The Paris *divān* contains a curious piece supporting the charisma theory, translated below. Warriors have proclaimed their epitaphs on the battlefield since Homer, in a tradition that has crossed over into poetry, but this poetry is more than martial boasting. The folk rhythm and structure suggests a musicality, possibly composed to incite the troops for battle.²⁷ Its strategy also befits a soldiers' march, with the sacred warrior, the *gāzī*, marauding throughout each couplet on behalf of the family of the Muḥammad-ʿAlī, deliberately conflated with the Safavid clan. This oft-cited piece in particular seems to be speaking directly to this sacred warrior, giving him urgent directives, to come forth, to prostrate, to address the author as shah:

1. Call to Allah, Allah *gāzī*, call me the Shah, *gāzī*,
Come forth to meet me, call me the Shah, *gāzī*.
2. I am the bird of paradise, I am a commander over legions of soldiers,
I am the comrade of the Sufi, call me the Shah, *gāzī*.
3. In whatever soil you plant me I grow, I come wherever you call me,
I take the hands of the Sufi, call me the Shah, *gāzī*.
4. I was in the gallows with Maṣūm,²⁸ I was in the fires with Abraham,
I was with Moses on Sinai, call me the Shah, *gāzī*.
5. From the eve come forth, celebrate the New Year, come to the Shah,
Prostrate yourselves, *gāzī*, call me the Shah, *gāzī*.
6. With a red crown and a gray horse, with the fierce soldiers of the Prophet's
family,
With the appearance of the Prophet Joseph, call me the Shah, *gāzī*.
7. I am Ḥaṭāʾī, on the red steed, as his words of sugar, I am as sweet,
I belong to Murteza ʿAlī, call me the Shah, *gāzī*.²⁹

Each successive couplet in this martial lyric aligns the poet, who speaks as a commander of a holy army, with waves of successive prophets (Abraham, Moses and Joseph), Sufi martyrs (al-Ḥallāj) and spiritual warriors (the Sufi and the *gāzī*), culminating in the final couplet with the declaration of his dedication to ʿAlī. Does the poem reveal the actual relationship between the poet speaking as a commander and his followers? The words are polemic, bombastic and sectarian, everything that is associated with the Qizilbash at this revolutionary stage. However, despite the temptation to contextualize the piece as a soldiers' march, our conjectures remain so, as we have no direct accounts that his poetry served this purpose. Only three manuscripts of Shah Ismā'īl's *divān* remain from his lifetime, which is not a strong indication of its widespread dissemination, and this particular "march" is taken from a later version. But perhaps the numerous subsequent versions of his *divān*, those that were copied and preserved decades and centuries after his reign, are more revealing alternative interpretations of intense sectarian content.

If the lack of corroborative witness justifies skepticism about the role Shah Ismā'īl's poetry played in the establishment of Safavid rule, then the question arises as to whether this should lead to a reassessment of the poetry itself. If the political consequence of the poetry is downplayed, should T. S. Eliot's principle to regard a poem "primarily as poetry and not another thing" reorient the interpretation of his poetry?³⁰ Reinterpretation of sources, literary or otherwise, is necessary, especially as new sources come to light and known ones are reevaluated. But it is perhaps unrealistic to view poetry which is obviously engaged with religious and political imagery in total isolation of its historical author; it is perhaps too purist a literary stance to apply to a time of such religious and political tumult. Nevertheless, political readings alone fail to explain the subsequent understandings of Ismā'īl's work. In order to account for this phenomenon, more literary, as opposed to literal, interpretations may better serve our understanding.

Shah Ismā'īl's Apocalypse

Previous analyses of Shah Ismā'īl's poetic allusions to the Mahdi have focused on his early career, his unlikely rise to establish Safavid Iran. In the same vein, his punishing defeat before the army of the Ottoman Selim I at the battle of Chaldiran in 1514 allegedly brought to an end any "messianic pretensions" previously revealed in his poetry.³¹ Ali Anooshahr dates the *divān* before the Safavid capture of Tabriz, but after the time of the young shaykh's departure from his educational haven in Gilan.³² If we are to date the more powerful images early (before 1501), then the alignment of Shah Ismā'īl's claims with deliberate and precise reference from Shī'ī apocalyptic culture is a strong indication of the guiding hand of his elders. Some of the grandiose imagery suits an adolescent prodigy groomed by a cabal of loyal tutors with a vested interest in augmenting the exceptionalism of their charge. This indeed may account for some of the more dramatic images. Yet many of these images were expressed by one with vision enough to construct them to endure beyond the immediate promised utopia. But *in toto*, Shah Ismā'īl's *divān* is complex and sophisticated enough to be cited as a major influence in the development of early modern poetics in the Turkish idiom.

However, additional sources that paralleled Ismā'īl's career with the appearance of the Mahdi, such as the *Ross Anonymous*, are now recognized as literary narratives that came much later.³³ As for the *divān* itself, Ismā'īl's motif of the mysterious eschatological figure have held up as some of its most arresting images. In some verses the poet even speaks as the Mahdi in first person, quoting directly from Shī'ī apocalyptic prediction, "as the ring of Solomon, the staff of Moses, and the flood of Noah, I have now come."³⁴ But as often, the apocalyptic element is subtle and ethereal, certainly more so than Ismā'īl is given credit for. The poems that employ nuanced strategies should be emphasized as least as much if we are to get a fuller picture of Ismā'īl's contribution as a poet.

In several pieces, one of them well known, Shah Ismā'īl explicitly heralds the coming savior in his effort to express the significance of his emerging dynasty.

Perhaps these verses indicate an early reckoning with his own significance as the leader of the emerging order, of what Ali Anooshahr characterizes as the obvious “expression of the thirteen-year-old shah’s political agenda.”³⁵ The following *qaside*, first brought to our attention by Minorsky, is the most obvious and propaganda-like of all of his poems, bearing an imminent messiah theme:

1. May God be glorified, come see that the light of God has come,
Muḥammed Muṣṭafā, the seal of all prophets has come.
2. The souls of the lovers are joyous, the destiny of the faithful is fulfilled,
The spirit of believers has awakened, purity has come, purity has come.
3. In all lands for all eras, it is the advent of the righteous,
From the heavens, from the angels, many greetings have come.
4. The perfect guide (*mürşid-i kāmīl*) has arrived to be the leader of all people,
All of the *ġāzīs* rejoice for the seal of the prophets has come.
5. Man stands before God, prostrate and do not follow Satan,
He has put on the clothes of man, God has come.
6. The angels have descended from the heavens, announcing good news to the
knowing,
The hour of death to the outsiders and disaster to the Yezīds³⁶ have come.
7. Amidst corruption, your candle extinguished into darkness,
Open your eyes, see that like the moon in darkness, religion has come.
8. Ḥalīlullah³⁷ has donned new garments, he was given the name İsmā’īl,
Sacrifice your lives, for a proclamation from God has come.
9. My beautiful Shah, my moon, my place of desire, my heart’s desire,
My perfected manifestation of God, the elect of saints has come.
10. Do not follow that demon by the name of ‘Azāzīl,³⁸
Take the hand of the guiding Imam, come see the path of God.
11. The world followed Pharaoh through sorcery,
But Moses’ staff, to devour like a dragon, has come.
12. The beautiful *ġāzīs* unleashed, the crown of the dynasty on their heads,
This is the *mahdī*’s time, to the cyclical world the eternal light has come.
13. His eye is *şād*, his tongue as *ṭāhā*, his cheeks as *kāf* and the *Ḳurān*,
His eyebrows as *nūn* his hair as “The Night,” his face as the midday sun, he has
come.³⁹
14. Submit to the son of İmām Shah Ḥayder, heart and soul,
My Imams Ca’fer Şadīk and ‘Alī Mūsā Rızā have come.
15. Desperate Ḥaṭā’ī desires union with that beauty of the Shah,
Sell your life, for knowledge worth the soul has come.⁴⁰

For Ḥaṭā’ī, the Mahdi is clearly a muse, especially in his hymns of praise. It is quite reasonable to characterize reference to the universal and ubiquitous Shī’ī figure as personal, that is to see the “Mahdi’s time” (12) as one in the same with İsmā’īl’s. Though allowing some ambiguity about the identity cast in the central role, the poet relays a militancy on behalf of the Mahdi, with “all of the *ġāzīs*” welcoming

the “seal of the Prophets” (4). Alluding to the Safavids’ dervish past, the “murşid-i kamil” becomes the “leader of all people” (4), with the “beautiful *ğāzīs* unleashed, the crown of the dynasty on their head.” Though the author leaves the identity of the dynasty deliberately vague, the parallels to the Safavid family are obvious and intentional.

Scholars have seen in Shah Ismā'īl’s poetry the identity of this messianic figure conflated with the identity of the poet himself.⁴¹ If not promoting himself as the eschatological Mahdi, internal evidence within the poetry suggests the author intended to present himself as the Mahdi’s representative.⁴² Most recently, Rıza Yıldırım has refined the Mahdist angle by interpreting Shah Ismā'īl’s poetic persona in light of the heroic *şāhib-i khurūj* figures that appeared in popular ‘Alid epics during the period leading up to the establishment of the Safavids.⁴³ These sectarian heroes, who took up the task of avenging Ḥusayn’s blood after centuries of quietism, were the archetypes Ismā'īl drew upon to cultivate both the mystique of his poetic identity and his revolution.⁴⁴ Rather than the singular end-time equalizer himself, Shah Ismā'īl was taken as one of several “heroic archetypes” in an effective call to extract vengeance for Ḥusayn, according to Yıldırım.

Whether or not Ismā'īl intended to present himself as the eschatological Mahdi, or some sort of “insurrectionist” on behalf of the Shī'ī martyrs, it remains true that one of the most intriguing figures appearing in Shah Ismā'īl’s *divān* poetry is a divinely guided savior. As the Mahdi specifically developed through the history of Shī'ism, it emerged by this time as an immortal commander lying in wait to break out and redress all of history’s injustices for a final time. Belief in his advent throughout the Muslim world, both Sunni and Shī'ī, was particularly intense during the sixteenth century, as it coincided with the millennium of the *hijrī* calendar.⁴⁵ For *ithnā ‘asharī* Shī'ism, which came to define Safavid Iran, the identity of the Mahdi was confidently placed in the obscured Twelfth Imam, Muḥammad al-Mahdī. For the most part Shah Ismā'īl defers to *ithnā ‘asharī* authority in this identification.

Thus it is through the Twelfth Imam that Ḥaṭā'ī most resolutely explores the significance of the Mahdi in his poetry. And it is specifically within the *qasīde* form dedicated to the Twelve Imams that Ḥaṭā'ī’s treatment of the Mahdi not only conforms to the convention of Twelver piety, but also contributes to its development. Ernest and lengthy, the *qasīde* is an ancient, originally Arabic, vehicle of formal poetic praise. While the form may be less frequently employed than the *ğazel* in the *divān* collections as a whole, they remain Shah Ismā'īl’s most consistent forms of religious expression, as seen in those *qasīdes* in praise of ‘Alī and the Twelve Imams (*düvazdah imām*). These poems are also the most influential of Ḥaṭā'ī’s forms, stretching beyond Shah Ismā'īl’s lifetime among the Safavids’ descendant communities. Taken from the Smithsonian manuscript, the following *qasīde* is one of several effuse though conventional praise hymns to the Twelve Imams. The Mahdi makes his due appearance in the penultimate couplet (see Figure 2):

Divān-i Khatā'i, Freer Gallery of Art and Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, s1986.60, 49v.



Divān-i Khatā'i, Freer Gallery of Art and Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, s1986.60, 50r.



1. From God, the intercessor of sinners, Muḥammad Muṣṭafa has come,
Glory to the people of the world, God's only chosen has come.
2. My shah, the leader of the world, the light of religion,
Taking *Zülfiḳar* in his hand, 'Alī Murteza has come.
3. In his hand the strength of God, disaster to the poison of assassins,
By God's command, with the blessing of the people, Ḥasan has come.
4. The fate of Ḥusayn's death, written on his forehead,
To your hearts from divine wisdom, purity has come.
5. Asylum for the afflicted has come in Zeyn al-'Abidīn,
So that to all who are blind, illumination has come.
6. Muḥammad Bāḳir, the light of my eyes,
To the people of the path, the master of fidelity has come.
7. Ca'far Ṣādiq, at the head of the straight path,
To the hearts of those who praise him, nourishment has come.
8. Mūsi-i Kāzım fulfilling Divine commands day and night,
To those who remain with him, grace and favor have come.
9. Always under Divine command, 'Alī Mūsā Rizā has come,
To those who mourn him, God's blessing has come.
10. Muḥammed Taḳī is the reader of hearts, the light of my soul,
To him many greetings from the angels in heaven have come.
11. 'Alī Naḳī remains the cure of all pain, all sickness,
As cure for the blind, the dust under his foot has come.
12. Those who love Ḥasan 'Askerī with all their soul reach God,
From the compassionate, many robes of honor have come.
13. Muḥammed is the *mahdī*, the mystery of the saints of the present day,
To us the guide on the path of the Islamic religion has come.
14. Oh Lord, is Ḥaṭā'ī the destitute worthy of Your Presence?
To the path of the Imams, with his life as a sacrifice, he has come.⁴⁶

Rather than dominating the central theme, the Mahdī's entry in this *qasīde* is in due order, appearing in sequence at the end of a litany of praise and honor to Muḥammed and each of the Twelve Imams the poem honors. Ḥaṭā'ī comes in reverently at the end, making a humble appearance in the concluding couplet as an unworthy destitute. The poem's unremarkable treatment of both the Mahdī and the author might account for its continued relevance as a pious form of poetry. Through a process of creative pseudonymity, works bearing the pen-name of Ḥaṭā'ī were revered among the Qizilbash tribes as they developed into permanent sectarian communities after the historical author's death. It is clear that within this additional corpus, the author's personal identity as Shah Ismā'īl became secondary to the devotional content of the poetry, especially in its major motif of praise for the Imams. The *düvazdeh imām* continued to hold a central place within the repertoire of the Qizilbash-Alevi, within their sacred texts and integrated into ritual. Ḥaṭā'ī's attributed *düvazdeh imām* form, placed throughout Alevi ritual and sacred texts, is perhaps the most direct connection between the historical corpus and the tradition of poets that drew inspiration from it.

But to return to the historical corpus, heralding the return of an eschatological savior through poetry has long precedent in Shī'ī history, as seen with the Kaysanites, among whom central Shī'ī messianic ideas crystalized.⁴⁷ But unlike the bards exalting Ibn al-Hanafiyya's (d. 700-701) status as a Mahdi, Shah Ismā'īl's legacy as a poet endured beyond that of a propagandist, if indeed he intended to compose for that purpose. At issue here is the causative connection assumed between Shah Ismā'īl's apocalyptic imagery in his poetry and the actual political achievements of his early career. These apocalyptic elements, outliving any of the disappointments of his messianic or political career, survived through the transmission of the *divān*. Therefore, even the most personal and political self-references within the *divān* hold up as literary expression in a way that the works of propagandists fail to.

In other words, the apocalyptic motif in Shah Ismā'īl's *divān* persists as a viable literary characteristic beyond verbatim readings, or even revisionist readings of the poetry's surmised political influence. There can be little question that Shah Ismā'īl's apocalyptic vision informed his literary odyssey, and this tendency is present in the earliest collections we have. But his apocalyptic themes are not automatically political or even eschatological in the literal sense. It is helpful here to distinguish between what Said Amir Arjomand refers to as the "apocalyptic worldview" and "political messianism." Since the latter is often expressed through the language of the former, the concepts are often conflated. But from a literary point of view, the distinction is essential, as it is the difference between the poet and the political propagandist, a distinction which is meaningful in this context. As Arjomand states, "Political messianism inevitably motivates militant activism."⁴⁸ And although Shah Ismā'īl's words are assumed to coincide with the "militant activism" among his followers, manuscripts of his *divān* circulated long after the dissipation of this activism, if in fact his poetry was a direct catalyst for political activism during his lifetime. More importantly, Ḥaṭā'ī's apocalyptic motifs are not exclusively eschatological, but carry certain features independent of eschatology that stand on their own, building upon a much older literary foundation.

Shah Ismā'īl's poetry can be more fully interpreted under Arjomand's "apocalyptic worldview," which is not only "historically prior" to political messianism, as Arjomand observes, it is also considerably more ancient. In its *longue durée* consideration, apocalyptic expression is continuously adjusted and cannot be confined to a fixed political agenda, making it amenable to multiple interpretations. As its Greek etymology indicates, the term "Apocalypse" entered the literary stream through the term for "Revelation," with the images from the last book of the Christian canon eventually dominating connotations of the term. But the complexity of the apocalyptic lens stretches further back to Hebrew biblical literature. In this earlier stage, apocalyptic literature was shaped by the orientation found in the Book of Daniel in its primary dichotomy: the present world of wickedness up against the righteous dispensation of the future, and, above all, the re-occurring battle of good versus evil, revealed piecemeal in elaborate, often cryptic, symbolism. Of course, the young Ismā'īl most likely absorbed his apocalyptic sensibility directly from the Qur'an, rather than from superseded biblical sources. And the Qur'anic font from which Ḥaṭā'ī draws his images is further evidence that he is operating on the level of "Apocalyptic" in this earlier sense

of an unveiling or revealing of the hidden. Viewed as such, the interpretation of Ḥaṭā'ī's apocalyptic expression, rather than literal insights into his public life, must be open to the concept of metaphor.

To demonstrate Ḥaṭā'ī's openness to the apocalyptic metaphor, we should look to those images he relies upon with a degree of literary consistency. For example, Shah Ismā'īl identifies with the mythical Alexander the Great, predictably in his role as world conqueror. Listed alongside the prophets as well as ancient Iranian kings, Ḥaṭā'ī struts: "I am the immortal Ḥīẓr, Jesus, Mary, and the Alexander of this age."⁴⁹ But at other times Ḥaṭā'ī's referencing of Alexander has less to do with his ambitious territorial designs and more with his understanding of esoteric literary interpretation. Louis Massignon famously referred to the Surah of the Cave, where Alexander makes a prominent appearance as Dhū al-Qarnayn ("of the two horns"), as the "Apocalypse of Islam."⁵⁰ Through its enigmatic episodes in which reality lies hidden, the Surah of the Cave both exemplifies and interprets the meaning of revelation itself. This type of scriptural criticism is helpful in understanding the importance of Surah's images in subsequent literature, including Shah Ismā'īl's poetry. Certainly more possibility is open to us if we approach Ḥaṭā'ī's self-expressions as a form of cyclical apocalypses, that is, a series of self-revelations with the images constructed to serve the internal strategies of the poem. Assuming Ismā'īl's grandiose statements should be received as a linear (and literal) eschatology becomes more anachronistic as time goes on.

It is also through the mysterious guide of Moses (identified by later commentators as Ḥīẓr, the "Green One") that Ḥaṭā'ī's indebtedness to the eighteenth Surah can be seen. Even apart from his extended appearance in the Surah of the Cave (though not by name), Ḥīẓr is a transcendent figure in Islamic culture, with a variegated extra-Quranic folk life. A Sufi *pīr*, saint, savior and prophet, avatars of Ḥīẓr bend well with Ḥaṭā'ī's continuous search for ways to express divine realities, in both creative and conventional ways. Conventionally, Ḥīẓr stands as a direct connection to the hunted "Water of Life," as in the *divāns* of countless other Islamicate poets. Following are some of Ḥaṭā'ī's references to Ḥīẓr and Alexander in their shared connection to the life-giving waters:

Just like the grail of the Prophet Ḥīẓr,
 The wine it holds is the water of life (*āb-i ḥayat*).⁵¹
 You long for the fountain of life (*çeşme-i ḥayvan*) Ḥīẓr came upon,
 Its waters falling as far as the contours of your lips.⁵²
 The shadow above your lip resembles Ḥīẓr,
 Possessing the shores of the fountain of life.⁵³
 The cup-bearer with the soft stubble fills your heart,
 The cup of Ḥīẓr is filled with the water from the fountain of life.⁵⁴
 I do not bow to the master hidden in the darkness of your curl,
 May the fountain of life from the time of Iskender flow again.⁵⁵

The *gazels* from which these references are taken are neither militant nor sectarian, and certainly not eschatological. Rather, they are examples of the dominant strategy

of the most common form of *divān* poetry, the *gazel*, in which unrequited love is the primary metaphor for seeking God. In conformity with this paradigm, references to Ḥizr (and to a lesser extent Alexander) are common in *divān* poetry, increasing the plausibility of a literary interpretation of these verses. Ḥizr stands as a metaphor for the elusive Beloved, with access to the most coveted treasure, the water that procures an infinite lifespan. The author returns to the concept of revelation as the unveiling of spiritual mysteries continuously throughout his *divān*, as in the following *gazel* from the Smithsonian manuscript. Again, we have no hard evidence of when particular pieces were composed, but one can nevertheless get a sense of a literary maturity in his presentation of the classical *gazel* strategy, especially in the use of apocalyptic images that shed their obvious eschatology to become more revelatory, more sophisticated, and more consciously literary. Through the classic *gazel* paradigm, in his own distinctive voice, Ḥaṭā'i reveals the divine encounter through the language of a human desire, achieving the symbiotic poetic relationship between carnal love and Divine encounter:

1. When we looked upon your face, our moon became sacred,
What a wondrous visage our God has created.
2. I reached the straight path through your visage,
Our path led us to the waters of life (*āb-i ḥayvāne*).
3. All who behold your dark locks are calmed,
Who would dare dye those locks we curse.
4. From the hand of the immortal Ḥizr we drank the waters of life,
We pitched our tent before 'Īsā and Meryem.
5. Reaching the *ka'be* I offered my life as the sacrifice,
Becoming a pilgrim, I spilled blood in our place of sacrifice.
6. I saw the arch of your eyebrows, I made it my *kible*,
Because the dust of your feet became our destination.
7. This Ḥaṭā'i wears pilgrim's clothing [*iḥrām*] for your *ka'ba* of Divine love,
At that hour, he ascended to the throne in remembrance of God.⁵⁶

The first couplet suggests the presence of a vision unveiled, the face of the Beloved. The vision of the Beloved and the reference to the elusive Ḥizr of the first lines meld into unified images serving the central metaphor of the *haj* as the quest for the encounter of the Divine Beloved: the garb of the tent and pilgrim, the place of sacrifice, and the *ka'ba*. In the final couplet the poet is rewarded with a beatific vision after his ascent to the throne of God. The fact that Ḥaṭā'i is granted an ascent to the Divine is an indication of his successful spiritual achievement we shall return to in the next section.

Although the poet establishes his mastery of the metaphoric possibility, Shah Ismā'il's poetic contribution often seems confined to the apocalyptic as the term later developed: a mission of vengeance and upheaval straddling the end of time. At times eschatological and even political, Ḥaṭā'i's use of apocalyptic images also, and more often, demonstrates literary depth, which explains not only the survival of the

corpus but how it may have been perceived among subsequent generations. Ḥaṭā'ī constructs images and figures with an apocalyptic perspective, but seeing these images as manipulation to achieve political goals is not inevitable. Moreover, as a source of a developing religiosity, his poetry remained influential for much longer than any particular political circumstance. What is being refined here is the addition of possible literary nuance in the interpretation of Shah Ismā'īl's striking, and often subtle, treatment of apocalyptic themes and personae.

A Literary View of Divine Union

If we begin to see Shah Ismā'īl's poetry in its primary context, the poetic one, then some widely held assumptions about his work must be refined. The first assumption is the poor quality of his verse. When regarded merely as self-promotion, the literary contribution Shah Ismā'īl made to the development of early modern Azeri is the first casualty. However, if we follow Azeri literary historians and categorize Shah Ismā'īl as an architect of Azeri poetry, he stands alongside Nesīmī (executed c. 1418) and Fuḡūlī (d. 1555) as well as the Qaraḡoyunlu ruler Jihān Shāh (d. 1467) who wrote under the pen-name Ḥaḡīḡī. ⁵⁷ Azeri scholars of the former Soviet republic were the first to champion Shāh Ismā'īl's literary legacy: Azizaga Memedov referred to Shah Ismā'īl as a "master" of poetry, central to the development of literary Azeri. ⁵⁸ This is a stark contrast to Minorsky's assessment of the "banal" images and "monotonous" themes of the *divān*, as well as to Jean Aubin's judgment of its "contenu juvenile." ⁵⁹ But today in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Shah Ismā'īl is an iconic figure in its national literary canon.

When seen in a literary context, we must acknowledge that the majority of Shah Ismā'īl's poetry is conventional relative to time, place and placement within Azeri literary history. In that way we can concede its treatment as literature apart from its limited-time use as Safavid propaganda. This again leads to the question of intended audience. When historians pass over the mainstream of Shah Ismā'īl's poetry as "ordinary lyrics in which pagan hedonism is often interwoven with Sufi ecstasy" ⁶⁰ in order to dwell on his self-referential lyrics, a distortion occurs because it is the "ordinary" lyrics that dominate his poetic corpus. Lacking accounts that place this poetry in its received context, we are left with the conclusion that Ismā'īl's poetry would be understood and appreciated by his intended audience, consisting of those who understood and appreciated such things. Thus, this audience must somehow be reimagined to include subsequent generations as well as non-combatants. Standing primarily as an expression of love, the poetry's militant, messianic and self-aggrandizing pieces constitute a fraction of the corpus as a whole. They remain an interesting segment of the corpus, but they must also be read as sources embedded within a larger literary tradition.

Shah Ismā'īl's formal collections consist of a variety of classical poetic forms, with the *ḡazel* predominating. ⁶¹ The numerical dominance of the *ḡazel* form is another indication of the placement of the corpus within the wider poetic culture. Significant

studies emphasize the *ġazel* as the primary vehicle in Islamicate literary culture, as the formal composition for centuries used to express unrequited love, both human and divine, carnal and incorporeal.⁶² Shah Ismāʿil's *divān* is no different in its reliance on this form and its use of metaphor. In much the same way as Baroque artists depicted sensual tension to intensify a Divine presence, so too does the erotic language parallel a mystical reality in these poetic images.⁶³ In hundreds of *ġazels*, Ḥaṭāʾī, like his contemporaries, stands as the dejected lover and the Beloved stands for the most part unrequited. Shah Ismāʿil's *ġazels* also follow the poet's tortured trance through its ecstatic highs and longer, anguishing lows, as in the following *ġazel* from the Smithsonian manuscript (see Figure 3):

1. Oh rose cheek, if I declare your lips my soul, I would be right,
If I declare your lock of hair an infidel against your believing face, I would be right.
2. I asked the doctor for a cure form my pain, it was not found,
If I declare your ruby lips the cure for this pain of love, I would be right.
3. Who leans against your threshold finds perpetual fortune,
If I declare your threshold to be the attributes of the Almighty, then I would be right.
4. But your door is a place of affliction and dejection,
And if I declare it vast as Solomon's dominion, then I would be right.
5. In the remembrance (*zīkr*) of you beauty Ḥaṭāʾī found Divine light,
If I declare the heat of your breath is a page of the Ḳurʾān, I would be right.⁶⁴

By ruefully describing the torture resulting from the Beloved's self-imposed distance, the author creates the classical paradigm of the *ġazel* in a familiar lament. In this way, most of Ḥaṭāʾī's works, like the one above, are remarkably conventional for their content. However strong the emphasis on earthy themes and images, such as the beloved's "rose cheeks" (1), "ruby lips" (2) and the heat of his breath (5), it should not obfuscate the mystical structure often underlying the paradigm, an interpretive lens which gives the genre its meaning and poignancy. It is within the mystical elements that Ḥaṭāʾī most displays his skill in guiding the central drama—that is, through his manipulation of the profane to express a longing for the sacred. Most of his *divān* poetry is a constant mixing and realignment of the sensual and the scriptural, contributing to an ongoing erotic allegory. While the psychology of real human relations is a valid way to understand *divan* poetry, the potential of the Beloved's divine identity is an important facet of the genre's complexity. As a poet fully embracing this culture, the mystical-religious character of Shah Ismāʿil's approach to the *ġazel* is traditional rather than aberrant. While certain tropes may seem blasphemous to the uninitiated, these expressions of desperate irreverence are suitable for the genre:

Your eyes, your locks of hair took my religion from me,
Well done! You have made me an infidel [*kafer*], an enemy of religion.
That one that bewilders me, that offspring of a houri,
Is he not the stature of Ṭūbā, are his lips not like the river Kevser?⁶⁵

Divān-i Khaṭā'ī, Freer Gallery of Art and Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, s1986.60, 45r.



The paradisiacal references above clearly place the poetry within the familiar role-playing of the drama, with the Beloved drawn as a *hourī*'s offspring, and the poet brought to the point of apostasy. This desperate pursuit is a noble one however, for like the lusty Zuleyhā in her obsession with the ethereal beauty of Yūsuf, ultimately it is a quest for the Divine. In the following couplet, the poet describes the intense desire for a *kouros* with his physical features likened to the images of scripture.

Your face is the *surah* of Yūsuf, your lips are from the waters of Kevser,
Your stature is that of Ṭubā, but your beard is only youthful stubble.⁶⁶

Eliciting literary meanings from Ḥaṭā'ī's poetry does not eliminate the possibility that this poetry was perhaps received at one time as the political-religious statements in service of the Safavid power. At the same time, the mechanics of his poetic propaganda are elusive enough to consider alternative understandings of the verse, both simultaneous and subsequent. While accounts directly linking Ismā'īl's poetry to propaganda during his lifetime remain obscure, what is known are more common and enduring interpretations of his allusions. We cannot know precisely how Ismā'īl's poetry boosted his popularity, but we do know that Shah Ismā'īl's *divān* proliferated beyond his reign. This indicates a literary accommodation of these verses after Shah Ismā'īl's image as a divinely guided ruler would have tarnished considerably.

The following *gazel* shows the possibility of reading the poetry on two levels. What "Ḥaṭā'ī desires," the refrain carried throughout, could easily be seen as a litany of demands made upon his followers, especially his desire for "*gāzā* from the *gāzīs*" (6). However, with a literary interpretation the piece reveals itself as poetry and something less cynical than a political pamphlet emerges (see Figure 4).

1. Ḥaṭā'ī desires from you purity for the Shah,
Ḥaṭā'ī desires goodness kindness and munificence.
2. Ḥaṭā'ī desires the zinc for his eyes,⁶⁷
From the dust of your feet, oh Shah of Shahs.
3. He does not wish to separate from your threshold,
Do not cause him pain, for Ḥaṭā'ī desires fidelity.
4. Take that black lovelock from the moon face,
Open your veil, Ḥaṭā'ī desires your face.
5. To arrive to this straight path to the Shah,
Ḥaṭā'ī desires to be your only guide.
6. Ḥaṭā'ī desires *gāzā* from the *gāzīs*,
Always against the Yezīds, infidels and Mervāns.⁶⁸

Despite the militant interjection in the signature couplet, against the "Yezīds, infidels and Mervāns," the *gazel* is almost archetypal in its portrayal of spiritual passion. Given the identity of the author, of course, the "Shah" introduced in the first couplet is an ambiguous figure to the audience. However, the sovereign was a stock symbol for the all-powerful Beloved, who is at the same time the destination of the path (5), the

Divān-i Khaṭā'ī, Freer Gallery of Art and Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, s1986.60, 47v.



Divān-i Khaṭā'ī, Freer Gallery of Art and Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, s1986.60, 48r.



moon-face behind the veil (5). The literary contribution achieved within Ḥaṭā'ī's conventional, even typical, *gazel*s lies in his juxtaposition and balance of sacred and sensual images.

Following the standard practice, Shah Ismā'īl's historical poetry collections are arranged alphabetically, according to poetic form, with classical love-centered *gazel*s mixed in with the more anomalous battle hymns and apocalyptic self-disclosures, sometimes within the same poem. Did these sometimes violent interjections reflect the author's psychological reality in an early example of confessional poetry? It is a legitimate question which has invited speculation. Irène Mélikoff returned to this question often: "Did Shah Ismail really believe in his divine essence? In reading his exalted poems and remembering his young age, one is tempted to think he really believed that he was the incarnation of Ali. He said it repeatedly in his poems."⁶⁹ The issue is raised again in the following selection from the Paris *dīvān*, the manuscript in which most of the self-referential poems remain intact:

1. Come, come here all of you, to love, which is mine,
You laugh at the ascetic but light and faith are mine.
2. In my hands are the earth and sky, as well as His wisdom and power,
The earth, air, water and fire all together are mine.
3. God, may his name be exalted, brought down four books to the earth.
Don't turn from me, because all scripture is mine.
4. Don't be dependent on the scribe's black and white [ink], it will lead you astray,
Open your ears and listen to my word, the Qur'ān is mine.
5. The world has many heroes such as Rustam and Zāl,
The dominion of Iskender and the possessions of Süleyman are mine.
6. I gave Eyyüb affliction, pain and disaster,
Call on me, the relief is mine.
7. I will cause Ya'qub bitter tears and longing for Yūsuf,
For a forty-day retreat, the throne and land of Egypt are mine.
8. Pushing forward the brave men, I am 'Alī's descendant, his family
Zülfikar, the crown and Döldül are the three signs that are mine.
9. In the very beginning, I gave my life as a sacrifice to the Shah,
If he accepts it, the feast of the sacrifice is mine.
10. I am Ḥaṭā'ī, praising the qualities of the Shah,
I gird my lions with truth, and the record book is mine.⁷⁰

The extent of Ḥaṭā'ī's desire for both worldly and spiritual things is fully revealed in this *gazel*. The ancient Iranian warriors Rustam and Zāl form a seamless chain with Alexander, and continue through the Quranic prophets, and through 'Alī and his descendants. The illustrious lineage culminates in the author, who possess the qualities of them all, from the dominion of Solomon, to the record book on Judgment Day. The blatant hubris, the extravagant spiritual claims, the posturing of Ḥaṭā'ī's more infamous pieces seems unbearable against the subtlety of the more conventional *gazel*s. But before confining the exuberant self-regard to the effect it presumably had on

his followers, the mystical-literary assumptions on which it is based must be considered. Beyond seeing this as the deviant expression of a megalomaniac, the words can be seen as part of a wider understanding, as a significant strain of Sufi expression, a spiritual tradition within which we know Ismā'il was schooled. Perhaps by this time in its decadent phase, statements of this intensity were actually established ways in which to express spiritual, as opposed to political, achievement.

Acknowledging Ismā'il first as a poet, Wheeler Thackston analyzed how he skillfully mirrors the *gazel's* standard themes and images to mystical realities. Thackston saw this as a literary process, described as a "conflation of attributes" in which "the devotee 'becomes' the lover in all respects, and the worshipped 'becomes' the beloved."⁷¹ In other words, in the works often cited as evidence of Shah Ismā'il's literal deification are based on a *literary* strategy in which the lover has actually become the Beloved within the poem. As the lover is now completely conflated with the Beloved, that which the poet utters is actually the utterances of the Beloved: "Beware of deeming me as a separate entity / As the beloved I have now come [*dilrūbayim*]."⁷² In addition to being a literary technique, this identification of the author with the Beloved constitutes a form of identification that goes even further back. It is a technique representing an older form of expressing ecstatic union, one that we can surmise through his references Shah Ismā'il was well acquainted with.

In fact, the unitive triumph present in Shah Ismā'il's poetry has a long history as an elite form of mystical expression identified as *shath* (plural: *shathiyāt*), from the root of "outpouring, overflowing." This outpouring of language is to be taken as a mystical reality, not a political literalism. As the famous scholar of religious sciences al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) defined the controversial phenomenon:

[*Shathiyat* are] broad, extravagant claims (made) in passionate love of God most high, in the union that is independent of outward actions, so that some go to the extent of claiming unification, rending of the veil, contemplative vision (of God), and oral conversation (with God) ... In this they resemble al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, who was crucified for uttering words of this kind, and they quote his saying, "I am the Truth."⁷³

The revelation materializes in the extravagance of *shath* expressions, which often centered on the nature of self.⁷⁴ Although understood as "ecstatic expressions" *shathiyāt* do not necessarily manifest during an ecstatic, non-rational state. According to Carl Ernst, "The majority [of *shathiyāt*] are admittedly answers to questions, written replies to letters, or actions taken in response to some need."⁷⁵ Concerning Shah Ismā'il's medium of *shathiyāt*, they are similarly generated during a state in which full control of the faculties are required such as the composition of classical *'arūz* poetry. However outrageous, the history of this expression shows that it can be a sober, articulate and, in the poet's case, metered, expression of God's all-absorbing existence.⁷⁶

Although Shah Ismā'il's images suggest his employment of classical *shath* expression, these expressions seem anachronistic from his pen and exalted place.

The archetypes of *shathiyāt* are represented by early, mythic figures such as Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī (d. circa 875)—“How great is my glory” and Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (executed 922)—“I am the Divine Truth.” The extended commentaries on the subject date from the classical period as well, such as Rūzbihān Baqlī’s (d. 1209) *Sharḥ-i Shathīyyat*. Therefore, the few studies which have dealt extensively with the phenomenon of *shathīyyāt*, most notably Carl Ernst’s study, are limited in scope to the classical period of Sufism, from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, and do not venture into its later developments.⁷⁷

According to Ernst, after the classical period, this form of inspired speech became formalized as a “conventional rhetorical device.”⁷⁸ As in Shah Ismā‘īl’s works, forms of *shathīyyāt* continued to serve as a mode of poetic expression in quotations from past masters and martyrs. The references to al-Ḥallāj are a characteristic of Shah Ismā‘īl’s poetry, a signaling of the false blasphemy of similar statements. The almost formulaic homage to al-Ḥallāj, his martyrdom and his infamous words, strongly suggests Shah Ismā‘īl’s deliberate interplay with the established technique of the “theophanic locution”:

The mystery of *anā al-ḥakk* is hidden here in my heart,
 I am the Absolute Truth, what I say is Truth.⁷⁹
 I am the gallows of the highest heaven,
 How I hang Maṣṣūr from my rope.⁸⁰
 To see His light manifest, I kiss your hand in respect,
 Now I am Maṣṣūr, and you must send me to the gallows.⁸¹
 At one time, with Ḥūsayn, the accusers flayed my skin,
 At one time I wore Maṣṣūr’s clothes, I declared *anā al-ḥakk* in the gallows.⁸²
 I am Ḥaṭā‘ī, I do not suffer for I have uttered *anā al-ḥakk*,
 Like Ḥayder, I traversed the battlefield bravely.⁸³

The poet and martyr Nesīmī (d. c. 1418) is often cited as the single most direct literary influence on Shah Ismā‘īl’s poetry. A follower, and likely a direct disciple of Faḍl Allāh Ḥurūfī (d. 1394), Nesīmī was also executed like his master, possibly as a result of his heretical utterances.⁸⁴ Nesīmī’s influence, alongside the decidedly eccentric Ḥurūfī influence on Shah Ismā‘īl’s poetry, has led to frequent speculation regarding Ismā‘īl’s Ḥurūfī leanings.⁸⁵ Both poets take quotations from the *shathīyyāt* of al-Ḥallāj. Like numerous poets and mystics since al-Ḥallāj, recalling the famous martyr both by name and through his immortal declarations, a wealth of associations are created, with the poet and his audience partaking in the mystical experience of *doctor ecstaticus* himself.

Nesīmī biographer Kathleen Burrill cites the specific references to Nesīmī in Shah Ismā‘īl’s poetry to further demonstrate the link between these two poets of the southern Turkish idiom.⁸⁶ However, it should be noted that explicit mentions of Nesīmī are found in Shah Ismā‘īl’s later, attributed poetry, calling the historic authenticity of these references into question. The following quatrain bearing Shah Ismā‘īl’s *mahlas* is taken from a poem in the syllabic meter, alludes to Nesīmī’s gruesome execution method:

Shah Hatayi, behold the grace of God,
Put the rope on the neck of Mansur,
Nesimî became *Hak* with *Hak*,
He is that flayed flesh of his.⁸⁷

Despite their affinities, according to Burrill, the comparison of Shah Ismā'īl to Nesimî is limited. The two are distinguished because Shah Ismā'īl's expressions of self-exaltation constitute "the words of a warrior-poet pressing his divine rights as king, not those of the intoxicated mystic treading the road to martyrdom at Aleppo."⁸⁸ Shah Ismā'īl's apothecic claims are "more insistent, more unmistakably personal than are Nesimî's."⁸⁹ It is Shah Ismā'īl's status as the founder of an empire that resists viewing his statements of ecstatic union as rhetorical forms of mystical and literary expression. Perhaps because he avoided execution, in contrast to the fate of *shah*-speaking martyrs, Shah Ismā'īl's poetry is not granted the poetic license afforded others, and is rather seen as literal reflections of his self-identity as well as those of the devotees of his persona. Nevertheless, it is significant that in the vast and varied body of pseudo-Ḥaṭā'ī which developed among the Anatolian Alevi-Bektashi, the references to al-Ḥallāj and his inspired speech carried through the tradition as a steady trope, as seen in the quatrain above.

In Shah Ismā'īl's historical poetry, however, al-Ḥallāj's recollected drama serves the Beloved, who is, whether vanquished or elusive, the constant muse throughout his *divān*. The following illustrates his *gazel*'s more traditional dialectic, subordinating the lover to the Beloved through the latter's adopted persona of the sovereign. The crucified Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj is cast as the iconic martyr, at the mercy of the Shah's cruelly impartial omnipotence (5):

1. The Shah who amazes and bewilders me
Is the Shah who tours the recesses of my heart.
2. You have scorned me, cast me into the world,
You are the Shah who has caused my eyes to weep bitterly.
3. He who conquered the entire world,
Is the Shah who created Yezīd's people and Muslims both.
4. He who became a nightingale and wandered the rose garden
Is the Shah who caused my bitter weeping outside its walls.
5. In his heart, Maṣṣūr cries out "anā al-ḥakk,"
Yet the Shah crucifies Maṣṣūr.
6. The Shah, with Yezīd's hand,
Sacrifices Hasan and Ḥüseyn in Karbela'.
7. He who rescued Yūsuf from the well of devastation,
Is the Shah who made him Sultan in the land of Egypt.
8. In his eye the only thing shining is the sun,
He made a rose bed out of the gardens of the world.
9. To the faces of the blameless his face is the sun,
Yet the Shah conceals the sun.

10. From the hand of the brave lion in Daşt-ı Arzan,⁹⁰
The Shah protects Selman Farsi.⁹¹
11. Ḥaṭā'ī desires longing from you,
Again, the Shah holds the records on Judgment Day.⁹²

Again, Shah Ismā'īl's presentation of the *gazel* form is arresting. Its personal and militant references are at the same time a theological meditation on God's all-encompassing power, where the poet has torn out the apocalyptic structure of duality to reveal a monist vision of the Beloved Shah. The Beloved cast as a cruel sovereign is an opportunity to explore a reality in which all of humanity is encompassed, Yezīds as well as Muslims (3). He is the one who protects Selman the Persian (10), exalts Yūsuf to the throne (7), but at the same time He accepts the martyrdoms of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn as a sacrifice (10). Revealing a painful sacred history, "The Shah who amazes and bewilders" conceals His own light, in an act of Divine withholding.

Shah Ismā'īl defies classical *gazel* paradigms by expressing a union of the lover with the Beloved, rather than a struggle on behalf of the lover to achieve this elusive consummation. However, pieces displaying this unique dramatic paradigm have been viewed primarily from the perspective of their external effects on Shah Ismā'īl's followers rather than internal strategy. Further ventures into Shah Ismā'īl's historical poetry must take into account a wider accommodation of these verses, beyond literal objectives of the author, beyond his supposed delusions of grandeur extending to the reception of this poetry beyond the battlefield. Shah Ismā'īl's striking mystical orientation is not without precedent in *dīvān* literature. By assessing Shah Ismā'īl's poetry in the context of his life and times, it is certainly understandable to assign purely political motives to this form of artistic expression. However, this approach alone limits the appreciation of this influential corpus as literature. Internal evidence within the poetry suggests that perhaps declarations are not always to be swallowed whole, but are to be taken as the ecstatic expressions of a mystical reality. With the collapse of the bard and his muse, union of the seeker with the Divine is, on occasion, fully achieved.

*Shah Ismā'īl's Adventures in Charisma*⁹³

Initially established as "an historical document characteristic of the strivings of the age,"⁹⁴ Shah Ismā'īl's *dīvān* remains compelling material for literary history. The following piece is an example of his singular voice, displaying the sectarian violence we have come to expect, replete with blood, sacred warriors (*eren*), final resurrection, millenarianism and martial machismo:

1. With the exalted word, may they come to the field,
May the effeminate stay back, may the manly come.
2. The sign of the *eren* is the sign of God,
To knowledge, may the *eren* come.

3. My Zūlfikar foams at the mouth, as I stand in blood,
He who denies, to belief may he come.
4. Sinners leave behind their sins,
He who would drive them away, to the Sultan may he come.
5. By the power of God, grief was put to an end,
To drive away that accursed Satan, may he come.
6. According to the tradition of the prophet,
Those who have laid rest for 1000 years, to life may they come.
7. Flowing streams, flowing canals and springs
Surge from their places, to the ocean may they come.
8. Ḥaṭā'ī is wealthy and generous,
To the cure, may the wretched come.⁹⁵

This is Ḥaṭā'ī at his most militant, with an astounding tone for such a simple *gazel* that does not even bother to mention the Beloved. Again, it is tempting read into it Ismā'īl's psychology of conquest as well as the motivation of his soldiers. At the same time, we simply have no record that anyone outside Ismā'īl's court scribes actually heard these words. Will these words continue to be a window into history's unfolding? Although the signature couplet offers a more mundane source for the author's military success—"Ḥaṭā'ī is wealthy and generous" (8)—it is difficult to completely discount the spiritual sources of his mystique when considering such pieces.

Modern historiography presents the career of Shah Ismā'īl through what Max Weber taught us to identify as charisma: the belief that certain individuals are endowed with divine or supernatural powers, allowing them to attain temporal authority over those who hold the belief in their enchanted being. As the concept became more important as a sociological theory through the twentieth century, the onus shifted to the believers in the divine authority, and charisma rises and falls according to their whims. With the discovery of Shah Ismā'īl's poetry as an important historical document, insight into the nature of charismatic leadership was articulated. Part of the excesses of Shah Ismā'īl's art came from how the concept of charisma developed in western, particularly Anglophone, academic scholarship. This notion of charisma, as it developed through the twentieth century with its hefty portion of history's demagogues, became a symptom of coercion and perversion, with no room for the original Weberian association of charisma with extraordinary individuals.⁹⁶ It is also significant that much of the analysis of Ismā'īl's rise to power took place simultaneously during the modern establishment of a "theocracy" in Iran, generally viewed in the West as an aberrant, irrational political development.

But even during his own time, Shah Ismā'īl's marriage of temporal with spiritual authority attracted violent criticism from his enemies, who would taunt him for his dervish identity. For the modern social scientist, however, this type of authority is reconciled intellectually by the theory of charisma. Focusing on the beliefs attributed to Shāh Ismā'īl's followers, modern associations of irrational fanaticism shaped our views of believers of the past. Characterized as regressive, pagan and fanatical, the

beliefs of Shah Ismā‘īl’s followers were logically susceptible to the charismatic authority he cultivated. Compelled above all by apocalyptic expectation in its more recent sense, the primitive beliefs of the Turkmen tribes were assessed in the following terms: “The ideational and theological elements of the shī‘itized Sufism of the Qizilbash appear to have been extremely crude, covering a substratum of shamanistic and anthropolatric folk religiosity.”⁹⁷ The conversion of the Safavids’ Turkmen followers to Islam is deemed “recent and most superficial” whereas their “Central Asiatic beliefs and customs” are tenuous.⁹⁸ The explanation for the rise of these charismatic warlords is often traced to a long period of instability ushered in by the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, a trauma which laid fertile ground for the irrational belief in utopias on earth. Shah Ismā‘īl, aware of his power over the impressionable hordes, expertly manipulated it: “Like the Musha‘sha‘ before him, Ismā‘īl varied his claim to mahdistic authority to the audience.”⁹⁹

Unsavoury aspects of Shah Ismā‘īl’s royal career (not uncommon among autocrats), his atrocities and decadence, but especially the fanatical excesses of the Qizilbash are all attributed to a lingering pre-Islamic paganism. This pagan regression, located in a distant shamanistic Central Asian past, explains the intense devotion of the shah’s followers, manifesting itself in such incidents as cannibalism.¹⁰⁰ The gruesome aspects of warfare are certainly found in Safavid sources as well. But modern sources have tended to paint the incidents of cannibalism as a “practice,” a ritualistic element of Mongol culture.¹⁰¹ The desecration of graves is also rooted in the ancient shamanic belief that the soul lived in the bones beyond death.¹⁰² The list goes on: the use of the skull as a drinking vessel (the fate of Shaybānī Khān’s) is also a vestigial Mongol custom.¹⁰³ Ismā‘īl’s well-documented alcoholism during his later years is also ascribed in part to culture of Mongol libertinism.¹⁰⁴ Both the shah and his followers shared in a backwards culture that was “not in the least Islamic”:

Ismail blended Muslim religiosity with archaic rites resurgent from the Anatolian Turkmen milieu, with their foundation in the beliefs of Central Asia. Added to the Shī‘ī cult of ‘Alī, with its vengeance for the martyr, Ismail presided over ritual acts that were not in the least Islamic. For the unrefined Qizilbash of Anatolia, the dervish was confounded with the shaman.¹⁰⁵

The charismatic lens that reconciles the European reports, the contemporary polemic as well as equivocal Safavid chronicles and, above all, Shah Ismā‘īl’s poetry, make decadence and divine inspiration theoretically determined. The cruelty of Shah Ismā‘īl combined with the fanatical conduct of the Qizilbash constitute the dark side of charismatic authority, a perverse interruption of the rational progression of both history and Islam. Because the charismatic leader is no longer deserving ethically of the devotion he commands, the nature of this devotion can at least be accounted for sociologically—in the case of the Safavids, a regressive paganism combined with a climate of millennial expectation among their restless followers. For the most part, the interpretation of Shah Ismā‘īl’s poetry conformed to this view.

In recent years, new interpretations of Shah Ismā'īl's power—the source of his authority, how it was wielded—are notable. Rather than the fanatical boy-messiah, what is emerging is a more rational figure, though not necessarily less despotic. There have always been suggestions of more pedestrian motivations for Shah Ismā'īl's devoted following: a power vacuum in East Anatolia, adept leadership and especially the payment of troops. Informed by an undervalued chronicle entitled *Futubat-e Shāhi*, Anooshahr plays down the charismatic factor in the Safavids' road to the Turkmen capital of Tabriz (definitively captured in 1501). This account suggests that it was not the divine favor of the adolescent *murshid-i kamil* as much as the material extravagance in his distribution of the spoils of war: "Ismā'īl was the most generous paymaster for soldiers during a period of political breakdown and profusion of impoverished, plunder-hungry, vagabond armies," Anooshahr states.¹⁰⁶ Like his poetry and private life, Ismā'īl's public career was extravagant. The Venetian descriptions of extreme enthusiasm witnessed by an unarmed infantry could just as well have been chalked up to the promise of booty. The Italian observers do not say. We do have accounts, however, that enumerate the material rewards for their service, and Ismā'īl was deemed "far more generous than Alexander."¹⁰⁷ Margaret Meserve's recent analysis of the European sources of Ismā'īl's early career also highlights the material incentives through which he fostered popular support. According to a Greek observer in Karaman in the fall of 1502, "I am assured that he is enormously rich, not only because he rules a large country but also because he has taken so much from these lords whom he has killed; and he is very just and liberal with everyone."¹⁰⁸ According to Meserve, it was the new shah's "zeal for redistributing wealth" that attracted as much attention from Europeans as the messianic promise of the early reports.¹⁰⁹ These studies have introduced a more sober approach to Ismā'īl's charisma, scaling back its intensity and citing more practical calculations of loyalty and leadership. Long lauded as a document reflecting his age, by downplaying Ismā'īl's persona as a demi-god, the *divān* may not remain so.

The challenge of interpreting Shah Ismā'īl's poetry is of course a familiar one in literary criticism: that is, to what extent should the interpretation of a particular text rely on its historical author and his context? And to what extent should other sources influence this interpretation? While it is true that in Shah Ismā'īl's case certain external sources bear too heavily on the meaning of the poetry, sources outside the literary text itself cannot be totally irrelevant. Shah Ismā'īl was the monarch who established *ithnā 'asharī* Shī'ism as the religion of state, defining the religious culture of early modern Iran. And not unusual for a pre-modern dynastic, he was also an accomplished poet, one who authored a significant amount of religious poetry as a direct expression of his loyalties: hymns to 'Alī and the Twelve Imams, laments for Karbala and apocalyptic visions. Shah Ismā'īl's *divān* cannot be considered irrelevant to history—not yet—as the connection between art and life is too obvious. But whether it proves to be directly influential or not, what is being proposed here is that Shah Ismā'īl's poetry was constructed as a literary form, authored by one clearly conscious of its place in the larger literary-religious culture.

Notes

1. For transliteration in this article, I have adopted the standard Persian/Arabic transliteration for general terms and names such as Qur'an, shah, etc. In the context of poetry, including technical terms as well as terms within the lyrics themselves, I have transliterated according to Ottoman-Turkish orthography.
2. *Divān-i Khaṭā'ī*, 46v-47r.
3. Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shāh Ismā'īl I." Other meanings attached include "Sinner" or "One with Fault," taken from the root *ḥaṭṭa* (error).
4. The existence of Shah Ismā'īl's poetry had been known for some time before Minorsky's translations. See Browne, "Notes on an Apparently Unique Manuscript"; Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismā'īl Safawī*, 101; Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, was one of the first sources to mention pseudo-Ḥaṭā'ī. In fact, Minorsky noted that this pious incarnation Shah Ismā'īl's known among the Ahl-i Haqq (in the 1920s), led him to investigate Shāh Ismā'īl's historic works. The contents of his *divān* poetry were not addressed until Minorsky's wartime article, however.
5. Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, 23.
6. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," 198.
7. Some of the material from the following sections is taken from my dissertation (Gallagher, "The Fallible Master of Perfection").
8. Although Turkish remained the language of the court until the end of the Safavid period. See Floor and Javadi, "The Role of Azerbaijani Turkish."
9. The term "Qizilbashi" as a dialectical designation see *ibid.*, 569; Turkhan Gandjei, "Ismā'īl I: 2. His Poetry," for the use of "Qizilbashi" in the linguistic sense.
10. On the history of the early Safavids, see Martin, "Short History of the Khalwati Order," 278.
11. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'īl Ḥaṭā'ī*.
12. Including the Smithsonian manuscript, *Divān-i Khaṭā'ī*, (s 1986.60) which is the main *divān* source used in this paper. Ferenc Csirkés includes two additional manuscripts to those which were commissioned during Shah Ismā'īl's lifetime: The British Library (Or. 11388) and the manuscript of Tehran's Majles Library (4077). For a comprehensive discussion of Ismā'īl's manuscripts see Csirkés, "Messianic Oeuvres in Interaction." It should be noted that the Tashkent *divān* manuscript was also deemed an important copy (alongside the Paris manuscript) and was used as the basis of Necf and Cavanşir's recent publication, *Şah İsmail Hatā'ī Külliyyatı*. On the Tashkent manuscript see Memedov, "Le plus ancient manuscrit." On recently added *divān* sources, see Köksal, "Şah İsmail"; and Macit, "Şah İsmail'in Eserleri."
13. Gallagher, "Shah Isma'īl's Poetry."
14. Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis."
15. *Divān of Khaṭā'ī* (s 1986.60), 38v-39r. On this manuscript see Thackston, "The *Diwan* of Khata'i." For the version from of this piece from the Paris 1541 manuscript, see Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'īl Ḥaṭā'ī*, #240.
16. Wheeler Thackston, "The *Diwan* of Khata'i: Pictures for the Poetry of Shah Isma'īl I," *Asian Art* 1 (1989): 39.
17. *Divān-i Khaṭā'ī*, 38v-39r.
18. Csirkés "Messianic Oeuvres in Interaction," 158.
19. Karamustafa, "In His Own Voice."
20. Ali Anooshahr analyzes the dubious nature of these sources in "The Rise of the Safavids," 250.
21. Woods, *Faḍlullāh Rūzbihān Khunji-Isfahānī*, 57.
22. Regarding Shaykh Ḥaydar Khunji claimed, "Many people from Rūm ... gathered to him and it is reported that they considered him as their God (*mā'būd*) and, neglecting the duties of *namāz* and public prayers (*ibādāt*), looked upon the shaykh as their *qibla* and the being to whom prostration [sic] was due (*masjūd*)." Quoted from Woods, *Faḍlullāh Rūzbihān Khunji-Isfahānī*, 58.

23. Brummett, "The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi," 333. The Venetian quote is taken from Sanuto, *I Diarii*, 4: 191-2, and translated in Brummett, "The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi," 334.
24. "Travels of a Merchant in Persia," 206. For criticism of this perception see Brummett, "The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi," 355, note 11.
25. Brummett, "The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi," 336. The quote is from Sanuto's *I Diarii*.
26. Written accounts of rituals with reference to Shah Ismā'il's poetry appear from the reign of Ismā'il's successor Shah Tahmasp (1524-76). See the account of Michel Membré in Morton, *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia*, 42.
27. Originally scanned as a poem in the *bece vezni*, the syllabic meter usually employed in folk compositions, the only composition in the entire *divān* to contain such a meter. The inclusion of this poem in his authentic corpus caused much debate regarding the historical authenticity of the poem, as well as all other *bece vezni* poems attributed to Shah Ismā'il found outside the official *divān* collections. Köksal notes the possibility of scanning this poem in the 'aruz' meter. See Köksal, "Şah Ismail Hatâyi'nin Şiirlerinde," 179 note 24.
28. Referring to the mystic and martyr Manşür al-Ḥallāj (d. 922).
29. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Şāh Ismā'il Ḥaṭā'ī*, #20.
30. In the same essay Eliot further describes the orientation of New Criticism: "And certainly poetry is not the inculcation of morals, or the direction of politics; and no more is it religion or an equivalent of religion, except by some monstrous abuse of words." Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (preface to the 1928 edition), viii-ix.
31. On this defeat in popular literature see Wood, "The Battle of Chālderān."
32. Anooshahr, "The Rise of the Safavids," 8.
33. See Morton, "The Date and Attribution of the *Ross Anonymous*."
34. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Şāh Ismā'il Ḥaṭā'ī*, #171.
35. Anooshahr, "The Rise of the Safavids," 250.
36. Reference to the Umayyad Yazīd (d. 683), who was Caliph during the massacre of Karbala.
37. "Friend of God," one of the Qur'an identities for Ibrahim, thus the Ismā'il in this couplet refers to his first-born as the intended sacrifice.
38. Derived from the Torah's 'Azāzel, a fallen angel, or a demon according to Islamic commentators.
39. Ḥurūfī references are pronounced in Shah Ismā'il's poetry, with letter mysticism being the central form of metaphorical significance integrated into the poetry.
40. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Şāh Ismā'il Ḥaṭā'ī*, #252.
41. I have used the convention of extending the Judeo-Christian term "messianic" to characterize reference to the Islamic eschatological figures and concepts as well.
42. Erika Glassen first argued for this interpretation in "Schah Ismā'il."
43. Yıldırım, "In the Name of Hosayn's Blood."
44. Twelver theology developed the distinction between the *qā'im* (on who rises up), a mission of all the Imams, distinct from the eschatological Madhi, which was the exclusive identity of the Twelfth Imam. The finite mission of the Madhi could only be accomplished by the return of Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Mahdi from major occultation. See Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 14.
45. Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah," 162.
46. *Divān-i Khaṭā'ī*, 49v-50r.
47. The verse of Kuthayyir 'Azza (d. 723) and Sayyid al-Ḥimayārī (d. 789) are two early examples of poetic propaganda championing the Mahdi status of Ibn Haifiyya (d. 700-701). See Arjomand, "Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution," 114; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 11.
48. Arjomand, "Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution," 108.
49. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Şāh Ismā'il Ḥaṭā'ī*, #16.
50. For an extensive literary analysis of the Surah as such, see Brown, "The Apocalypse of Islam."
51. *Divān-i Khaṭā'ī*, 6v.
52. *Ibid.*, 30v.
53. *Ibid.*, 14r.
54. *Ibid.*, 12r-12v.

55. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'il Ḥatā'ī*, #196.
56. *Divān-i Khata'ī*, 22v.
57. Minorsky, "Jihān-Shāh Qara-Qoyunlu."
58. Memedov, "Le plus ancien manuscrit," 11.
59. Minorsky, "Khata'ī"; Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 38.
60. Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shāh Ismā'il I," 1025.
61. The *ġazel* is a lyric poem arranged according to 'arūz prosody. Formed in monorhyme, all half-lines which complete the *beyts* conform to the rhyme of the first *beyt*. *Gazel* compositions are relatively short, generally numbering from four to fourteen couplets. On the technicalities of the form see Andrews, *An Introduction to Ottoman Poetry*, 14-129.
62. For example, see. Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of the Beloveds*.
63. See Bernini, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*.
64. *Divān-i Khata'ī*, 45v.
65. *Ibid.*, 47r.
66. *Ibid.*, 27r. On the preferred gender of the Beloved in the *ġazel* form, see Thackston, "The *Diwan* of Khata'ī," 41.
67. From the Arabic, *tūtyā*. Zinc deficiency is still recognized as a source of blindness.
68. *Divān-i Khata'ī*, 47v-48r. Yazīd and Mervān reference any enemy that recalls the nefarious Umayyad dynasts, Yazīd I (d. 683) and Marwān I (d. 685).
69. Mélikoff, "The Worship of Shah Isma'il," 66.
70. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'il Ḥatā'ī*, #47.
71. Thackston, "The *Diwan* of Khata'ī," 60.
72. *Divān-i Khata'ī*, 38v-39r.
73. From *Ihyā' 'Ulum al-Dīn* as quoted in Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 14.
74. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 18.
75. *Ibid.*, 48.
76. On the presence of a monist theology in a didactic *mesnevi* attributed to Shah Ismā'il, see Karamustafa, "In His Own Words," 604.
77. For references of *shatḥiyāt* among Anatolian dervishes and poets during the middle period see İnalçık, "Dervish and Sultan," 210-213; Schimmel, *As Through a Veil*, 158.
78. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 6.
79. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'il Ḥatā'ī*, #198.
80. Memedov, *Shah Ismail Khatai: Asarlari*, 1: 468.
81. *Ibid.*, 1: 292.
82. *Ibid.*, 1: 372-3.
83. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'il Ḥatā'ī*, #187.
84. Burrill, *The Quatrains of Nesimī*, 29.
85. See Yazıcı, "Şah İsmail." On the influence of Ḥurūfism on Azeri poetry in general see Gasimova, "Qur'anic Symbolism of the Eyes."
86. Burrill, *The Quatrains of Nesimī*, 84.
87. Boratav, *İzablı Halk Şiiri Antolojisi*, 72.
88. Burrill, *The Quatrains of Nesimī*, 84.
89. *Ibid.*, 82.
90. Daşt-i Arzan, the birthplace of Salmān al-Fārisī, according to legendary accounts.
91. A loyal companion of 'Alī's, Salmān al-Fārisī was a Persian convert who developed into a figure of devotion for Iranian Shī'a. The legend and significance of Salmān al-Fārisī became integral to the Alevi-Bektashi poetic and ritual tradition as well.
92. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'il Ḥatā'ī*, #204.
93. The title of this section pays homage to Anderson's chapter "Further Adventures of Charisma," in *Language and Power*, 78-93. It influenced my analysis of Shah Ismā'il and his followers.
94. Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shāh Ismā'il I," 1007.
95. Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'il Ḥatā'ī*, # 192.

96. As described in Anderson, *Language and Power*, 89-90. See Weber, "The Nature of Charismatic Authority."
97. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, 80.
98. *Ibid.*, 79.
99. *Ibid.*, 76.
100. See Savory, "The Consolidation of Şafawid Power in Persia," 72-3, 79. J.-P. Roux argues that the Qizilbash "practice" of grave desecration can be traced to their Mongol descent. See Roux, "Une survivance des traditions turco-mongoles," 11.
101. For a more intensive analysis of the acts of cannibalism, see Bashir, "Shah Isma'il and the Qizilbash."
102. Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 44.
103. *Ibid.*, 46.
104. See *ibid.*, 50.
105. *Ibid.*, 44.
106. Anooshahr, "The Rise of the Safavids," 10-11.
107. Meserve, "The Sophy," 589.
108. *Ibid.*, 587.
109. *Ibid.*, 590.

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