

James White 

On the Road: The Life and Verse of Mir Zeyn al-Din ‘Eshq, a Forgotten Eighteenth-Century Poet

Using newly discovered materials, this article introduces readers to the career and poetry of Mir Zeyn al-Din ‘Eshq, a now forgotten poet who was connected to many prominent political and literary figures in India during the eighteenth century. The primary source for the research is John Rylands Library, Persian MS. 219, a holograph copy of the poet’s divān, which he presented to John Macpherson, acting Governor-General of the Presidency of Fort William, in May 1785. The divān contains a considerable amount of contextual commentary which allows us to reconstruct Mir Zeyn al-Din’s biography and working practices, casting light on how his verse was produced and consumed. An Iranian émigré, he circulated throughout the Punjab, North India and Bengal, accompanying the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shāh Dorrāni on his Indian campaigns, participating in professional symposia with some of the leading literary personages of Delhi, Lucknow and Patna, and entering the ambit of colonialist British patrons in Kolkata.

Keywords: Mir Zeyn al-Din ‘Eshq; Book History; Migration; Picture Poems (Carmina Figurata; *Movashshabāt*); Poetic Symposia (*moshā‘erāt*); Ahmad Shāh Dorrāni; John Macpherson; Sir William Jones

Introduction

In May 2018, the present writer came across a previously unstudied volume of verse in Persian (705 ff., 29 × 20.5 cm), composed by a poet with the pen name ‘Eshq

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(“Passion”), in the collections of the John Rylands Library, Manchester (Persian MS. 219).¹ Although the volume lacks a title and a colophon, an inscription in English on f.1a, annotated as being in the hand of Sir William Jones (d. 1794), the Orientalist and puisne judge of the supreme court of Bengal, names the book as the *divān* of a certain Mirzā Zeyn al-Din Khān, and states that the poet himself presented it to the Governor-General—then John Macpherson (d. 1821)—on 21 May 1785.²

The manuscript is highly unusual. It is written in the poet’s own hand, providing us with an unrivaled insight into how he composed and edited his verse. Furthermore, the *divān* is full of rubrications which state when and where many of the poems were first composed or drafted, which name the people who commissioned them or who collaborated with Zeyn al-Din in their composition, and which mark intertextual connections with the work of other poets.

Generally, such contextual comments are not included in manuscript copies of poets’ collected works, even in autographs and holographs.³ These annotations therefore provide a far greater level of detail than one could normally hope to find about the poet’s methods of composition and the social contexts in which he performed, as well as the intended audiences for his verse. As much of Mir Zeyn al-Din’s output consists of allusive *ghazal* poetry, in which erotic, panegyric and mystical themes are amalgamated, the contextual rubrics also provide some assistance in clarifying how his verses were intended to be interpreted in the primary contexts of their reception. For these reasons, Persian MS. 219 should be considered a rare and valuable source for reconstructing the working practices of an eighteenth-century poet. More broadly, the manuscript provides a detailed illustration of how poetic activity in Persian in eighteenth-century north India was rooted in the phenomena of migration between cities, towns and villages, and circulation between *moshāʿerāt* (public and semi-private competitive poetic symposia) and *majāles* (public or private gatherings).

¹The manuscript is written on several different types of paper: some bear watermarks such as “C. Taylor” and “G.M.T.”; others are slightly polished wove papers. The text is copied in a *nastaʿliq* hand with elements of *shkasteḥ*, in black ink; rubrication is used for headings and commentary. The binding, with flap, is made of red leather, and is gilded, tooled and stamped. Before it entered the collections of the John Rylands Library, the manuscript was MS. 440 in the collection of Nathaniel Bland (d. 1865), and then Persian MS. 219 in the library of the Earls of Crawford.

²The British Governor-General of the Presidency of Fort William. By May 1785, Warren Hastings (d. 1818) had resigned from his post, and Macpherson had taken over as acting Governor-General. He would occupy the job until September 1786.

³By way of comparison, one may cite Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley Add. 109, the holograph *divān* of the poet Nawwāb Mahabbat Khān (d. 1223/1808), whom Mir Zeyn al-Din may have known (see n. 88 below). Just as Mir Zeyn al-Din presented his holograph to a Briton, so too Nawwāb Mahabbat Khān presented his to the British diplomat Sir Gore Ouseley (d. 1844). The manuscript lacks any kind of contextual commentary, and simply consists of poems arranged in alphabetical order. When he was later in Iran, Ouseley was presented with an autograph *divān* by the poet Mirzā ʿAbd al-Vahhāb “Nashāt,” minister of foreign affairs to Fath ʿAli Shāh (Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley Add. 17). Again, this manuscript lacks any form of contextual rubrication. More generally within the manuscript tradition, however, certain manuscript *divāns* belonging to particular stemmata do include contextual comments which mark intertextual connections. For example, for the case of the *divān* of Navāʿi (d. 906/1501), see Lewis, “To Round and Rondeau,” 480–8.

What follows is a conjoined study of 'Eshq's life, his verse and the contexts in which he composed. In addition to studying Persian MS. 219, I have utilized a series of other narrative and documentary sources, including *tazāker* of eighteenth-century Persian and Rekhta poets, and papers written by Sir William Jones. I have found it necessary to use these materials, not simply in order to identify Mir Zeyn al-Din as a historical figure, but also to reconstruct the web of social interactions in which his literary activities took place. He had a varied career, during the course of which he went from writing highly intertextual *ghazal* poetry to authoring a verse epic for the British. Consequently, he disappears from sight in the *tazkereh* literature, which is concerned with the lyric verse of *moshā'ereh* culture, only to reappear in the correspondence and notes of colonialist patrons. These sources are not particularly concerned with understanding his development as a poet, but that is precisely the interest of his ego-document, the *divān*. It is only by reading across the different kinds of source that we can hope to understand how much of his verse functions. Indeed, the proliferation of competing centers of poetic activity and forms of patronage in eighteenth-century India make it essential that we investigate differing kinds of source if we are to reconstruct the careers of many poets in full.

1. *Towards a Biography of Mir Zeyn al-Din*

Glimpses of a life: Mir Zeyn al-Din in the Tazkereh literature.

In his handwritten catalogue of the Earl of Crawford's Persian collections,⁴ Michael Kerney tentatively identified the author of Persian MS. 219 as Sheykh Gholām Mohyi al-Din Qoreyshi Miruthi, a poet and literary biographer who went by the pen-names 'Eshq and Mobtalā ("Sorely Tried"), and who was attached to the court of the Mughal emperor Shāh 'Ālam II (d. 1806) in Delhi during the latter part of his life.⁵ This identification cannot be correct, primarily because Miruthi's *laqab* was Mohyi al-Din, rather than Zeyn al-Din.⁶ In fact, Miruthi was only one of at least eight poets active in Persian and Rekhta in India during the eighteenth century who adopted the *takhallos* 'Eshq or 'Eshqi.⁷

A positive identification of Mir Zeyn al-Din can be made if we examine a series of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century *tazāker* of Persian and Rekhta

⁴Most of the library of the Earls of Crawford—Persian MS. 219 included—was purchased by Enriqueta Rylands in 1901 for the newly founded John Rylands Library, Manchester. The Persian manuscripts in the John Rylands collections still await detailed cataloguing, and readers are therefore dependent on Kerney's unpublished, handwritten catalogue, which was produced at some point in the 1890s; or on Bibliotheca Lindesiana, *Hand-List of Oriental Manuscripts*, in which classmarks and titles of works alone are given.

⁵Kerney, *Handwritten Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 86.

⁶It should also be noted that the author of Persian MS. 219 was composing verse at least as early as 1140/1727-28 (see Persian MS. 219, f. 154b.). Such a date seems slightly premature for Miruthi, who was active compiling literary works as late as 1222/1807-8 (On Miruthi, see Sprenger, *Catalogue*, 187; Naqavi, *Tazkereh-nevisi*, 447-8).

⁷For a list of Rekhta poets with the *takhallos*, see Sprenger, *Catalogue*, 241.

poets.⁸ There was only one poet active during the second half of the eighteenth century who was called Mir (or Mirzā) Zeyn al-Din and who also bore the *takhallos* ‘Eshq. The shortest entry on him, which is simultaneously one of the richest in terms of factual data, is to be found in Gholām Hamdāni Moshafi’s (d. ca. 1243/1827) ‘*Eqd-e sorayyā*’ (*The Necklace of the Pleiades*), which was completed in 1199/1784–85. Moshafi calls the poet Mirzā Zeyn al-Din ‘Eshq and states that he was born in Jām (modern Torbat-e Jām, Khorāsān, Iran), but emigrated to India at the age of eight.⁹ He received his education under Shāh Mohammad Panāh,¹⁰ who can be identified as an influential Sufi and poet who lived in Delhi.¹¹ By the time that ‘*Eqd-e sorayyā*’ was drafted, ‘Eshq was an “elderly and experienced man.”¹²

Tazkereh-ye Masarrat-afzā (*The Biographical Anthology Which Promotes Delight*), a Persian anthology of Rekhta poets written in 1193/1779, has an entry on the poet under the name Mir Zeyn al-Din ‘Eshq.¹³ It states that he had lived in Delhi, and that he was a poet of amorous disposition who possessed the temperament of a dervish, a characterization which concords with the representation of him in ‘*Eqd-e sorayyā*’. From Delhi he had moved to Bengal, spending time in ‘Azimābād (Patna) and Morshedābād. He composed in both Persian and Rekhta. Amr Allāh Allāhābādi, the author of *Tazkereh-ye Masarrat-afzā*, states that Mir Zeyn al-Din’s present whereabouts were unknown to him at the time that he was compiling his anthology.

The information that we glean from *Tazkereh-ye Masarrat-afzā* can be supplemented by *Tazkereh-ye Shuresh* (*The Biographical Anthology by Shuresh*), another *tazkereh* of Rekhta poets, which was written in 1195/1780. Here the poet is named as Mir Zeyn al-Din ‘Eshq.¹⁴ It is stated that he was a poet of Persian who had written a *divān*, and that he also composed in Rekhta.¹⁵ He had been resident in Delhi, but poverty and want had forced him to migrate to ‘Azimābād (Patna), where he moved into the house of the poet Mirzā Ghasitā.¹⁶ Mirzā Ghasitā, who also went by the pen-name ‘Eshq, was a Sufi and poet from Delhi, whose title was

⁸In addition to the *tazāker* discussed below, I have examined several in which Mir Zeyn al-Din ‘Eshq does not feature, at least as the subject of a biographical entry. These are: ‘Ali Ebrāhim Khān, *Sobuf-e Ebrāhim*; ‘Ali Ebrāhim Khān, *Golzār-e Ebrāhim*; Mohammad ‘Ali Hazin, *Tazkerat al-mo’āserin*; Miyān Rahmat Allāh ‘Eshqi of Patna, *Tazkereh-ye ‘Eshqi*; Muhān La’l Anis, *Anis al-abebbā*; Seyyed ‘Abd al-Heyy, *Gol-e rā’nā*; Ebn Gholām ‘Ali Khān Yusof ‘Ali, *Hadiqat al-safā*; Keshan Chand Ekhlās, *Hamishbeh Bahār*; Mir Hoseyn Dust Sanbhali, *Tazkereh-ye hoseyni*; Mir Taqi Mir, *Nekāt al-sho’arā*; Abu Tāleb ebn Mohammad Tabrizi Esfahāni, *Kholāsāt al-afkār*; Mohammad Rezā ebn Abi l-Qāsem Tabātabā, *Naghmeb-ye andalib*. Mir Zeyn al-Din is mentioned briefly, on the basis of information culled from *Tazkereh-ye Masarrat-afzā*, in de Tassy, *Histoire de la littérature*, 2: 44.

⁹Gholām Hamdāni Moshafi, ‘*Eqd-e sorayyā*’, 42.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹See Persian MS. 219, f. 379b, where he is called Shāh Mohammad Panāh Qātel; and Persian MS. 219, f. 296b.

¹²Gholām Hamdāni Moshafi, ‘*Eqd-e sorayyā*’, 42.

¹³Amr Allāh Allāhābādi, *Tazkereh-ye Masarrat-afzā*, f. 115a-b.

¹⁴Seyyed Gholām Hoseyn Shuresh, *Tazkereh-ye shuresh*, ff. 174b-175a.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

Shāh Rokn al-Din 'Āref (or 'Erf);¹⁷ Persian MS. 219 demonstrates that Mir Zeyn al-Din composed poems in Patna “at [Mirzā Ghasitā's] suggestion” (*be-hasb al-īmā*).¹⁸ Given this information, it seems possible that the two men's common *takhallos* (pen name) should be regarded as a maker of intellectual and emotional affiliation, rather than as a confusing coincidence.

In short, the *tazāker* develop the following composite portrait of the poet: Mir Zeyn al-Din was an Iranian émigré who arrived in India as a child. He was educated in Sufi circles in North India and was for some time resident in Delhi. He was forced to leave the capital because he was unable to earn a living there, and so he began to migrate eastward, spending time in Bengal from the late 1770s. In the course of his travels he stayed with acquaintances who were Sufis and poets, and who had also left Delhi.

From Moshā'irāt to an army camp: the travels of Mir Zeyn al-Din.

The *tazāker* present fragmentary, though complementary, portraits of Mir Zeyn al-Din as he was known to the compilers in the latter part of his life, and they testify to his involvement in the overlapping Persian and Rekhta literary networks of the 1770s and 1780s. In order to fill in the details of the poet's youth and middle age, we can turn to the contextual rubrics in Persian MS. 219. Some of the earliest poems in the *divān*, dating from 1141/1728 and 1146/1736, were composed in Shāhjahānābād (i.e. Delhi), supporting the biographers' comments that Mir Zeyn al-Din had been resident in Delhi early in his life.¹⁹ During his time there, he often participated in poetic gatherings (*moshā'irāt*) hosted by different luminaries.²⁰ Simultaneously sociable and competitive events, these symposia seem to have been one of the principal fora in which the poet honed his work. For example, we learn that one poem was “formed” (*tab' shodeh*) in the *moshā'ereh* of Hāfēz Halīm in Shāhjahānābād,²¹ while another was composed in the symposium run by Mir Zeyn al-Din's paternal uncle ('*ammu*), Mohammad Qobād Khān Ahmad.²²

Mir Zeyn al-Din's biographers make no mention of his extensive travels north of Delhi, to Haryana and the Punjab. While the intermittent use of dates in the *divān* makes it difficult to develop a precise chronology for these journeys, it appears that the poet traveled back and forth between Delhi and the north between the mid-1740s and the late 1760s. In 1158/1745, he was in Sirhind.²³ It is possible that his stay in the nearby town of Sarwali should also be dated to this

¹⁷See Miyān Rahmat Allāh 'Eshqi of Patna, *Tazkereh-ye 'Eshqi*, f. 56b.

¹⁸Persian MS. 219, f. 305a.

¹⁹Persian MS. 219 f. 197a, f. 222a.

²⁰On *moshā'ereh* culture, see Pritchett, “A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture,” 892-901; Rahman, “The Moshā'irah”; Tabor, “Heartless Acts.”

²¹Persian MS. 219, f. 360b.

²²Persian MS. 219, f. 268a. See also a poem produced in the *moshā'ereh* of Mohammad Qobād Khān Ahmad in 1162/1748-49 (Persian MS. 219, f. 213a); as well as Persian MS. 219, f. 202b, dated 1152/1739-40; Persian MS. 219, f. 378b, dated 1155/1742-43; Persian MS. 219, f. 431a.

²³Persian MS. 219, f. 285a.

year.²⁴ He was back in Delhi by 1159/1746.²⁵ Subsequently, he began to participate in the Indian campaign of the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shāh Dorrāni (d. 1184/1773).²⁶ He returned to Sirhind, and composed poems for Ahmad Shāh there, perhaps in 1161/1748, when the Dorrāni army sacked the city.²⁷ He also wrote lyric *ghazals* and a devotional poem in praise of the theologian and Sufi Mohyi al-Din Jilāni (d. 561/1166) while encamped with Ahmad Shāh in Jalandhar,²⁸ and Jalālābād,²⁹ in the Punjab.³⁰ The use of the word “commission” or “order” (*farmāyesh*) implies that Mir Zeyn al-Din was patronized by Ahmad Shāh as a professional poet. At an unknown date, Mir Zeyn al-Din was also patronized by Ahmad Shāh’s chief vizier, the highly influential Shāh Wali Khān.³¹

Having returned to Delhi by 1167/1753,³² the poet subsequently moved north again, this time to Karnal in Haryana in 1171/1757-58,³³ then to Samana in the Punjab in 1172/1758-59.³⁴ He reappears among the army of Ahmad Shāh in 1175/1761-62, when ‘Ali Verdi Khān Shāmlu, known as Heyrat (“Astonishment”), gave him an opening verse (*tarh*)³⁵ to work up into a poem.³⁶ The next dated poems in the *divān* were composed in the region around Delhi. They were written in the fort at Jhansi (*Jānsi Hesār*) in 1176/1762-63;³⁷ in Delhi itself in 1179/1765-66;³⁸ and in Anwali in 1181/1767-68.³⁹

²⁴See Persian MS. 219, f. 288b.

²⁵Persian MS. 219, f. 381b, produced in the *moshā‘ereh* of Khāksār.

²⁶See also Persian MS. 219, f. 270a.

²⁷Persian MS. 219 f. 303a, f. 338a. On the dating of Ahmad Shāh’s plunder of Sirhind, see “Ahmad Shah’s Second Campaign Towards Lahore and India with God’s Assistance,” in Feyz Mohammad Kāteb Hazāreh, *History of Afghanistan Online*. Alternatively, Mir Zeyn al-Din could have composed for Ahmad Shāh in Sirhind in 1170/1757. See “Ahmad Shah Travels to Akbarabad to Chastise Suraj Mal Jat,” in Feyz Mohammad Kāteb Hazāreh, *History of Afghanistan Online*.

²⁸Persian MS. 219, f. 303a, f. 588b.

²⁹Persian MS. 219, f. 372b.

³⁰These events may have occurred in 1174/1760, when Ahmad Shāh encamped near Jalālābād. See “Badu’s Battles with Ahmad Shah’s Forces and His Eradication and Death,” in Feyz Mohammad Kāteb Hazāreh, *History of Afghanistan Online*.

³¹Persian MS. 219, f. 271a.

³²Persian MS. 219, f. 221b, f. 222b.

³³Persian MS. 219, f. 212a.

³⁴Persian MS. 219, f. 205b. It seems likely that his visit to Fatehabad also occurred during this period: Persian MS. 219, f. 285a.

³⁵On the word *tarh*, see Naim, “Poet-Audience Interaction,” 168; Rahman, “The Mushā‘irah,” 76. For an illustration of how *tarh* could be used in Safavid Iran, see Losensky, “Utterly Fluent,” 573.

³⁶Persian MS. 219, f. 314a. In 1175/1761-62, Ahmad Shāh conducted campaigns in Lahore and in the vicinity of Sirhind. See “Ahmad Shah Marches to the Punjab and India for the Seventh Time,” in Feyz Mohammad Kāteb Hazāreh, *History of Afghanistan Online*.

³⁷Persian MS. 219, f. 208a.

³⁸Persian MS. 219, f. 223b.

³⁹Persian MS. 219, f. 204a.

Mir Zeyn al-Din may have left Delhi for good as early as 1185/1771, when he travelled to Bareilly,⁴⁰ and the fortified village (*qasbeh*) at Kaithal.⁴¹ It seems that he subsequently spent an extended period of time in and around Lucknow.⁴² One dated *ghazal* which was composed in Lucknow was written in 1189/1775-76.⁴³ As in Delhi, Mir Zeyn al-Din appears to have used *moshā'erāt* as his way into the local poetic scene in Awadh. In Lucknow, he attended a symposium run by Mirzā Mohammad Fākher Makin,⁴⁴ a well-known master of poetry who had established a "school" of Muslim and Hindu poets of Persian around him.⁴⁵

Corroborating the biographies given in the *tazāker*, the *divān* demonstrates that a third phase of travel in Mir Zeyn al-Din's life took the poet eastward in the direction of Bengal. It is clear that he spent some time in Patna from at least as early as 1192/1778, and that he participated in *moshā'erāt* there.⁴⁶ Many of his poems were composed in Morshedābād, the seat of the Nuwwāb of Bengal, or were conceived as responses to other poets of that town. For example, he composed one poem at the request of Mir 'Ali Naqi Razavi, reader of the imam of Morshedābād;⁴⁷ and he wrote a *ghazal* in Morshe-dābād at the combined request of the Nawwāb Asad Allāh and the Mirzā Dāvud, who entrusted him with the commission in order to test his talent.⁴⁸ Yet another poem, conceived as a response to a *ghazal* by Na'im,⁴⁹ was extemporized in the *majles* of Rāja Dowlat Rāy in Morshedābād.⁵⁰ Mir Zeyn al-Din was also commissioned to write a *mon-āzareh* (competitive response poem) to the collected poets of the town.⁵¹

The Kolkata years: Mir Zeyn al-Din and the British.

At a point which can be dated to around late 1782, the poet wound up in Kolkata.⁵² In order to discover what happened to him subsequently, we must turn to the papers of Sir William Jones, the author of the inscription on f. 1a of Persian MS. 219. Jones mentions Mir Zeyn al-Din repeatedly in his notes and correspondence, first discussing him in Beinecke Library MS. Osborn c400, an unpublished notebook in which he began

⁴⁰Persian MS. 219, f. 202a.

⁴¹Persian MS. 219, f. 211b. He returned to Kaithal in 1188/1774-75: see Persian MS. 219, f. 207b. There are several places named Kaithal in India. Mir Zeyn al-Din may be referring to the one on the outskirts of Chandausi, modern Uttar Pradesh, which lies about eighty kilometers from Bareilly. On the importance of *qasbehs* as sites of literary and religious activity, see Orsini, "Between *Qasbas* and Cities"; Rahman, *Locale, Everyday Islam and Modernity*.

⁴²See Persian MS. 219 f. 294b, f. 335b.

⁴³Persian MS. 219, f. 207a.

⁴⁴Persian MS. 219, f. 335b.

⁴⁵Mirzā Mohammad Fākher Makin and his poetic disciples are the subject of the *tazkereh Anis al-ahabbā'*. Since Mir Zeyn al-Din does not feature in this work, it is unlikely that he was particularly close to Makin.

⁴⁶Persian MS. 219, f. 220b. See also Persian MS. 219, f. 217a, f. 218a, f. 219b.

⁴⁷Persian MS. 219, f. 344a.

⁴⁸Persian MS. 219, f. 345b.

⁴⁹A poet of eighteenth-century Delhi.

⁵⁰Persian MS. 219, f. 248b.

⁵¹Persian MS. 219, f. 336a.

⁵²Persian MS. 219, f. 588a.

to compile memoranda on the scholars and poets of Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit whom he started to meet after his arrival in Bengal in 1783. Mir Zeyn al-Din is named at the very beginning of the manuscript as “a poet who has written 100,000 couplets,”⁵³ and is subsequently discussed, under the heading “Learned Men of Calcutta,” in the following terms: “Poetry. Pleasant old man. Distinct, good pronunciation.”⁵⁴ These brief comments reinforce the impression given by the *tazāker* that the poet was advanced in years by the early 1780s, which would perhaps place his birth somewhere between 1705 and 1715. It is not entirely clear how Mir Zeyn al-Din was introduced to Jones, but the two men had at least three acquaintances in common.⁵⁵

Three letters written by Jones provide more detailed information about the poet’s time in Bengal. The first two, which were composed in May 1785, demonstrate that Jones arranged for Mir Zeyn al-Din to have an audience in Kolkata with John Macpherson, who had taken over as acting Governor-General of the Presidency of Fort William that February, in the wake of Warren Hastings’ resignation.⁵⁶ In advance of the meeting, Jones sent two autographed volumes of Mir Zeyn al-Din’s poetry to Macpherson, writing:

It was my intention to present to you, in the Author’s name, the books [sic]⁵⁷ which I now send. The poet Zainu’ddein was recommended to me soon after I came to India, as a worthy ingenious old man. I enclose his verses to you, with a hasty translation, on the back of the paper, of the best couplets. The smaller volume contains part of the Epick poem, which is written with enthusiasm; and the other volume is filled with pleasing Odes and Elegies, all in the old man’s handwriting.⁵⁸

By cross-checking the evidence provided in this letter with the inscription on Persian MS. 219, f. 1a, we can conclude that John Rylands Library Persian MS. 219 is the “other volume ... filled with pleasing Odes and Elegies, all in the old man’s handwriting,” which Jones presented to John Macpherson on behalf of Mir Zeyn al-Din on 22 May 1785.⁵⁹

⁵³Jones, Notebook, 2-3.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁵The three acquaintances are Nawwāb Mahabbat Khān, who patronized Mir Zeyn al-Din and who was purportedly commissioned by Jones to write the *masnavi Asrār-e mahabbat*; Mir ‘Ali Naqī Razavi of Morshe-dābād; and ‘Ali Ebrāhīm Khān. For the relationship between Nawwāb Mahabbat Khān and Jones, see de Tassy, *Histoire de la littérature*, 2:249-50; Sprenger, *Catalogue*, 251. ‘Ali Ebrāhīm Khān is mentioned in Cannon, *The Letters*, 658-9, and in Jones, Notebook, 27. He also gave Jones a manuscript copy of the work *Tohfāt al-hend*, now British Library MS. RSPA 78. Mir ‘Ali Naqī Razavi features in Jones, Notebook, 39.

⁵⁶Cannon, *The Letters*, 2:673-5 (Letters 407 and 408). The original of Letter 407 was recently published by Joshua Ehrlich. See Ehrlich, “Empire and Enlightenment,” 6-9.

⁵⁷See Macpherson, Correspondence, f. 1a.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, f. 1a-b. For a transcription and edition of the text of the English portion of the letter, see Ehrlich, “Empire and Enlightenment,” 6-9.

⁵⁹Persian MS. 219 cannot have been compiled before 1199/1784 (see Persian MS. 219, f. 646a), and hence it seems likely that Mir Zeyn al-Din produced it as a clean copy of his collected lyric and panegyric verse for presentation to Hastings or Macpherson. The present whereabouts of the smaller, accompanying volume, containing narrative verse memorializing British military activity in India, are unknown to me.

Joshua Ehrlich's recent discovery of the original of the abovementioned letter in the British Library also uncovered the Persian text of Mir Zeyn al-Din's verse petition to Macpherson, of which only Jones' English paraphrase had been published previously.⁶⁰ In this poem, Mir Zeyn al-Din is concerned with securing continued patronage for his work on a Persian verse epic on British military activity in India, the "smaller volume" containing "part of the Epick poem" that is mentioned in Jones' letter. Mir Zeyn al-Din asks Macpherson to pay him through the *divān* (here meaning the revenue tribunal or council meeting), and to continue the patronage which had been extended to him by Warren Hastings, Governor-General of the Presidency of Fort William between 1773 and ca. 1785, who had commissioned the epic.

As the Persian text of this petition is not examined in Ehrlich's article, and as it contains some additional lines, left untranslated by Jones in his letter, which cast light on the poet's biography, I offer the first transcription, edition and full translation of this *masnavi* here:⁶¹

نقل دیباچه انگریزنامه من کلام خجسته انجام میر زین الدین خان عشق

فلک جاه مکہ فرسن کامیاب * نوازنده نره چون آفتاب

توئی عادل وقت در این زمان * ز نامت بشد زنده نوشیروان

بامداد عیسی علیه السلام * بذاتت حکومت گرفته قیام

بکن عدل در کار من این زمان * که محنت کشیدم بهندوستان

ز ملک ولایت باین سرزمین * رسیدم رب سال ای دلنشین

عبورم بنظم است ای کامیاب * ز انگریز تصنیف کردم کتاب

بفرمان هشتین ذو الاحترام * نوشتم ز فتح بنارس کلام

بتمهید کردم سخن را درُست * ستودم در آن کمپنی را نخست

در آن ضمن پیکار انگریزیان * رقم کردم از کلک افصح بیان

بشه نامه پهلو زدم در شکوه * که دستان انگریز شد مثل کوه

⁶⁰Ehrlich reproduces a photograph of the Persian text without further comment. See Ehrlich, "Empire and Enlightenment," 7. For Jones' English paraphrase, see *ibid.*, 8-9. My comparison of the petition with Persian MS. 219 suggests that both are written in the same hand and use the same combination of inks.

⁶¹In my transcription of the petition, I retain Mir Zeyn al-Din's orthography even when it is unusual, e.g. "ایسرور" for "ای سرور" (l. 17); " " ای سرور" marking what I understand to be a subjunctive verb (l. 18); "جولانی" with the marked *hazma* (l. 26); and "پیشینهان" for "پیشینان" (l. 30).

ببین نقشه جنگ انگریزیان * که این قصه باشد عجیب البیان
 بفرمان هشتین ارباب جود * بمن میجر دینیس این گفته بود
 که این قصه هر گاه کردی بیان * بدیوان ترا میکنم کامران
 وقایع ز انگریز صاحب حشم * ترا میسپارم بلطف و کرم
 از آن پیش کاین قصه گردد تمام * بسوی ولایت شد آن نیکنام
 بدور تو این قصه انجام یافت * که انگریز از وصولت فرنام یافت
 بنام تو دیباچه این کتاب * رقم کردم ایسرور کامیاب
 امید از تو دارم که در این زمان * به بخشی وقایع ز انگریزیان
 که در نظم آن نثر را برکشم * رخ صفحه را جمله در زر کشم
 بحکم تو روشن کنم این کتاب * بدیوان ز لطف شوم کامیاب
 بنام خوش شاه انگریزیان * چو شه نامه گویم گر این داستان
 بایران و توران رود این کتاب * کنم روشن احوال چون آفتاب
 ز پیکار انگریز شور افکنم * مروج بدوران کتبی کنم
 نگارم اگر جنگ انگریز را * نکرد کسی نام پرویز را
 گشائیم ازین قصه گر فتحباب * بزیر زمین لرزد افراسیاب
 ز جولانی کلک مشکین رقم * نهد رخس رستم بلنگی قدم
 تصانیف من بین و کن امتیاز * که کلکم بپرواز شد شاهباز
 بآئین محمود صاحب کرم * چو فردوسیم کن قرین با حشم
 بدیوان سرافراز کن این زمان * که هر مو چو بلبل گشاید زبان
 ز پیشینان شاعران زمین * بگفتند دستان بسی دلنشین
 ز هر قوم در دوره کائنات * بمانده ست در باد کاری نکات

همان به که انگریز عالی وقار * بدور تو ماند سخن باد کار
ازین بیش ختم سخن بر دعا * روا باشد ایصاحب با صفا
بگردش بود تا که دور جهان * بود حکم تو مثل دریا روان
سر سرفرازان بدام تو باد * نگین حکومت بنام تو باد

A copy of the preface to the Angriznāme⁶² in the felicitous speech of Mir Zeyn al-Din Khān 'Eshq.

Macpherson—he of heavenly power who attains his desires * And who, like the sun,
magnifies motes of dust.

You are the judge of the present age * It is in your name that Nushirvān⁶³ has been
revived.

With the aid of Jesus⁶⁴—upon whom be peace * Rule has been resurrected in your
person.

Now, treat my case with justice * For I have suffered terribly in India.

My dear, I came to this land from the country * Of Iran⁶⁵ many years ago.

Prosperous one, my craft is in verse * I have compiled a book about the British.

On the orders of the honorable Hastings⁶⁶ * I wrote about the victory at Varanasi.⁶⁷

⁶²“The Book of the British,” a title evidently designed to create a parallel with the *Shāhnāme*.

⁶³Nushirvān refers to the Sasanian king Khosrow Anushirvān (r. 531-79 CE), nicknamed *‘ādel* (“the just”).

⁶⁴A dual reference to Macpherson’s Christianity and to Jesus’ renowned association with speech in Islamic culture.

⁶⁵The word *velāyat* appears twice in this *masnavi* in what I understand to be two different senses. In Persian texts composed in India during the early modern period, *velāyat* can be used to refer to Iran or to Britain (see Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*). Since the *tazkereh* literature informs us that Mir Zeyn al-Din was born in Jām, it makes sense to interpret the usage in l. 5 as meaning “Iran.” The usage in l. 15 appears to be a reference to the resignation of Hastings and his return to Britain.

⁶⁶Warren Hastings (d. 1818), Governor-General of the Presidency of Fort William between 1773 and ca. 1785.

⁶⁷The defeat of Raja Chait Singh by Hastings and the incorporation of Varanasi into British territory in 1781.

With careful preparation I made my speech truthful * I began by praising the Company.⁶⁸

In the course of the poem I represented * The battles of the British with the brush of most eloquent depiction.

In its grandeur, I made [the work] an equal to the *Shāhnāmeḥ* * For the story of the British has become as lofty as a mountain.

Behold the image of the battles of the British * For this tale will be expressed marvelously.

On the command of Hastings, the lord of generosity, * Major *Dinbes*⁶⁹ said this to me:

“If you tell this story * I will use the revenue tribunal to make you prosperous;”

“With grace and magnanimity, I will entrust to * You the deeds of the powerful British.”

Yet before the story could be finished * That renowned man returned to England.

This tale was completed in your age * For the British have gained renown from your arrival.

O prosperous lord, I have inked * The preface to this book in your name.

Now I hope that you will endow * Me with news of the British,

So that I might versify that prose * And paint the cheek of every page in gold.

By your command I will brighten this book * Thanks to your kindness, I will prosper in the revenue tribunal.

If I should tell this story in the manner of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* * In the good name of the king of the British,

This book will travel as far as Iran and Turan * Like the sun, I will illuminate the state of things.

⁶⁸The East India Company.

⁶⁹My reading of this name, which appears to be transliterated as *dinbes*, is purely speculative. Several variants are possible, including “Danvers,” “Dunbas,” or even “Dundas,” if we interpret the *be* as a *dāl*.

I will excite a great clamor about the battles of the British * I will write a book which travels widely in this age.

Should I write about the battles of the British * No-one will mention Parviz.⁷⁰

Should I begin to compose this tale * Afrāsiāb will tremble beneath the earth.⁷¹

Rostam’s horse Rakhsh will be hobbled * By the gallop of my musky brush.

Read my compositions and show me preferment * For my brush has become a royal falcon in its flight.

Following the custom of the noble Mahmud * Unite me, like Ferdowsi, with dignity.⁷²

From now on, ennoble [me] in the revenue tribunal * For every hair [of my brush] sings like a nightingale.

Many fine tales have been told * By the poets of yesteryear.

Anecdotes survive⁷³ * About every people in the age of created beings.

All the better, then, that laudatory tales * Should be told about the majestic British in *your* age.

It is most fitting, * Serene lord, that I end my speech with a prayer.

⁷⁰Khosrow Parviz (r. 590–626 CE), immortalized in the *Shāhnāme* and in romances such as Nezāmi Ganjavi’s *Khosrow o Shirin*.

⁷¹The references to Rostam and Afrāsiāb are intended to reinforce Mir Zeyn al-Din’s argument that he had begun composing a “better,” modern equivalent of the *Shāhnāme*.

⁷²Stating that Mahmud had promised Ferdowsi a piece of gold for every verse of the *Shāhnāme*, but then gave him pieces of silver instead, Cannon deems the logic of this verse—or rather, the logic of Jones’ English translation of it—“inept” (Cannon, *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, 2, 674 n. 4). However, the anecdote recounted by Cannon is only one version of the narrative about the relationship between Ferdowsi and the sultan. A better-known recension of the story, transmitted by Nezāmi ‘Aruzi Samarqandi, runs that Mahmud eventually recognized the aesthetic and monetary value of Ferdowsi’s work, and sent him a cargo of indigo worth sixty thousand *dinārs*; the cargo entered Tus just as Ferdowsi’s bier was leaving it. Mir Zeyn al-Din’s argument is that Macpherson should recognize the value of his work and reward him appropriately. Moreover, the *talmih* is intended to suggest that Mir Zeyn al-Din and Macpherson are the “modern” equivalent of Ferdowsi and Mahmud of Ghazneh: a matchless poet and a matchless patron.

⁷³I take *dar bād māndan* to be a compound verb meaning “to survive,” the opposite of *bar bād raftan* (“to disappear”), although I have not found this attested.

As long as the world spins on its axis * May your rule flow like the sea.

May the heads of the mighty lie in your snare * May the seal-ring of government be engraved in your name.

Lines 4-6, 9-15, 20, and 23 of this *masnavi* do not feature in Jones' English paraphrase, which amplifies the panegyric quality of the poem and plays down Mir Zeyn al-Din's complaint regarding the unfulfilled promises made to him by Hastings. In addition to corroborating the claim made by Gholām Hamdāni Moshafī that Mir Zeyn al-Din was an Iranian émigré, the previously untranslated lines also provide new information about the poet's interactions with the British during the 1780s. The first major British patron with whom the poet seems to have come into contact is Hastings, who is well known as a scholar of Arabic and Persian and as a collector of manuscripts.⁷⁴ He also had precedent as a patron of poetry in Persian.⁷⁵ Through a major in the service of the East India Company, Hastings commissioned Mir Zeyn al-Din to rhapsodize on his defeat of Raja Chait Singh and the incorporation of Varanasi into British territory, an event which had taken place in 1781. The episode was widely seen at the time as an example of Hastings' "ruthless high-handedness,"⁷⁶ and it is generally understood to have been one of the catalysts of his political downfall.⁷⁷ Perhaps Hastings believed that a literary representation of his actions in Persian, based on the model of the *Shāhnāmah*, would provide him with another, oblique means of intellectual engagement with North Indian and Bengali political elites.⁷⁸ This is certainly the implication made by Mir Zeyn al-Din in his *masnavi*, where it is insinuated that Hastings' representative took a close interest in coordinating the themes and subjects which were to appear in the

⁷⁴See the remarks in Marshall, "Warren Hastings as Scholar and Patron." Many of the Arabic and Persian manuscripts in the former India Office collections of the British Library were once owned by Hastings. He patronized the translation of legal works from Arabic and Persian into English and was instrumental in the foundation of the Kolkata *Madrāseh*.

⁷⁵Hastings patronized the poet Qamar al-Din Mennat (d. 1207/1792 or 1793), who was introduced to him by Richard Johnson. See Marshall, "Warren Hastings as Scholar and Patron," 245. A fuller account is given in the *tazkereh Riyāz al-vefāq*; see Sprenger, *Catalogue*, 171.

⁷⁶Marshall, "Hastings, Warren."

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Mir Zeyn al-Din's composition of an *Angriznāmah* prefigures a series of versified Persian epics on British military activity in India which were commissioned in the early nineteenth century. Among these, see Feyruz ibn Kāvus, *George-nāmāh* (*The Book of [King] George*), which was print published in three volumes in Mumbai in 1827. This work is a voluminous verse history of British involvement in India which is primarily concerned with the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but which begins with a mythical history of India, privileging the propagation of Christianity throughout the sub-continent. The book was written in order to be presented to Jonathan Duncan, governor of Bombay. Another, connected epic which survives in manuscript is *Jerjis-e Razm* (*George of War*), an account of the Anglo-Mysore wars and the first two Anglo-Maratha wars, which was composed by Safdar 'Ali Shāh "Monsef" for William Erskine in 1229/1814. For the author's holograph, see Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 725. Neither text appears to have been studied in detail in modern scholarship.

poem, thereby ensuring that Mir Zeyn al-Din promulgated an “authorized” representation of the Governor-General.

One final letter by Jones, written to Colonel Allan Macpherson on 6 January 1786, suggests that, following Mir Zeyn al-Din’s meeting with the acting Governor-General in May 1785, the poet did receive a sum of money for his *divān*, but it was insufficient to support him for very long, and he continued to be beset by money worries.⁷⁹ Jones writes that the poet “has been so poor that he has been forced to sell his darling books,”⁸⁰ and says:⁸¹

[Mir Zeyn al-Din’s] son in law, who is in the service of the Vizier’s Minister, has now invited him to settle at Lucknow. It would be very honorable to him if the Governor would favor him with a recommendatory letter to the Nabob Vizier.⁸²

From 1786 onwards, no references to Mir Zeyn al-Din appear in the notes and correspondence of William Jones, suggesting that the poet may indeed have left Kolkata. As the evidence which I have encountered in the *tazkereh* literature dates from no later than 1199/1784-85, we are left to speculate about the end of the poet’s life. It is possible that he moved to Lucknow and subsequently died there; he is not mentioned in *Naghmeḥ-ye ‘Andalib* (*The Song of the Nightingale*), a *tazkereh* which includes a section on past poets of the court of Awadh, and which was compiled in 1261/1845.

2. *Mir Zeyn al-Din’s Poetry*

Collaborative authorship and patronage: how Mir Zeyn al-Din composed.

One of the most significant aspects of the *divān* of Mir Zeyn al-Din is that it provides us with a window onto poetic production in a way that only narrative sources normally can. It underscores the extent to which one poet active in eighteenth-century India migrated in his search for employment, and it shows how he circulated between different working environments. In addition to moving between patrons, he also appears to have used urban poetic symposia as a way of finding clients willing to subsidize his work, and the *divān* contains numerous examples of figures that each commissioned only one poem as a test of the poet’s mettle.⁸³ There are obvious macro-historical reasons which may have encouraged Mir Zeyn al-Din to travel, such as the instability in Delhi caused by the Afghan invasions, and the increasing control of the British, both of which phenomena affected him directly, and it is possible that he was simply unlucky in failing to secure a permanent source of patronage. However, it seems equally likely that he was operating within a system where poetic

⁷⁹Published in Macpherson, *Soldiering in India*, 345. See also Franklin, *Orientalist Jones*, 347; and Ehrlich, “Empire and Enlightenment,” 8 n.24.

⁸⁰Macpherson, *Soldiering in India*, 345. Presumably this is a reference to Mir Zeyn al-Din’s presentation of his autograph manuscripts to Macpherson.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²In 1786, the Nabob, or Nawwāb, Vizier of Awadh was Āsaf al-Dowleh (ruled 1775-97).

⁸³See, for example, Persian MS. 219, f. 288a, f. 289b, f. 319b.

activity was characterized by movement, both between places and between different social environments.

The contextual comments in the *divān* suggest that one factor which may have encouraged Mir Zeyn al-Din to circulate was the collective manner in which he composed. As indicated above, a number of his *ghazals* are based on a *tarh*, an opening verse or pattern line issued to poets taking part in competitive *moshā'erāt*.⁸⁴ While participants would compose and then perform their own poems on the basis of the *tarh*, the environment fostered by *moshā'erāt* encouraged them to critique one another's work and to offer suggestions for its improvement. When poets subsequently came to fix recensions of their performed texts in writing, it was perhaps inevitable that they would draw on what they had heard from the other participants. For example, in 1145/1732-33, Mir Zeyn al-Din composed a poem in response to a *tarh* which the participants in a *moshā'ereh* had developed through studying the early modern Indo-Persian poets Salim (1057/1647 or 1648), Kalim (d. 1061/1651), Sā'eb (d. ca. 1080/1669 or 1670) and Qodsi (d. 1056/1646-47).⁸⁵ The response poem is also designed to engage with the styles of these four poets, and hence it is grounded in the proceedings of the *moshā'ereh*.

Another poem arose out of a commission that had been set for Mir Zeyn al-Din as a practice piece (*dar estedā'-ye rotbeh-ye mashāqi*) by Mohammad Anvar, a pupil of the poet Rashid Khalifeh.⁸⁶ Mir Zeyn al-Din turns his response poem into a narrative of the commission, writing that Mohammad Anvar had said: "Do not abstain from answering me / And do not disappoint me in my desire / I wish to see the full merit / Of the bounty of your refreshing eloquence."⁸⁷ This suggests that Mir Zeyn al-Din used *moshā'erāt* as a forum for honing his talent, and as a way of making connections with more established poets. Within this system, exposure to as many different critical opinions as possible—and hence migration—would have been vital to ensuring that the quality of the poet's verse improved.

There are also indications that Mir Zeyn al-Din composed in direct collaboration with other poets, and even in partnership with some of his patrons. Sometimes, poems appear to have been half formed through conversations; one was composed when he was in the company (*dar sohbat*) of Nawwāb Mahabbat Khān Bahādor in Bareilly.⁸⁸ This is the same Nawwāb Mahabbat Khān who also commissioned Mir Zeyn al-Din to write verse, and who can therefore be considered a patron.⁸⁹ Another poem was written with Miyān Sāne' Belgrāmi in Farrokhābād, implying that it was a truly collaborative composition.⁹⁰ There is also one noteworthy example of a commission from

⁸⁴See, for example, Persian MS. 219, f. 320a, where the *tarh* was given in the *moshā'ereh* of Patna.

⁸⁵Persian MS. 219, f. 379a.

⁸⁶Persian MS. 219, f. 318b.

⁸⁷*Ibid.* *Az javābam maikon tehi pahlū / nā-omidam maikon degar ze morād / khvāham az feyz-e notq-e jān-bakhsbat / beresam dar kamāl-e estē dād.*

⁸⁸Persian MS. 219, f. 202a. It seems likely that Nawwāb Mahabbat Khān is the prominent Rohilla poet of Bareilly, active in Persian, Pashto and Rekhta, who died in 1223/1808.

⁸⁹See Persian MS. 219, f. 290a.

⁹⁰Persian MS. 219, f. 398a.

a patron on which Mir Zeyn al-Din worked as part of a group. 'Ali Ebrāhim Khān, most probably none other than the chief magistrate of Varanasi, biographer and historian of Persian and Rekhta poetry (d. 1208/1793 or 1794), entrusted the poet to compose a response poem to Naziri⁹¹ (d. 1023/1614 or 1615).⁹² Mir Zeyn al-Din formed the poem (*tab' nemudeh*) along with the poets of Morshedābād.⁹³

Other cases give an equally nuanced picture of how patronage worked. We are told that the poet and politician Qezelbāsh Khān Ommid (d. 1159/1746)⁹⁴ requested that Mir Zeyn al-Din compose poems,⁹⁵ but it seems probable that these commissions had a pedagogical aspect, particularly because there is one poem in the *divān* in which Mir Zeyn al-Din set out to emulate (*tatabbo' kardan*) Qezelbāsh Khān Ommid's poetic style.⁹⁶ In other words, the critical opinion of Ommid and his patronage of Mir Zeyn al-Din's work were intended to improve the quality of the Mir Zeyn al-Din's verse. A different vocabulary is used to describe those compositions which were prompted by the suggestions of Mir Zeyn al-Din's friends and his earliest teachers. Ārzu Khān⁹⁷—by whom the poet may well mean the influential lexicographer and literary historian Serāj al-Din 'Ali Khān Ārzu (d. 1179/1756)—the poet Mirzā Jān-e Jānān (d. 1195/1781),⁹⁸ Mirzā Ghasitā,⁹⁹ and Mir Zeyn al-Din's teacher, Shāh Mohammad Panāh,¹⁰⁰ all appear to have given Mir Zeyn al-Din "suggestions" (*imā'*) on the basis of which he constructed poems, but they do not seem to have commissioned work from him.

In short, the *divān* highlights the importance of collaborative fora such as *moshā' erāt* to Mir Zeyn al-Din's working practices. Cases in which his friends and teachers suggested themes for him to develop into full poems should be distinguished from the more formal types of interaction which were practiced in public symposia and *majāles*, where Mir Zeyn al-Din was actively commissioned to compose. Within these contexts, discussions with other poets and critically minded patrons were crucial to ensuring that the poet developed forms and themes which were in dialogue with contemporary trends in poetic fashion, and which corresponded with the particular tastes of his interlocutors. This evidence suggests that patronage could often have collective aspects, in which patrons came together with more than one poet. It also reinforces the understanding that the investment of patrons in poets often possessed both a pecuniary and an aesthetic aspect. By the same token, when Mir Zeyn

⁹¹Another Iranian émigré, Naziri moved to Agra, where he was affiliated with the literary establishment of the poet and Mughal minister 'Abd al-Rahim Khān-e Khānān.

⁹²Persian MS. 219, f. 336a.

⁹³Persian MS. 219, f. 336a.

⁹⁴He was in Delhi between 1150/1737 to 1159/1746, and Mir Zeyn al-Din met him in 1154/1741 or 1742 (Persian MS. 219, f. 204a).

⁹⁵Persian MS. 219, f. 271b, f. 276b.

⁹⁶Persian MS. 219, f. 204a. See below for an edition, translation and discussion of this poem.

⁹⁷Persian MS. 219, f. 298a.

⁹⁸Persian MS. 219, f. 296b. Mirzā Jān-e Jānān composed in Persian, though he is far better known as a poet of Rekhta. See Haywood, "Mazhar."

⁹⁹Persian MS. 219, f. 305a. On the identification of this figure as Mirzā Ghasitā, see above, n. 17.

¹⁰⁰Persian MS. 219, f. 296b, f. 379b.

al-Din responded to a commission, he was not hoping to gain the approval of a patron alone; he also needed the validation of the poets with whom he composed.

A survey of the divān.

The *divān* of Mir Zeyn al-Din is arranged partly alphabetically, and partly by form and genre. It begins with devotional poetry in praise of God, the Prophet and then the four rightly guided caliphs, of whom ‘Ali ibn Abi Tāleb features most prominently.¹⁰¹ The poet’s self-identification as a twelver Shi‘ite receives its most explicit expression in poems such as a *tarjī‘-band* in mourning for Hasan and Hoseyn,¹⁰² as well as in a *masnavi* which is a mock debate (*monāqashah*) between Sunnis and Shi‘ites.¹⁰³ The religious poems are followed by a section of versified letters (*makāteb-e manzum*) which are concerned with calligraphy, writing implements and the letters of the alphabet.¹⁰⁴

Mir Zeyn al-Din was particularly adept at condensing panegyric and devotional themes within lyric forms, and consequently the majority of his *divān* consists of *ghazals*.¹⁰⁵ As we shall see, the poet used the *ghazal* form when composing for his most illustrious patrons, allowing him to combine praise with eroticism and mysticism. As the section of *ghazals* progresses, the reader is faced with an increasing number of poems which reflect Mir Zeyn al-Din’s marked interest in technically unusual types of verse; there is even one poem which is partly in words and partly in numbers.¹⁰⁶ A brief section of pentastichic poems (*mokhammasāt*) is followed by an introduction to metrical issues arising in the composition of *robā‘iyyāt*, with which the *divān* closes.¹⁰⁷

The value that participants in *moshā‘erāt* attributed to poetic interplay, both among themselves and with their predecessors in the corpus, may have spurred Mir Zeyn al-Din to make the intertextual connections in his work as evident as possible, and he introduces many poems in the *divān* by naming the poets he is attempting to emulate (*tatabbo‘ kardan*), or to whose style he is attempting to respond (*javāb kardan*). His response poems demonstrate his familiarity with the work of canonical medieval and early modern poets, including Zahir Fāryābi (d. 598/1201 or 1202), Rumi (d. 672/1273), Sa‘di (d. 691/1292), Amir Khosrow (d. 725/1325), Hāfez

¹⁰¹Persian MS. 219, ff. 1b-62a. See, for example, the poem entitled Fath-e Bāb-e Heydari (Persian MS. 219, ff. 47b-53a); and another entitled Golzār-e Velāyat, (Persian MS. 219, ff. 57b-62a).

¹⁰²Persian MS. 219, ff. 71b-74a.

¹⁰³Persian MS. 219, ff. 111b-113b.

¹⁰⁴Persian MS. 219 ff. 115a-138a.

¹⁰⁵The section of *ghazals* extends from f. 141a to f. 600.

¹⁰⁶Persian MS. 219, f. 384a.

¹⁰⁷Persian MS. 219, ff. 646a-705. The prose introduction to this section contains a passage in which Mir Zeyn al-Din refers to an unnamed figure using the epithet “the dusty earth of the steps of men of vision” (*khāksār torāb-e aqdām-e ulu l-absār*). It is stated that this person had traveled from the Dead Sea and Europe (*daryā-ye shur va farangestān*) to India, that he had spent his life poring over works on prosody, and that he turned sixty in 1199/1784-85 (Persian MS. 219, f. 646a). While it is difficult to conceive of this figure as anyone other than the poet himself, the dates are confusing. Were they correct, the poet would have been aged only two in 1141/1728, when he was composing poems in Delhi. Furthermore, I have not encountered any direct evidence which would suggest that Mir Zeyn al-Din had traveled any further west than Iran.

(d. 792/1390), Jāmi (d. 898/1492), Bābā Feḡhāni (d. 925/1519), 'Orfi (d. 999/1591), Kalim (d. 1061/1651), and Sā'eb (d. ca. 1080/1669 or 1670).¹⁰⁸ The *divān* opens with a combined response to the styles of Hāfez and Ahmad-e Jām (d. 536/1141), the latter perhaps chosen because Mir Zeyn al-Din's place of birth, Torbat-e Jām, takes its name from his tomb, which lies on the outskirts of the town.

Mir Zeyn al-Din's poetic style is perhaps best exemplified by a *ghazal* which he composed for Ahmad Shāh Dorrāni. A commission, written in Sirhind, which fuses panegyric themes together with lyric and mystical ones, this is a piece designed for performance. It is simultaneously intimate in its tone and expansive in its sweep, developing a representation of Ahmad Shāh which could be propagated widely. Lines such as ll. 1, 2 and 7 would have been brought alive in recitation, taking on a more acute meaning from the visual interaction of the poet with his patron (meter: *mozāre'-e mosamman-e akbrab-e makfuf*).¹⁰⁹

خاصیت تو در نظرم کیمیا بود * هر کس دمی که با تو نشیند طلا بود
خود را بچشم من بنگر خودنمای من * زآینه بیشتر دل زارم صفا بود
دل زنده از کلام مسیحی مقال تست * لعل لبث لطیف و سخن دلگشا بود
ای تاجدار کجکلهان از دم ازل * در ملک جان جمال تو فرمان روا بود
بهتر ز روم و شام و ری و روس و اصفهان * کابل زمین ز فیض تو رونق فزا بود
بهر عروج خوئی حسن تو دمبدم * در حضرت کریم مرا التجاء بود
با زلف و عارضت شده دام محبتم * وردم دعای خیر تو صبح و مساء بود
بیگانگی ز جوهر ذاتی نمیکندند * با جوهر لطیف تو دل آشنا بود
از موج موج گوهر معنیت حاصلم * طبعم محیط اعظم لا انتها بود
ای عشق غم ز سختی دوران چه میخوری * ملکت یمن علی مرتضی بود

Your nature seems to me alchemical * Whoever sits beside you is immediately turned to gold.

See yourself reflected in my eyes, my proud beloved, * My penitent heart is more polished than a mirror.

¹⁰⁸This catalogue of authorities can be compared with the Jāmī's, on which see Lewis, "To Round and Rondeau," 500-3, 530-49. It is particularly notable that, in both cases, Zahir Fāryābi is regarded as one of the earliest authorities who can still be imitated.

¹⁰⁹Persian MS. 219, f. 308a.

My heart only beats on account of your Christ-like speech * Your ruby lips are fine,
your words—pleasant.

Sovereign of the cocked-cap band since time immemorial! * Your beauty holds sway
in the kingdom of the soul.

Fairer than Anatolia, Syria, Rey, Russia and Isfahan, * The land of Kabul gains luster
from your generosity.

Given the lofty nature of your beauty * There is continual shelter for me in your
noble presence.

My love is ensnared by your locks and cheek * Prayers for your well-being are on my
lips morning and night.

Any essence possessed of a soul cannot be made unfamiliar * My heart knows your
subtle essence.

I fish the pearls of your virtue from the waves one by one * My nature is an endless,
supreme ocean.¹¹⁰

‘*Eshq*, why do you grieve over time’s cruelty * When you possess the good fortune of
‘Ali Morteżā?

The representation of the king as part ruler, part beloved and part gnostic “pearl”—
a punning reference to his sobriquet, “the pearl of pearls” (*dorr-e dorrān*) which is
developed here through repetition of the cognate words *gowhar* and *jowhar*—
largely conforms with the picture of Ahmad Shāh’s political theology as sketched in
recent scholarship.¹¹¹ Playing with the king’s purported interest in the philosopher’s
stone,¹¹² Mir Zeyn al-Din answers the questioning first line of Hāfez’s celebrated
ghazal, “Might those whose glance turns dust into gold glimpse at us?”¹¹³ with the
assertion that Ahmad Shāh is a master of the occult. Part of the joke is the insinuation
that the king will undoubtedly reward the poet for his work with payment in gold.
The subsequent lines construct a representation of Ahmad Shāh through a combined
appeal to the auditor’s intellect and sense of sight. Physical beauty is equated with
spiritual authority and the right to rule (ll. 4 and 7), and it is the king’s aura which

¹¹⁰*Mobit-e āzam* (*The Supreme Ocean*) is the name of a *masnavi* by Bidel Dehlavi (d. 1133/1721),
who, undoubtedly, would have been regarded as a major figure of poetic inspiration in the Delhi of
Mir Zeyn al-Din’s youth. Here it seems likely that Mir Zeyn al-Din is not referring specifically to
Bidel’s poem, but rather to the theological concept behind it.

¹¹¹See Nejatī, *The Pearl of Pearls*, 334–55.

¹¹²See *ibid.*, 350–51.

¹¹³*Ānān ke khāk rā be-nazar kimiā konand / āyā bovad ke gusheh-ye chashmi be-mā konand.*

brings luster to Kabul, rendering the city peerless (l. 5). The poet casts himself as the interpreter, or the mirror (l. 2) who can make the king's unseen qualities familiar (l. 8) to an audience, yet, despite this intimacy, he is dependent on the ruler's magnanimity and protection (l. 6). The final assertion that Mir Zeyn al-Din possesses the good fortune of 'Ali ibn Abi Tāleb unites the concept that the ruler is blessed with the idea that he in turn will bless the poet.¹¹⁴

A different poem shows the extent to which Mir Zeyn al-Din's verse constructed dialogues with the corpus of contemporary poetry.¹¹⁵ The following *ghazal* was composed early on in the poet's career, in 1155/1742 or 1743, in imitation (*tatabbo'*) of Qezelbāsh Khān Ommid (d. 1159/1746), who, like Mir Zeyn al-Din, had emigrated from Iran to India.¹¹⁶ The date of composition makes it likely that the poem was written in Delhi, since both Ommid and Mir Zeyn al-Din were in the city around this time, and both were participating in *moshā'ereh* culture (meter: *ramal-e mosaman-e maqsur*).¹¹⁷

چشم را دید و وحشت کرده یار از دست رفت * آهوی چمن رمید از من شکار از دست رفت

در گلویم زد خیال زلف مشکینش کمند * فرصت نالیدن شبهای تار از دست رفت

گر من از خود رفته ام ای دوستان تقصیر نیست * دید هر کس روی او بی اخبار از دست رفت

زلف و رخ نمود و صبح و شام گشت از من نهان * همچو عمر رفته لیل و نهار از دست رفت

تافت تا آیینۀ خورشید دوران در حورش * در فروغ حسن او آیینۀ دار از دست رفت

چاره کارم کند بی کار کارافتاده را * غمزه تا شد کارگر در سینه کار از دست رفت

در وصالش حالت دل را نپرس ای همنشین * رفت آن دیوانه لیکن بیقرار از دست رفت

فرصت اندک یافت عیش ناتمامم در جهان * جام تا نزدیک لب بردم بهار از دست رفت

My beloved caught my eye, took fright, and was lost * The meadow deer flew from me and the game was lost.

¹¹⁴Although it is possible that Ahmad Shāh had a particular veneration for 'Ali ibn Abi Tāleb, it is most probable that this line reflects Mir Zeyn al-Din's own doctrinal affiliation. Nejatie's detailed study postulates that Ahmad Shāh was himself a Sunni and a Hanafite. See Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls*, 338.

¹¹⁵The issue of the reception of a poet's work by his contemporaries has been treated in detail recently in two studies by Franklin Lewis and Marc Toutant, both of which are devoted to Timurid Herat. See Lewis, "To Round and Rondeau," particularly 480-8; and Toutant, *Un empire des mots*, particularly 268-91.

¹¹⁶For brief remarks concerning Ommid's career, see Dudney, "Going Native." A fuller study is given in Qezelbāsh Khān Ommid, *Divān*, ed. Nā'emeh Khurshid, 1-13.

¹¹⁷Persian MS. 219, f. 204a.

The phantom of his musky locks lassoed my throat * And the opportunity of pining the dark nights away was lost.

My friends, I am not to blame if I have lost my senses * Whoever saw his face was utterly lost.

He showed his locks and cheek, and morning and evening were hidden from me * Like the vanished years, night and day were lost.

Before the mirror-like sun could shine, spinning in astonishment at him, * The keeper of the mirror was lost in the blaze of his beauty.

My aid would render an experienced man useless * When his glance set to work in my chest, all was lost.

My companion, do not ask how my heart felt on meeting him * That madman went, yet he was lost trembling.

My unsated appetite found few opportunities in this world * Before I could raise the goblet to my lips, spring was lost.

The poem which Mir Zeyn al-Din's *ghazal* answers can be traced in Ommid's *divān*.¹¹⁸ It too is a *ghazal*, and it too has the *radif-ār az dast raft*. The response

¹¹⁸Qezelbāsh Khān Ommid, *Divān*, ed. Nā'emeh Khurshid, 102. There are several nonsensical errors in the print edition of this text; I have emended it using Qezelbāsh Khān Ommid, *Divān*, Bodleian Library MS. S. Digby Or. 43, ff. 8a-8b.

من نمیگویم گل و بهار و باغ از دست رفت * یک بهشت آرزو یعنی که یار از دست رفت
 غنچه همجنس دل به گلشن وا نشد ای گل بیا * کار ما سهل نیست کار نوبهار از دست رفت
 گفتمت ای دل ترا کاری به کار من کار مباد * این قدر بی طاقتی کردی که کار از دست رفت
 بلبل از رشک گلشن خواهد به پای خود شکست * ای نسیم وصل کاری کن که خار از دست رفت
 دل ز من بردی و گفتی فکر کار خویش کن * خوب فکری کرده بودی حیف کار از دست رفت
 همچو آن نخلی که پیش از میوه گل ریزد امید * زانتظارش دیده امیدوار از دست رفت

I do not say that rose, spring, and garden were lost * A paradise of hope—my beloved—was lost.

Just like my heart, the rosebud did not return to the garden—come, rose! *

Our task is not simple: early spring is lost.

I said to you: "My heart, your affair has no affair with my affair * You have acted so weakly that the affair is lost."

Jealous of the garden, the nightingale yearns to annihilate itself. * Breeze of union, do something, for the thorn is lost.

You stole my heart and said, "Consider your affair." * You considered well; it is

poem expands the original from six lines to eight and develops its imagery and rhetoric. Both are nostalgic pieces about lost love, but Mir Zeyn al-Din turns Ommid's condensed series of connected images into a coherent narrative about unfulfilled desire. A portrait of the speakers' lovesickness (ll. 3, 6, 7) is balanced with a description of the beloved (ll. 1, 2, 4, 5) which is absent in the original. The engagement with Ommid's text is partly semantic and partly syntactic. The *jenās-e tāmm* on the word *kār* which is to be found in l. 3 of the original is expanded and complicated with the introduction of compounds in l. 6 of Mir Zeyn al-Din's poem. In other cases, the engagement is confined to poetic image (*mā'ni*): only the basic concept of the beloved stealing the speaker's heart, seen in l. 5 of Ommid's poem, is preserved in l. 7 of the response.

Those lines of Mir Zeyn al-Din's poem which expand on, and digress from, Ommid's original appear to be intended to demonstrate his mastery of rhetorical technique. For example, l. 4 is constructed around an antithesis (*tebāq*) between darkness (signified by the words *zolf*, "lock of hair"; *shām*, "dusk"; and *leyl*, "night") and light (signified by the words *rokh*, "cheek"; *sobh*, "morning"; and *nahār*, "day"). Line 5 is dominated by the technique of *jenās*, partly through the repetition of the word *āyineh*, and also through the sound *-owr-* in *dowrān* and *howr*.

These sorts of expansions reinforce the understanding that response poetry is not simply about demonstrating knowledge of the corpus; it is also about innovation and the desire to define oneself in contrast to the model.¹¹⁹ Mir Zeyn al-Din's answer consciously aims to outdo Ommid's poem in rhetorical complexity, and to create a more intimate psychological portrayal of a narrative persona. It is noteworthy that Mir Zeyn al-Din still terms his poem an "imitation" (*tatabbo'*). Perhaps this is partly because he conserves the formal features of the model,¹²⁰ and partly because he recognizes that Ommid is—in the social hierarchy at least—the more senior poet. However, his response is not really a homage to Ommid, but a competitive attempt to outflank him. This possibly antagonistic approach may have been encouraged by the nature of *moshā'ereh* culture. When Mir Zeyn al-Din is not developing forms and themes used by other poets, he often describes his *ghazaliyyāt* as *ijādi* ("innovative" or "contrived") and *momtané al-javāb* ("impossible to answer"), the implication being that, while he demonstrated his mastery of the corpus through mimicking and developing the styles of others, his own work was inimitable.¹²¹

a pity then that the affair was lost.

Just like a palm that sheds all hope before it flowers * In expectation of it, the hopeful eye was lost.

¹¹⁹See Losensky, "Utterly Fluent," 592-3; Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī*, 230-49.

¹²⁰For approaches to *tatabbo'* in the work of the fifteenth-century poet Navā'i (d. 906/1501), see Toutant, *Un empire des mots*, 275-8; Lewis, "To Round and Rondeau," 480-8.

¹²¹This approach differs quite substantially from the system conceived by Lewis, who sees acts of emulation as a process of canonization. See Lewis, "To Round and Rondeau." On the production of verse as a competitive undertaking, see Tabor, "Heartless Acts," 88-91.

Figure 1. *Zu l-faqār*. John Rylands Library, Persian MS. 219, ff. 65b-67b. Courtesy of the University of Manchester.



The picture poems.

Two inventive poems in the *divān* deserve close scholarly attention, because they are unusual and they raise questions about how the book was supposed to be used. Both are picture poems, known in Persian as *movashshahāt* (“adorned” or “garbed” poems).¹²² The first is a long and complex piece in the shape of the double-bladed sword, *Zu l-faqār*, which the Prophet purportedly presented to ‘Ali ibn Abi Tāleb before the Battle of Uhud (Figure 1); the second is a *ghazal* copied within the form of a flower (Figure 2). Although picture poems are mentioned as a type of verse by medieval and early modern writers concerned with literary theory and rhetoric in Persian,¹²³ they do not appear to have attracted attention from modern historians of Persian literature. However, there is a body of research on Arabic and Sanskrit picture poems, to which we can refer for some comparison.¹²⁴

Picture poems in Arabic and Persian generally consist of lines of verse which are woven in interlocking structures. These structures can be geometrical, vegetal or representative of birds and animals. They are puzzles which must be decoded in order to produce meaningful literary works, and their artifice lies in the fact that several complete poems, each one sound in rhyme and meter, can normally be derived from a single structure.¹²⁵ They are often accompanied by verse or prose instructions for

¹²²The Persian *movashshah* should not be confused with the Arabic *muwashshah*, which designates strophic poetry that was often set to music.

¹²³See Mohammad ebn ‘Omar Rādūyāni, *Tarjomān al-balāghat*, 194; Shams-e Qeys, *al-Mo’jam*, 336-45; Kamāl al-Din Hosayn Vā‘ez-e Kāshefi, *Badāye’ al-afkār*, 117-20; ‘Abd al-Vahhāb, *Daqā‘eq al-ash‘ār*, ff. 75a-87a; Shir ‘Ali Khān Ludi, *Tazkereh-ye mer’āt al-khayāl*, 103.

¹²⁴Recent studies of picture poems in Arabic have focused on a work known in some recensions as *Dīwān al-tadbij* (*The Dīwān of Interweaving*), a corpus of picture poems composed by Abū l-Faḍl ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ibn ‘Umar al-Jilyāni (d. 602/1206), who emigrated from Guadix in southern Spain to Ayyubid Syria, where he found employment at the court of Saladin. *Dīwān al-tadbij* has been edited by Abu Deeb and published as *Dīwān al-tadbij*; it has also been studied in Bray, “Picture-Poems for Saladin”; and Bray, “From Spain to Syria.” Picture poems (*citrakāvya*) are an important type of verse in Sanskrit literary culture. They are studied in Lienhard, *A History of Classical Poetry*, 154-8; Lienhard, “Carmina figurata”; and Tubb, “Kāvya with Bells On.” I am grateful to one of my anonymous referees for drawing my attention to Sanskrit picture poetry.

¹²⁵One may point to the parallel practices of “bitextuality” (*śleṣa*) and “twinning” (*yamaka*) in Sanskrit *kāvya* literature in general and picture poems in particular. See Tubb, “Kāvya with Bells On,” 148-51.

Figure 2. Flower. John Rylands Library, Persian MS. 219, f. 449a. Courtesy of the University of Manchester.



their decipherment. The basic definition of the *movashshab* proposed by Shams-e Qeys (d. after 627/1230) is that it is a poetic form consisting of sections based “on several different meters, which together form a single *qasideh*, but whose sections each form other *qasidehs* when they are read separately.”¹²⁶ The Arabic equivalent of the *movashshab* is on some occasions called the *mudabbaja* (“brocaded” piece).¹²⁷ It is worth remarking on the similar concepts, connected to clothes and fabric, which connect these words, and we may speculate that the idea of interweaving small pieces within a larger text—just as decorative patterns or striped bands of color are woven into clothing—is behind this nomenclature.¹²⁸

One additional, noteworthy aspect of Arabic and Persian picture poems as a type of verse is that quite a few of them appear to have been copied onto scrolls or particularly large sheets of paper.¹²⁹ There seem to be two reasons behind this. The first is practical, and is connected to the fact that picture poems may have appealed to small groups of viewers, because they can generally be decoded in several different ways and therefore exert the attraction of a game. If a group is to engage with a picture poem, the poem has to be copied onto a surface that is large enough for the viewers to see it. The second reason is that some picture poems are quite clearly intended to mimic or to double as talismans and amulets, which were block printed onto scrolls from the early medieval period onwards.¹³⁰

Mir Zeyn al-Din’s picture poems broadly conform to the contours of the Arabic and Persian types as described above. However, it is worth emphasizing the point that they are also formally in dialogue with some picture poems in Sanskrit, as the sword (*khadga*) and the eight-petaled lotus (*padma*) are among two of the most common types of Sanskrit carmina figurata.¹³¹ The picture poems in the *divān* are another testament to the dominant role that circulation between different social and cultural spheres played in Mir Zeyn al-Din’s life.

The poem the shape of *Zu-l faqār* consists of parallel sets of verses inscribed on the dual blades of the sword, one in the meter *sarī-e mosaddas*, the other in the meter *motaqāreb-e mosamman*. The parallel poems split off from the eleven lines of verse inscribed on the sword’s hilt, which can be read in both meters, and which consist of the epithets of God (*asmā-ye hosnā*). The artifice of the piece lies in the fact that the parallel poems are part of the same “macro”-structure. Having described God,

¹²⁶Shams-e Qeys, *al-Mo’jam*, 336. Here the word *qasideh* should probably be interpreted in the general and inaccurate sense of “poem”; the examples that Shams-e Qeys provides include a *qasideh* which yields a *qet’eh* and a *robā’i*, a case which would contradict his definition were the word *qasideh* understood *sensu stricto*.

¹²⁷See Bray, “Picture-Poems for Saladin.”

¹²⁸In fact, this is the explanation of the term *movashshab* given in Kamāl al-Din Hosayn Vā’ez-e Kāshefī, *Badāye’ al-afkār*, 117.

¹²⁹See Bray, “Picture-Poems for Saladin.”

¹³⁰See *ibid.* On block printed amulets, see Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms*; Muehlhaeusler, “Eight Arabic Block Prints”; Nashef, *Ya Kafī, Ya Shafī*, 48-9; Canaan, “The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans”; Fodor, *Sufism and Magic*; Kiānrād, *Gesundheit und Glück für seinen Besitzer*.

¹³¹For illustrations, see Lienhard, “Carmina figurata,” 167; Lienhard, *A History of Classical Poetry*, 211.

the poem given on the right-hand blade moves on the praise of the Prophet, and 'Ali ebn Abi Tālib, who "gave me this *Zu l-faqār* in a dream / So that the hearts of the enemy might be split in two."¹³² Only one line of verse is provided on the left-hand blade; the reader must complete it by following the author's instructions, feeding the epithets of God into a blank table of 144 cells, which can be divided into magic squares in order to produce sixteen lines of verse.¹³³

The poem extends across several folios, with the hilt occupying f. 65b, the blades ff. 66a-67a, and the tips f. 67b. Although it is possible to view and to decode the poem by turning the pages of the book, the segments make more visual sense if they are joined to create a single scroll, and indeed, in his opening remarks, the poet refers to the piece as a *manshur* (diploma), a kind of document which often took the form of a scroll.¹³⁴ The sword can be stitched together as shown in Figure 1.

The poem mimics the appearance of some early modern and modern talismanic scrolls and amulets (known variously in the singular as *tahviteh*, *berz* and *hejāb*) containing the motif of *Zu l-faqār*.¹³⁵ It can, for example, be compared with a metal printing block constructed for the production of amulets and dated 1322/1904-5, which is now in the collections of the Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait.¹³⁶ The design of this block consists of *Zu l-faqār* surrounded by a written description of the amulet's protective function and the methods for its employment. Interlocking geometrical shapes, which are connected to one another by linkages, and which contain text, feature on the sword itself. Some of the writing on the sword consists of Qur'ānic *āyāt* which are arranged so as to sound like a prayer,¹³⁷ but the names of the Prophet and the People of the House also appear, as do a number of the epithets of God.

The similarities between the poem and the talismanic scroll in Kuwait extend to aspects of function. In the introductory comments to his poem, Mir Zeyn al-Din describes his vision of 'Ali ebn Abi Tāleb:

[‘Ali] said: "Take this *Zu l-faqār* from my palm / And unfurl the standard¹³⁸ in *majāles*."

When I touched the hilt / A sea of milk boiled out of my chest.

¹³²Persian MS. 219, f. 66b: *dād be-ruyā be-man in zu l-faqār / tā del-e doshman shavad az vey do nim*.

¹³³For similar operations requiring the use of magic squares in amulets, see Kriss and Kriss-Heinrich, *Volksglaube im Bereich des Islam*, 2: 111-25. See also Ja'far Sharif, *Qanoon-e-Islam*, 347-72; and Savage-Smith and Maddison, *The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art*, 106-9.

¹³⁴Persian MS. 219, f. 64a.

¹³⁵See, for example, Nashef, *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi*, Cat. No. 159; Kriss and Kriss-Heinrich, *Volksglaube im Bereich des Islam*, 2: 113 and unnumbered plate; Cnaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," 176, Fig. 32.

¹³⁶Fodor, *Sufism and Magic*, 10-11. The poem is significantly longer than the block when the sheets on which it is transcribed are laid end to end. The block measures some 22 cm in length, as against the poem's 145 cm.

¹³⁷Ibid. As identified by Fodor, the *āyāt* are: Q.2:255-6; 40:44; 68:31-2; 108; 112; 113; 114.

¹³⁸A reference to the *'alams* which are unfurled during Moharram.

These words contain the miracle of Heydar / Whoever understands them will become a perfect man.¹³⁹

In magicking lines of verse out of the table and completing the poem, the reader renders the talisman effective, and gains the protection of ‘Ali ibn Abi Tāleb.

The second picture poem in Persian MS. 219 is altogether simpler. It is a *ghazal* in the form of a flower, where the lines of each *beyt* are copied onto a petal, and a separate line sits on the sepals.¹⁴⁰ The rhyme word *nadīdam* (“I did not see”) sits on the stigma. The poet explains in his introductory comments that in every *beyt*, the inversion of the phrases of the first *mesrā‘* creates the second *mesrā‘*. In fact, this is not quite what happens, as it is each syntactic unit, rather than each word, which is inverted. The poem does qualify as a *movashshah*, since there is play with meter, and the final line is not part of the main *ghazal*. However, the reader is not required to magic new verses to complete the poem, and the inversions do not produce new meanings. Indeed, it would be redundant to translate the second *mesrā‘* in ll. 2-8:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم * رهبر عشق است بطبع سليم
 ندیدم دل بی غم در این عالم * در این عالم دل بی غم ندیدم
 ندیدم کم جفا از خوب رویان * جفا از خوب رویان کم ندیدم
 ندیدم هم سر آزادگان را * سر آزادگان را هم ندیدم
 ندیدم دم جدا از بار در تن * جدا از بار در تن دم ندیدم
 ندیدم رم بمفتونی ز جانان * بمفتونی ز جانان رم ندیدم
 ندیدم نم بچشم مرد غافل * بچشم مرد غافل نم ندیدم
 ندیدم هم باوج عشق همسر * باوج عشق همسر هم ندیدم
 ارادت در دل آزرده دارم * در آن در آرزو آورده زارم

In the name of God, the merciful and the compassionate * Passion guides a sound nature.

I have not seen a heart free from sorrow in this world.

¹³⁹Persian MS. 219, f. 63a. *Goft besetān az kafam in zu l-faqār / dar majāleshā ‘alam kon āshkār / sar-e qabzeh chon kard talqin be-man / jowshan zad az sineh-am bahr-e laban / mo‘jez-e beydar bovad dar in kalām / har ke dar yābad shavad mard-e tamām.*

¹⁴⁰Persian MS. 219, f. 449a.

I have not seen but a little cruelty from the beautiful.
Nor have I seen people behave nobly.
I have not seen anyone exhibit pride without grief.
I have not seen fear in anyone entranced by a sweetheart.
I have not seen tears in the eyes of ignorant men.
Nor have I seen my equal in the preferment of passion
My tortured heart has a wish * To which, in hope, my desire is consigned.

It is worth noting that there is a close correlation between the visual form of this poem and its intellectual content. It is a lyric poem, and hence the flower is an appropriate shape, just as the sword is a fitting form for a talismanic poem. Similarly close pairings between form and genre are to be found in earlier picture poems.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

This paper has had two purposes. The first has been to resuscitate Mir Zeyn al-Din, whose poetry appears to have remained unexamined since Persian MS. 219 was consigned to John Macpherson's bookshelves. Mir Zeyn al-Din ought to be better known, both because he was a competent and prolific poet, and because he traveled so widely. His career testifies to the catholic contexts in which poetry in Persian was consumed in eighteenth-century India, from the army camp of Ahmad Shāh Dorrāni to the homes of British bureaucrats in Kolkata. The poet adapted himself and his work to each of these markets, and, when it was required, he played to the ideological prerogatives of his patrons. He also made the intertextual connections of his verse as obvious as possible when producing work for *moshā'irāt*, in order to fulfil the expectations of his peers.

The second purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate the extent to which paratextual material in manuscripts, such as rubrics, can help us in reconstructing the histories of literary circulation. Evidence culled from manuscripts can be used in conjunction with information derived from narrative and documentary sources: without the contextual comments in Persian MS. 219, we would have no clue that Mir Zeyn al-Din had ever performed for Ahmad Shāh Dorrāni. More than this, however, the rubrics also show how Mir Zeyn al-Din's poetry was connected to the place, time, and context of its composition. Not only do they mark a series of choices concerning form, theme and rhetoric, which the poet made in order to

¹⁴¹See Bray, "Picture-Poems for Saladin."

complement the different environments in which he was writing, but they also show that he did not compose alone. He collaborated constantly with his colleagues and his patrons in creating texts. It is the background of inherent sociability against which Mir Zeyn al-Din wrote which most probably inspired him to make his rubrications in the first place. He recognized that each poem was the product of a particular set of circumstances and interactions.

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