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A History of Style and a Style of History: The Hermeneutic of *Tarz* in Persian Literary Criticism

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میان اهل سخن امتیاز من صائب
همین بس است که با طرز آشنا شده ام

Oh Sā'ib! To be distinguished among the poets
It was enough that I have become acquainted with style

Abstract

This article considers style in Persian literary history and its critical rhetorical and hermeneutical roles for poets and critics in the medieval and Safavid-Mughal eras. It explores how *tarz* (manner) emerged as a hermeneutical term in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and achieved a central position in *sukhansanjī* (evaluating speech) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This account of *tarz*—grounded in its historicity and multivalent implications—offers new insights into language for early modern Persian literary history, which is often periodized as *sabk-i hindī* (Indian style) or *tāza-gūyī* (fresh-speaking). Through a close reading of Safavid-Mughal *tazkiras* (literary compendiums), this contribution examines *tarz* as an operating concept deployed by a number of prominent *tazkira* writers. Finally, the article concludes by discussing this legacy's impact on twentieth-century scholarship.

Keywords: *ghazal*; historiography; Persian literature; Mughal Empire; Safavid Empire; *tarz*; *tazkira*

Most scholars have recognized the early twentieth century as a watershed moment in the historiography of Persian literature, when modern literary studies were institutionalized and key authoritative works were produced. One of the most foundational works of twentieth-century literary criticism is *Tāriḫ-i Tatavvur-i Nasr-i Fārsī*, also known as *Sabkshināsī* (Stylistics), written by Muhammad Taqī Bahār (d. 1951). For decades, several generations of scholars have studied Bahār's *Sabkshināsī* and placed it at the center of Persian literary historiography, mostly focusing on its periodization and nationalist orientation.¹ By reading Bahār's *Sabkshināsī* from this perspective, there is a tendency to describe his idea of style (*sabk*) primarily as a modern concept imported from Western scholarship. For example, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi considers Bahār's understanding of style as foreign to premodern Persian literary history. Even though he acknowledges the existence of

¹ For example, in his examination of *Sabkshināsī*, Wali Ahmadi frames Bahār's work as a national project in which Bahār tries to represent the "historical continuity" of the Iranian nation by invoking pre-Islamic "Iranian languages and literature" in his literary history. Ahmadi maintains that "it is necessary, then, to situate and examine *Sabkshināsī* precisely within the context of a literary history bound to a national imaginary order and the institutional politics of literary studies" ("Institution of Persian Literature," 141–42).

stylistic terms such as *shīva* (method), *tarz* (manner), *tawr* (route), and *tariq* (way) in the language of premodern critics such as Amīr Khusraw (d. 725/1325), he argues that they are disconnected from how style (or *sabk*) is used in modern Persian literary history.² Similarly, Muhammad Ja'far Mahjūb claims that “there has been no discussion of style in Iran until our era, and the critics of poetry and prose did not examine the stylistic features of a poet or writer.”³ Although Mahjūb recognizes that poets were aware of the notion of style through limited usage of *tarz* and *shīva*, he argues that their understanding of these stylistic terms was entirely irrelevant to the way modern scholars conceptualize style.⁴

Recent scholarship has begun to challenge this view. As Alexander Jabbari argues, Bahār's work (together with that of other Iranian, Indian, and European scholars) was engaged in reworking premodern and early modern materials. His work allows us to see Bahār's continuity with literary criticism developments that preceded him.⁵ A deeper examination of style in premodern works will allow us to better understand Bahār's notion of *sabk* and the early modern and modern literary historiography it drew from and contributed to. As a departure from Faruqi's and Mahjūb's claims that style is an entirely modern concept that has no place in pre-twentieth-century historiography, I argue that style, although highly capacious and fluid, is central to the way early modern critics understood their own literary tradition. By working through the various discussions of style found in some key *tazkiras* (literary compendiums) and *divans* (poetic collections), we can better understand the early modern literary critics on their own terms and use their insights to develop a more nuanced vocabulary for the study of the literary history of that period.

Several scholars have already made important contributions to this work. Increased attention has been given to understanding the notion of Safavid-Mughal literary style—also known as the Indian style (*sabk-i hindī*)—and its trademarks in early modern Persian literary history.⁶ Some of these scholars have examined the Safavid-Mughal literary corpora, including *tazkiras* and *divans*, to learn how early modern critics and poets conceptualized Persian literary history.⁷ Despite these extensive contributions, the analysis of *tarz* as an evolving stylistic term and its hermeneutical functions throughout the Persian literary tradition remains an ongoing project. The aim of this article is to identify the historical moment that *tarz* emerged as a key concept in Persian literary historiography and to demonstrate some of its nuanced usages in Safavid-Mughal literary historiography. My ultimate objective is to show how the stylistic frameworks used by Safavid-Mughal critics and poets afford us a more nuanced and granular account of the early modern period.

We need to take into consideration that the notion of style is capacious, similar to other slippery terms that have various meanings and implications. In this article, I use “style” in the same sense as the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, which describes style as the method by which a writer carries meaning, tone, and emotion in their writing and the “common features that identify the works of particular places, times, groups, or schools.”⁸ Despite many discrete usages of the term *tarz* in the early modern Persian literary context, these two basic implications of style are recognizable. The concept of style is not limited to a single word;

² Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “Stranger in the City,” 1–6.

³ Muhammad Ja'far Mahjūb, *Sabk-i Khurāsānī*, 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵ See Alexander Jabbari, “Making of Modernity.”

⁶ See, for example, Ehsan Yarshater, “Indian or Safavid Style”; Arthur Dudley, “Sabk-e Hendi”; Mahmūd Futūhi Rūd Mī'jānī, “Nāzuk Khayālī-yi Isfahānī”; Husayn Hasan-Pūr Ālāshtī, *Tarz-i tāza*; Z. G. Rizaev, *Indiiskii stil' vpoëzii na farsi kontsa*, vols. 16–17; M. L. Reĭsner, *Ėvolutsiia klassicheskoi gazeli na farsi*; and Riccardo Zipoli, *Chirā Sabk-i Hindī*.

⁷ The many significant contributions to this field include: Paul Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani*; Muzaffar Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*; Jane Mikkelsen, “Worlds of the Imagination”; Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*; Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity*; Kevin Schwartz, *Remapping Persian Literary History* and “Local Lives of a Transregional Poet”; and Muhammad Reza Shafī'ī Kadkanī, *Shā'ir-i Āyina-hā*. This is not a comprehensive list, but rather a few examples of valuable contributions to the question of the Safavid-Mughal literary tradition.

⁸ *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 1369.

premodern scholars used closely related concepts such as *shīva*, *tarz*, *tariq*, and *tawr* to discuss Persian poetry. From the fourteenth century onward, however, there was an interesting development: *tarz* became more frequently used in rhetorical manuals and *tazkiras*, eventually becoming the standard term used for the discussion of Persian literary history.

Early Implications of Style, and an Introduction of the Subject

There is a history of the concept of style before its efflorescence in the Safavid-Mughal era that sheds light on how we might understand this notion in the early modern context. The earliest references to the notion of style, using terms such as *shīva*, *tarz*, and *tariq*, date back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a time when the lands of *Irāq-i ʿajam* (western Iran) and *Āzarbāyjān* had emerged as a new center for the patronage of Persian poetry, in competition with the tradition's homeland of *Khurāsān* and *Transoxiana* to the east. Two of the major poets of this period, *Khāqānī Shirvānī* (d. 595/1190) and *Nizāmī Ganjavī* (d. 607/1209), who both came from the same cultural zone in *Āzarbāyjān*, left commentary on the novelty of their style. In the following lines, *Khāqānī* emphasizes the newness and supremacy of his style and distinguishes it from that of his predecessors, saying: "I am the king of poetry and prose in *Khurāsān* and *Irāq* (*Irāq-i ʿajam*) • that I have, every word, brought to the educated people for their evaluation / the just call me master, for in content and in language • I have brought forth a new style, not an old one" (*pādīshāh-i nazm-u nasr-am dar Khurāsān-u Irāq • ki ahl-i dānīsh rā zi har lafz imtihān āvarda-am / munsifān ustād dānand-am ki dar maʿnī-u lafz • shīva-yi tāza na rasm-i bāstān āvarda-am*).⁹ By drawing a dichotomy between fresh and ancient (*tāza* and *bāstān*), *Khāqānī* not only endorses the novelty of his poetic style and the way in which it deviates from literary precedent, but also reveals his historical awareness of the development of Persian poetry.

The dynamic between old and new suggests a sense of continuity between the historical past and the present through the notion of style. We can explore the nature of this dynamic further in another line of *Khāqānī*'s poetry: "I have a unique and new style • while *ʿUnsurī* holds the ancient style / he wrote neither philosophy, nor homily, nor asceticism • for *ʿUnsurī* did not even know a letter of those [fields]" (*marā shīva-yi khāss-u tāzast-u dāsht • hamān shīva-yi bāstān ʿUnsurī / na tahqīq guft-u na vaʿz-u na zuhd • ki harfī nadānist az ān ʿUnsurī*).¹⁰ *ʿUnsurī Balkhī* (d. 431/1039) was a leading Persian poet who served as the poet laureate (*malik al-shuʿarā*) at the court of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 389–421/998–1030). He was a model in writing the *qasida* (ode) in *Khurāsān*, and was noted, praised, and imitated by several poets.¹¹ *Khāqānī* uses *ʿUnsurī* as a foil, challenging him and claiming his place as an authority on poetry. By maintaining the binary between fresh and ancient, self and other, *Khāqānī* not only positions himself as an established poet within Persian literary history, but also claims superiority over his predecessors through his innovative style. He inserts himself as a pivotal poet in the development of Persian poetry and the new *ʿUnsurī* of his age. Becoming a poetic model in the premodern era required multiple competencies, including creativity and stylistic innovation, while at the same time competing with established masters of a particular genre.

Furthermore, along these lines, *Khāqānī* allows us to access his denotation of *shīva* by differentiating his poetry from that of *ʿUnsurī*. It seems that for *Khāqānī*, *shīva* refers to three things: possible functions of poetry (didactic, homiletic, or philosophical), possible topics for poems, and possible sources of images, figurative language, etc.¹² All these implications

⁹ *Khāqānī, Divān*, 258.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 926.

¹¹ For more about *ʿUnsurī* and his literary career see "ʿOnsori." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, April 7, 2008. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/onsori>. For further discussion of *ʿUnsurī*'s style, see *Shafīʿī Kadkanī, Suvar-i Khayāl dar Shīr-i Farsi*, 526–39.

¹² *Bo Utas* also uses this example to state that, in these lines of *Khāqānī*'s poetry, *shīva* (manner) refers only to theme ("Genres in Persian Literature").

point toward Khāqānī making the distinction between the old qasida of the Ghaznavid court and the “fresh” poetry that engages with these new topics and themes. This transformation offers new materials outside of the court for poets’ imagery, language, and rhetoric, and fashions new topics and themes in different poetic forms.

Similarly, Khāqānī’s counterpart Nizāmī attempted to fashion himself as the initiator of a new style in writing *masnavī*.¹³ For example, in *Makhzan al-Asrār*, he marks authenticity and newness as the two main features of his poetic thoughts and style, saying “I brought forth a fresh magic • cast a figure from a new mold . . . / the style is strange [but] don’t ignore it • if you embrace it, it won’t be strange / for this liberated poetry, full of the garden’s image • is not like a lamp with borrowed kindler” (*shu‘bada-yī tāza barangikhtam • haykalī az qālib-i naw rikhtam . . . / shiva gharīb ast mashaw nāmujīb • gar binavāzīsh nabāshad gharīb / kīn sukhan-i rasta pur az naqsh-i bāgh • ‘āriyat afrūz nashud chun chirāgh*).¹⁴ By setting his fresh and distinctive style against the models of his forerunners, particularly Sanā’ī in his *Hadiqat al-Haqīqat*, Nizāmī places himself in competition with the past and uses his style and originality to prove his superiority.¹⁵ This example shows Nizāmī’s awareness of his rupture of tradition, and he apparently anticipated that his poetry might be difficult to grasp or even unappealing to his readers, who had been educated and influenced by previous canonic poets and works. Accordingly, he promoted his alien and novel style to persuade readers to accept his poetry. Lastly, because Nizāmī was active in narrative poetry, the originality of his poetic ideas was more critical than it was for a poet like Khāqānī. This originality suggests that the notions of freshness and strangeness, as two important premodern stylistic features, might have had different implications for innovative poets.

These are the first indications of the idea of freshness in poetry (*tāzaqī*), articulated through the lens of style, that developed and became a critical part of Persian literary historiography. They indicate the extent to which the audience played a significant role in a poet’s literary career. Interestingly, both poets are not only trying to “sell” their crafts to the patrons of the present, but also to contemporary and future poets.¹⁶ In their struggle for dominance within a particular genre, these innovative poets had to use their poetry to announce their intervention and, in that way, attract a greater audience. For example, Khāqānī directly addresses the community of poets as he emphasizes his new style and seeks admission into their ranks: “This is a strange style that I have fashioned • it is appropriate for the poets to consider my poetry as a model” (*hast tariq-i gharīb inki man āvarda-am • ahl-i sukhan rā sazad gufta-yi man pīshvā*).¹⁷ All these examples show that Nizāmī and Khāqānī conceive of their contributions to poetry and their historical legacy in terms of style, albeit that style for Nizāmī means something different than it does for Khāqānī. Each attempts to secure his own legacy by persuading future poets to imitate him, thus making the poetic style and manner of writing recognizable and the poetry universal. For Khāqānī and Nizāmī, style emerges as a self-aware breakthrough from previous generations, as they

¹³ *Masnavī* is a Persian literary form that contains a series of couplets in rhymed pairs, used mainly for a long narrative poem, such as for romantic, heroic, didactic, or mystic stories.

¹⁴ Nizāmī Ganjavī, *Makhzan al-Asrār*, 35–36.

¹⁵ In *Makhzan al-Asrār*, Nizāmī compared his work with Sanā’ī’s *Hadiqat al-Haqīqat* and imagined his own and Sanā’ī’s poetry as golden coins, concluding that “although in that coin (*Hadiqat al-Haqīqat*) speech is like gold / my gold coin is better than his” (*gar chi dar ān sikka sukhan chun zar ast / sikka-yi zarr-i man az ān bihtar ast*). In that way, he acknowledges the high value of Sanā’ī’s poetry and at the same time shows the superiority of his poetry over that of Sanā’ī (*Makhzan al-Asrār*, 36).

¹⁶ The metaphor of the poet as a craftsman and the patron as a customer is well represented in a famous qasida of Farrukhī Sīstānī (d. 429/ 1037–38) with this opening line: “I left Sīstān with the caravan of silk merchants” (*bā kāravān-i hulla beraftam zi sīstān*), which, according to Nizāmī ‘Arūzī, played a significant role in Farrukhī’s success as a court poet. As Clinton discusses in this poem, Farrukhī represents himself as a “silked and painstaking craftsman and one who is unself-conscious about both his intention to sell his wares at the best market for them and his willingness to suit them to the taste of his customer and patron.” See Nizāmī ‘Arūzī, *Chahār Maqāla*, 36–40; Jerome Clinton, “Court Poetry,” 80–81.

¹⁷ Khāqānī, *Dīvān*, 39.

declare that as poets, they are not situating themselves within the existing poetic field but can only be understood outside of its terms.

It is suggestive that although poets of the medieval period showed a kind of self-consciousness of the notion of style, it was absent from rhetorical manuals. Conspicuously, the recognized rhetoricians such as Muhammad b. ‘Umar Radūyānī (d. 514/1120), Rashīd Vatvāt (d. 578/1182), and Shams-i Qays Rāzī (d. 627/1230) did not discuss style and focused primarily on poets’ characteristic use of particular rhetorical devices and their approaches to meter and rhyme. For instance, in his explanation of *husn-i takhallus*,¹⁸ Rashīd Vatvāt referred to Kamālī’s innovative treatment of this poetic device and asserted that “I believe that no one amongst the Arabs and Persians has created such an excellent *takhallus* (disengagement), and this is novel in Kamālī’s works” (*va i’tiqād-i man ān ast ki dar ‘Arab va ‘Ajām hich kas bih az in takhallus nakarda ast va in az kārḥā-yi Kamālī badīr ast*).¹⁹ As we see, Vatvāt made an evaluative statement recognizing Kamālī’s innovative approach to a particular literary device and situated him in the broader literary field, but did not refer to his style. In other words, medieval critics like Vatvāt were more concerned with rhetorical than stylistic innovation.

It is not until the fourteenth century that there is a turning point, at which time style becomes a crucial concept in rhetorical manuals. The critical figure in this movement was the fourteenth-century rhetorician, Sayf-i Jām-i Hiravī, who laid out a concrete theory of style using the specific term *tarz* and consequently shed new light on the conceptualization of style. He used *tarz* in a precise stylistic sense and explicitly differentiated it from other categories, such as “kinds” (*anvā’*), which were largely form-based, and “intentions” (*maqāsīd*), which were theme-based.²⁰ According to Sayf-i Jām, “style literally refers to shape and appearance; but in the terminology of the rhetoricians, it is that thing by which [the poet] specifies a [particular] genre from among the genres of poetry, using a form from among the [various] forms of poetic descriptions” (*tarz az rūy-i lughat, hay’at va shikl ast va dar istilāh-i in tāyifa ānast ki maqsadī rā az maqāsīd-i nazm dar naw’ī az anvā’-i awsāf-i nazm makhsūs gardānīda bāshad*).²¹ Based on this definition, Sayf-i Jām suggested ten poetic styles and identified each with an individual master poet who served as a model for a specific genre. Two examples of his *tarz* categories were the “romantic” (*‘āshiqāna*) style, which contained “soundness and elegance” (*salāmat va zawq*) and was associated with the poet Sa’dī, and the “philosophical” (*hakīmāna*), which was considered Sanā’ī’s style, containing exhortation and advice supported by proverbs and similes.²² Although Sayf-i Jām’s intervention played a vital role in the history of the reconceptualization of *tarz* within the rhetorical tradition, his usage of *tarz* was not representative of the later tradition, as embodied by early modern *tazkira* writers. The following sections analyze the new approach to *tarz* in the *tazkira* tradition and how its hermeneutical principles played a critical role in Safavid-Mughal literary texts.

¹⁸ *Husn-i takhallus* refers to a high-quality verse that a poet composes to change the subject of his poem, moving from the *nasīb* (a short prelude to the *qasida*) of the *qasida* to its panegyric portion. According to Radūyānī, with this verse (*takhallus*) real poets could be distinguished from those who pretended to be poets, and falsified poetry distinguished from the pure. See Rādūyānī, *Tarjumān al-Balāgha*, 57. See also Meisami’s observation on *husn-i takhallus*, in *Structure and Meaning*, 75–89.

¹⁹ Vatvāt, *Hadā’iq al-Sihr*, 32.

²⁰ Hiravī, *Jāmi’ al-Sanāyi’*, folio 212. For more information about Sayf-i Jām and his work, see Nawshāhī, *Jāmi’ al-Sanāyi’*, 36–49. It is worth adding that the development of Persian literary criticism in the fourteenth century was not limited to Sayf-i Jām Hiravī but seems to have been a broader movement taking place in India under the patronage of the Delhi Sultanate. Hiravī is clearly in dialog with the ideas raised by Amīr Khusraw, particularly in the introduction of his *divan*.

²¹ Hiravī, *Jāmi’ al-Sanāyi’*, 214.

²² *Ibid.*, 211, 216. It is of note that Hiravī’s ideas on *tarz* and his categorization of Persian poetic styles were later adopted by Muhammad ‘Alī Tahānavī (d. 1755), the author of *Kashshāf-i Istilāhāt al-Funūn va al-‘Ulūm*, an encyclopedic work containing Persian and Arabic scientific terms. See Tahānavī, *Kashshāf Istilāhāt*, 1131–32.

The Construction of Literary History and Stylistics in the *Tazkira* Tradition

In the previous pages, I have suggested that early conceptualizations of style in poetry give us a sense of how poets talked about themselves as individuals. In this way, their discussions of style were only occasional rather than representative of a broader movement. The systematic use of *tarz* as a part of literary history appeared first in the post-Mongol rhetorical manuals before later developing in the *tazkira* tradition, particularly in the Safavid-Mughal period. The emergence of the poetic *tazkira* genre opened a new space for literary scholars to practically analyze and discuss the concept of *tarz* in an extensive and integrated way. Unlike rhetorical texts, which only included the names of a few master poets and their selected poetry, the *tazkira* tradition established itself as a genre that created a textual community for poets of varying skill sets. The collection of poets' biographies and selected poetry in a single text created space for critics to evaluate poets' poetry in a more comprehensive way. In that way, the *tazkira* tradition facilitated the development of the concept of *tarz* and its role in literary history.

Like other long-standing literary genres, *tazkira* writing underwent many changes over time in response to various sociohistorical and political factors. In the earliest *tazkiras*, including 'Awfī's *Lubāb al-Albāb* and Dawlatshāh Samarqandī's *Tazkirat al-Shu'arā*, the authors took a biographical approach, describing selected poets' lives and their literary careers. In such an approach, the earliest anthologists displayed their critical viewpoints in an implicit rather than explicit way. From the sixteenth century onward, we see a new approach to the *tazkira* genre, in which writers paid more attention to analysis of the poetry and poets' styles.²³ Accordingly, in contrast to earlier anthologists such as Muhammad 'Awfī (d. 640/1242), who alluded to style using a range of terms such as 'azab (sweet), *matbū'* (pleasant), *fasiḥ* (eloquent), and *nāzūk* (delicate), Safavid-Mughal literary scholars tried to provide more critical insights.²⁴ In their examination of poetic style, these critics developed a way of writing literary history that was not limited to rhetorical and philological issues but considered the individual style of master poets and their followers as the main focus of their analysis. In this way, they adopted the framework that we saw earlier in the poetry of Khāqānī and Nizāmī, in which certain poets established themselves as masters to be emulated, imitated, and superseded. These early modern scholars tried to crystallize and critically develop the nebulous idea of *tarz* that had first been fashioned by Khāqānī and Nizāmī. Subsequently, the elaboration of *tarz* emerged in the *tazkira* corpus, with authors deploying such terms as *tarz-i khāss* (distinct style), *tarz-i tāza* (new style), *shiva-yi qudamā* (ancient style), *tatabbu'-i tarz* (following a style), *ma'ni-yi bigāna* (strange meaning), and *lafz-i gharīb* (bizarre word).

It is critical to note that, in the early modern *tazkira* tradition, the term *tarz* and its synonyms carried multiple implications for the analysis of poetry in general, rather than just individual poetic styles. For example, *tarz* was used to distinguish between what modern

²³ Stefano Pellò shows how in this era scholars took a different direction from their predecessors and turned their attention to present poets instead of the past ones ("Persian Poets on the Streets"). This approach may have played a critical role in the development of *tazkira* tradition in the Safavid-Mughal era.

²⁴ Comparing the comments of three *tazkira* writers about Khāqānī may give us a better understanding of the development of the stylistic approach in the *tazkira* tradition. 'Awfī describes the style of Khāqānī's poetry in an obscure way, without giving readers any details about his poetry, saying "a few people believe that the manner of speech ended with Khāqānī, and after him, no one knitted such poetic fabric in the loom of expression" (*jamā'atī bar ān-and ki shiva-yi sukhan bar Khāqānī khatm shud-i ast va ba'd az ū kas bar minvāl-i bayān chinān tansij-i nazm nabāfta; Lubāb al-Albāb*, vol. 2, 221). Similarly, Awhadī addresses Khāqānī's poetry but tries to give more details about it, arguing that "there are difficult and cryptic words, and obscure and disused meanings in his poetry" that make it difficult for poets to imitate (*Arafāt al-'Ashiqīn*, vol. 2, 1270). Last, Khān Ārzū provides a more detailed analysis of Khāqānī's poetic style. He defines the foundational elements of Khāqānī's poetic style to be the high frequency of "meaningful obscurity, the use of uncommon vocabulary and words from different sects, the method of enigma and riddles, and citing Arabic verses" (*ghumūzat-i ma'navī, isti'māl-i alfāz-i ghayr-i mashhūra, istilāhāt-i firaq-i digar, va tariq-i ta'miya va lughaz, va abyāt-i 'Arabi; Majma' al-Nafāyis*, vol. 1, 399).

scholarship generally refers to as forms: the ghazal (a short poem with a specific meter and fixed rhyme order, usually with a love theme), the qasida (ode), the *rubāʿī* (quatrain), and others. There were kinds of *tarz* associated with specific stylistic approaches within the ghazal, such as *tarz-i vuqūʿ* (realistic style) or *tarz-i vāsūkh*; with individual poets such as the *tarz* of Sāʿib and the *tarz* of Asīr; or with geographical regions, such as *tarz-i ʿIrāq* or *tarz-i Kashmīr*.²⁵ Sometimes *tazkira* writers defined *tarz* in association with noticeable frequent uses of a certain rhetorical element such as *tarz-i ihām* (ambiguity) or *tarz-i ighrāq* (exaggeration or hyperbole). For instance, in his discussion of Sanāyī Mashhadī's poetry, Ārzū says, "he has cultivated an exaggerated style" (*hamān tariq-i ighrāq rā varzida ast*).²⁶ By highlighting Mashhadī's *tariq-i ighrāq*, Ārzū identifies its frequency in Mashhadī's poetry as a core feature of his poetic style. In that sense, it expands beyond considerations of rhetoric to encompass discussions of an entire approach to writing poetry. *Tarz* appears in several theoretically nuanced ways, although always in relationship to the underlying consideration of style in one way or another.

This elaboration of the term *tarz* took place in the seventeenth century, a time in which both the *tazkira* tradition and the vocabulary of literary analysis gained a great deal of sophistication. This transition can be traced to literary figures such as Taqī al-Dīn Kāshī (d. 1016/1607), Taqī al-Dīn Muhammad Awhadī Balyānī (d. 1050/1640), Mīrzā Tāhīr Nasrābādī (d. 1089/1678), and others. Taqī Awhadī's massive *tazkira*, entitled *ʿArafāt al-ʿAshiqīn va ʿArasāt al-ʿArifīn*, composed around 1613 to 1615 in Agra, played a key role in the development of the *tazkira* tradition and became a major source for later literary scholars.²⁷ Awhadī was able to combine both biographical and critical approaches in his writing, providing detailed information about the poets (particularly his contemporaries) and a critical description of their poetic styles. With this approach, he established a new method of doing literary history that inspired a new generation of literary critics in the eighteenth century, including Khān Ārzū, Vālih Dāghistānī, and Āzād Bilgrāmī, all of whom represented themselves more as critics than biographers. They shifted away from a mere recognition of poets' style and drew into debate new questions about poetic style and literary history, such as who originated the ghazal, or who innovated a specific poetic style. For this reason, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should be regarded as a turning point in Persian literary historiography.

A Turning Point: From Awhadī to Ārzū in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

In an influential intervention, Awhadī draws an implicit link between temporality and poetic style and uses it as the overarching structure of his *tazkira*. In that sense, he uses the conventional temporal divisions of ancients (*mutaqaddimīn*) and moderns (*mutaʿakhhirīn*), while also fashioning a novel category of poets, the medievals (*mutavassitīn*), to create his own chronology of poets and styles. It is significant that no other *tazkira* writer before Awhadī introduced a concept like *mutavassitīn*. This is a different temporal framework

²⁵ For instance, Awhadī considers the *tarz-i vuqūʿ* (realistic style) a prominent method of *ghazal*-writing during the early Safavid period and introduces Mīrzā Sharaf-ibn Qāzī Jahān (d. 968/1561) as the originator of that style. See Awhadī, *ʿArafāt al-ʿAshiqīn*, vol. 4, 2113. For more detailed information about the *vuqūʿ* style, see Losensky, "Poetics and Eros," 749. The *tarz-i vuqūʿ* refers to the *ghazal*-writing method in which poets used a simple and even colloquial language to describe interactions with their beloveds in a realistic way. The *tarz-i vāsūkh* is another important style of *ghazal*-writing, in which authors tried to move away from the conventional approach toward the beloved in the ghazal tradition. Ārzū uses *tarz-i vāsūkh* to describe the style of Vahshī Bāfqī, as well as some of Muhammad Rizā Mashhadī's poetry. See Ārzū, *Majmaʿ al-Nafāyis*, vol. 1, 453. Also, in *Tazkirat al-Shuʿarā*, Mutribī Samarqandī identifies poetic styles through local designation, such as *tarz-i ʿIrāq* and *tarz-i māvarāʾ al-nahr*.

²⁶ Ārzū, *Majmaʿ al-Nafāyis*, vol. 1, 317.

²⁷ For more information about the importance of Awhadī's *tazkira* see Golchīn Maʿānī, *Tarikh-i Tazkira-hā-yi Fārsī*, vol. 2, 7–11; and Sāhibkāri's introduction to Awhadī's *ʿArafāt al-ʿAshiqīn*, vol. 1, 28–41.

from what is commonly used in the Western academy for literary periodization, which draws on European models, but nonetheless we see a certain kind of shared logic in dividing the history of Persian poetry into three parts, reminiscent of Renaissance writers like Petrarch beginning to conceive the idea of a “middle age” that separated them from the ancients. Based on the information provided in *‘Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn*, roughly speaking the ancients (*mutaqaddimīn*) were poets who lived before 1300, the medievals (*mutavassitīn*) were post-Mongol poets who lived between 1300 and 1525, and the moderns (*muta’akhhirīn*) included poets who lived after 1525.²⁸

By this arrangement, Awhadī not only painted a vivid picture of the trajectory of Persian poetry but also established grounds for the identification of poems that conformed to a certain conventional style, language, and rhetorical features that were popular in a specific literary period. According to Awhadī, there was a vast difference between the styles of the ancients, the medievals, and the moderns, and there was no excuse for misattribution of poems.²⁹ For example, in his entries on Badī‘ī Tabrīzī, Awhadī wrote “some consider him as one of the medievals (*mutavassitīn*), which is mostly correct . . . because the style of this *ghazal* suggests so.”³⁰ We see that Awhadī’s primary framework was a temporal one in which the main characteristics of poets could be understood according to their place on the timeline.

Nonetheless, when it comes to his observations of how poetic style changed across time, Awhadī brought a greater degree of nuance to Persian literary history through the consideration of the geography of patronage. He located the origins of Persian poetry in Khurāsān (northeastern Iran), then explained that its first major stylistic change took place when it began to be patronized in Ghazna.³¹ According to Awhadī, “when poetry returned from Ghazna to Khurāsān, it achieved its apogee there, and when it shifted to *‘Irāq*, the poets from there became the emblem of Persian poetry.”³² What he meant by this was that Persian poetry followed its centers of patronage. With the rise of the Ghaznavids, he identified a stylistic change when it moved to Ghazna and then identified another change when it moved to Khurāsān and *‘Irāq*, which corresponded with the Saljuqids and Salghurids. Interestingly, he did not talk about the dynasties themselves, but his model maps onto those dynastic changes, even if he was not explicit about it. For Awhadī, poetry was the major actor that moves across places, not people. Accordingly, Khurāsān, Ghazna, and *‘Irāq* are the three major literary sites that had played a pivotal role in the development of Persian poetry up to his lifetime. By using geography as a basis for understanding the history of Persian poetry, Awhadī decisively associated the evolution of style to the sociocultural contexts that gave rise to different ways of writing.

Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān Ārzū (d. 1169/1756) was one of those eighteenth-century critics who was deeply influenced by Awhadī, but who also distinguished himself from Awhadī in key ways.³³ Ārzū engaged with Awhadī’s scholarly discourse regarding the historical development of Persian poetry from a different perspective. In contrast to Awhadī, who tied Persian poetry and its stylistic development to particular geographies, Ārzū attempted to understand it through the study of a few pioneering individuals. In that sense, he based his historiography of poetry on two foundations: poetic style and the chronological order

²⁸ These dates are not explicitly named by the author; however, he seems to draw a line between the end of Shāh Isma‘īl I, whom he counts among the *mutavassitīn*, and Shāh Tahmāsp, whom he places among the *muta’akhhirīn*. It is on that basis that I define these periods. It is important to point out that Awhadī sometimes uses *mu‘āsirīn* (contemporaries) to address his contemporary poets (*‘Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn*, vol. 2, 768). Although the scopes of the terms “ancients” and “medievals” are fixed in the *tazkira* tradition, the boundaries of “moderns” and “contemporaries” vary depending on the author’s time period.

²⁹ Awhadī, *‘Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn*, vol. 3, 1673.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 704.

³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, 3519.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ For Ārzū’s biography and literary career, see Dudney, *India in the Persian World of Letters*, ch. 1; See also Prashant Keshavmurthy, “Khān-e Ārzū.”

of master poets. To illustrate, Ārzū wrote that Rūdakī (d. 330/941) was the first poet whose poetry was recorded and preserved in the Islamic era. Then, in the eleventh century, poetry entered a new stage in stylistic evolution with Sanāʿī and continued until the rise of new poets such as Nizāmī, Khāqānī, Anvarī, and Kamāl Ismāʿīl brought a “new change” in poetry.³⁴ From the thirteenth century on, Persian poetry experienced subsequent changes with the emergence of new literary models developed by poets such as Saʿdī (d. 690/1291), Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī (d. 725/1325), Hāfiz (d. 792/1390), Jāmī (d. 898/1492), Bābā Fighānī (d. 925/1519), Sāʿib (d. 1086/1676), and others.

With this approach, Ārzū minimized the issues of movement, location, and patronage, focusing instead purely on poets and their craft. Additionally, he paid more attention to poetry than the historical biography of poets. Instead of arranging his *tazkira* by date, Ārzū did it by the alphabetical order of the poets’ pen names (*takhallus*).³⁵ In this way, he created a literary community of poets as the producers of poetry, regardless of their association with a specific time and place. Turning poets into a list of names based only on objective criteria (alphabetic order) led to significant shifts in information retrieval and in divorcing the poet from his social settings. Furthermore, using pen names rather than real names for the purpose of alphabetization suggests that Ārzū was moving from the *tabaqāt* (biographical compendium) approach to a type of *tazkira* writing that was mostly concerned with the craft of the poet, the poetry.³⁶ We can conclude that the changes Ārzū brought to the model he inherited from Awhadī allowed him to create a space for a deeper exploration of *tarz* and literary analysis, and to assert *tarz* as the criteria for distinguishing poetry. Consequently, the usage of stylistic terms such as *tarz*, *shīva*, and *tarīq* was significantly more frequent than in other *tazkiras*.

This transition should be seen as a result of the shared understanding of literary history of the Safavid-Mughal scholars and their contributions to the field, not as an individual innovation. Ārzū was an influential eighteenth-century literary critic whose works and ideas were effective examples of the development of literary history in that era; his interventions in the development of Persian literary history were the result of his contribution to ongoing debates about poetic style and genre.³⁷ He not only engaged with and reflected on a broader tradition of scholarship in circulation, but also drew a genealogy of *tarz*, which he saw as going back a hundred years to the work of Awhadī. Many of Ārzū’s colleagues, such as Vālih Dāghistānī (d. 1170/1756) and Āzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1200/1786), engaged in similar methods and used particular approaches to understanding the literary history that originated during that period and that today remains understudied. Given the importance of the shared approach of these actors, the following section uses their style-based methods to explore how they tackled questions current in their time, including the origins of the ghazal and the notion of *sabk-i hindī* (Indian style).

Historicizing the Ghazal (Style-Based, Not Form-Based)

One of the most interesting perspectives we can draw from this approach is an account of the ghazal that differs from what we see in modern scholarship. The ghazal is a poetic

³⁴ Ārzū, *Musmir*, 10–12.

³⁵ It is important to note that other *tazkira* writers also adopted the alphabetical framework, but most of them established a different trajectory. For example, ʿAwfī, Sām Mirzā, and other *tazkira* writers conceived of poets in the social hierarchy of a given region. But it is significant that Ārzū and Vālih Dāghistānī, who wrote their *tazkiras* about two years apart, took a different approach and discarded the social, spatial, temporal, and geographic distinctions between poets in their works.

³⁶ For the critical approach of Ārzū in his *tazkira*, see Sīrūs Shamīsā and Shahla Farghadani, “Tahlīl-i Dīdgāh-hāyi Intiqādi-yi Ārzū.”

³⁷ For more on Ārzū, his thoughts, and his influential role in the development of Persian literary history and philology in the eighteenth-century Persianate world, see Dudney, *India in the Persian World of Letters*. See also Mahdi Rahimpūr, *Bar Khwān-i Ārzū* and “Sayarī dar Aḥwāl-u Āsār-i Sīrāj al-Dīn.”

form that is defined as a short poem, tied together with a specific meter and fixed rhyme order, and usually with a theme of love. Shams-i Qays-i Rāzī writes that the ghazal literally means “speaking of women, description of making love to them, and the desire for their friendship,” adding that “most innovative poets (*shu‘arā-yi muflīq*) define the *ghazal* as a depiction of the beloved’s beauty and the description of characteristics of love and lovemaking.”³⁸ However, as Franklin Lewis and other scholars have observed, the ghazal developed over time from a specific genre to a more capacious form that could address multiple topics such as mysticism, philosophy, sociopolitical thoughts, and others.³⁹

The ghazal became a predominant genre in the post-Mongol era and achieved its apogee during the Safavid-Mughal period. The popularity of the ghazal in that era stimulated an ongoing conversation among literary critics about the origin and development of the genre.⁴⁰ The broad hermeneutical functions of *tarz* allowed Safavid-Mughal scholars to represent the ghazal in terms of what modern scholars might call the genre of the ghazal, and to analyze the distinctive stylistic features of a poet, region, and school. These critics used *tarz* to write the history of the ghazal and at the same time make elaborate stylistic changes within that history. The questions of what the ghazal is and where it came from are still questions of debate among contemporary scholars. In recent decades, Iranian and Western scholars such as Sīrūs Shamīsā, Sa‘īd Hamīdiyān, and Franklin Lewis have tried to answer this question through their attention to formal features such as the use of the pen name (*takhallus*), the length of verses, and the *radīf* (refrain). They agree that Sanā‘ī is the initiator of the ghazal as a fixed form. For example, Hamīdiyān argues that Sanā‘ī is the first poet who viewed the ghazal as an “important and extensible form” and in that sense was able to compose the real ghazal and promote it in the history of Persian poetry.⁴¹ Similarly, Lewis considers Sanā‘ī a poet who established himself as the “father of the ghazal” by composing a “large number of ghazals” and including his pen name (*takhallus*) in his poetry for the first time.⁴²

It is striking that, contrary to the modern account, early modern *tazkira* writers excluded Sanā‘ī, and other distinguished poets such as ‘Attār and Mawlānā Rūmī, from the history of the ghazal and began instead with Sa‘dī. Dāghistānī, who conclusively acknowledges Sa‘dī as the initiator of the ghazal, tries to shed some light on this. He maintains that there were some ghazals in the divans of a few poets before Sa‘dī, “but their *ghazals* are in the manner of *qasīda*, which [they] abbreviated and named *ghazal*, while *ghazal*-writing has a distinct and diverse style that is not at all similar to writing *qasīda*” (*ghazal gūyī rā turuq-i ‘alā hidda mukassara ast ki mutlaq mushābihat bi qasīda nadārad*).⁴³ Dāghistānī’s comment suggests that, for him and his colleagues, although the medieval ghazal might appear as a separate genre by form, in its performance and context it was still strongly linked to the world of *qasīda*. We do not see figures such as Sanā‘ī, ‘Attār, and Mawlānā Rūmī included in the history of the ghazal tradition because these scholars’ understanding of ghazal is based on the

³⁸ Shams-i Qays Rāzī, *Al-Mu‘jam fi Ma‘āyir-i Ash‘ār al-‘Ajam*, 418.

³⁹ For more details on *ghazal* as a formal term see Lewis, “Reading, Writing, and Recitation,” 104–11. For a discussion on the *ghazal* as a fixed form see Lewis, “Transformation of the Persian *Ghazal*.”

⁴⁰ In *Khazāna ‘Amira*, Āzād Bilgrāmī reflects on the popularity of the ghazal in that era, saying: “Most people in this period like the *ghazal*, and the earliest poetry was the *qasīda* and rarely the *ghazal*, which was [considered] tasteless” (*marghūb-i, tabāyī‘ in zamān, aksar ghazal ast va shīr-i qudamā bishtar qasīda, va ghazal bi nudrat va ān ham bīmaza*; 18). This is not exclusive to the ghazal; the *tazkira* writers were using *tarz* as a representative of literary forms or genres to describe *qasīda*, *rubā‘ī*, and others.

⁴¹ Hamīdiyān, *Sa‘dī dar Ghazal*, 24. See also Shamīsā, *Sayr-i Ghazal dar Shi‘r-i Fārsī*, 11.

⁴² Lewis, “Reading, Writing, and Recitation,” xii.

⁴³ Dāghistānī, *Riyāz al-Shu‘arā*, vol. 1, 289. The following verses of Khāqānī are in line with Dāghistānī’s account, in which he sees the ghazal as a theme in *qasīda*, saying: “From having a lovely beloved and a good patron / ‘Unsurī became a lyricist and panegyrist / Aside from praise and love poetry / ‘Unsurī has not tested his verve on any other theme” (*zi ma‘shūq-i nikū u mamdūh-i nik / ghazal gū shud-u madhkhwān ‘Unsurī / juz az tarz-i madh u tarz-i ghazal / nakardī zi tab‘ intihān ‘Unsurī*). See Khāqānī, *Divān*, 926.

style that Sa'dī pioneered, and not necessarily on features like pen name, the number of verses, and so on.

The idea of Sa'dī as the creator of the ghazal emerged in the fifteenth-century Timurid era when the genre became popular and established itself as a dominant genre in Persian literature. Jāmī, the Timurid poet-scholar, for example, claims that “Sa'dī is the model of the *ghazal* writers and no one has practiced the way of the *ghazal* (*tariq-i ghazal*) before him or more than him (*pish az vay va bish az vay*).”⁴⁴ Most Safavid-Mughal literary critics such as Awhadī, Ārzū, Dāghistānī, Āzād Bilgrāmī, ‘Alī Ibrāhīm Khān Khalīl (d. 1208/1793), and later Muhammad Qudrat Khān Gūpāmūy (d. 1281/1864), followed Jāmī’s assertion and identified Sa'dī as the initiator (*mukhtari*) of both the ghazal (*tarz-i ghazal*) and the “new style” (*tarz-i tāza*).⁴⁵ For these style-minded literati, Sa'dī was the inventor of the ghazal because he mastered it stylistically and, like Khāqānī and Nizāmī, became the model for later poets to follow. For example, in his historiography of *tarz-i ghazal*, Ārzū describes Amīr Khusraw as a pupil of Sa'dī’s style and believes that “all of the recent poets like Bābā Fighānī and others have merely picked the gleanings from Sa'dī’s harvest.”⁴⁶ Ārzū and his colleagues’ analysis of the history of the ghazal shows that they have a concrete notion of what constituted it, which was predicated on models established by Sa'dī. These scholars’ interpretation of the ghazal, distinct from more recent scholarship, allows us to consider the rise and history of the ghazal from a different angle, with insight into how poets and critics understood their own history within a networked lineage of masters and disciples, one that followed in many respects the same master-disciple relationship that organized many walks of life in the medieval and early modern Islamic world, from scholars, to artisans, to Sufis and saints.

As a founder of the ghazal and due to the acknowledged quality of his poetry, Sa'dī’s image was constructed in the *tazkira* tradition as a legendary and divine figure; even the title “prophet of speech” (*payghambar-i sukhan*) was granted to him. In this respect, Sa'dī’s life, character, and literary activities have been tied to various stories in which the figure of Khizr plays an important role. In the Islamicate tradition, Khizr is a prophet and an immortal guide, the only human being who has access to the fountain of life, a legendary spring of immortality and sainthood. By drawing this comparison, these narratives attempted to associate Sa'dī and his poetry with immortality in one sense or another. For instance, in his description of Sa'dī’s biography, Ārzū connected him to several saints, saying “he had been serving water for some time in Jerusalem; he had met Khizr (peace be upon him) repeatedly, and was a devotee to Shaykh Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Dāghistānī attempts to understand Sa'dī’s literary achievement in a spiritual and mystical way, saying, “He [Sa'dī] was a companion of the prophet Khizr, and it is known that Khizr threw his saliva in the mouth of the Shaykh. Thus, all of his knowledge and eloquence (*shīrīn zabānī*) is because of Khizr’s blessed company and saliva.”⁴⁸

By this observation, Dāghistānī and Ārzū represent Sa'dī as a divine poet whose status as the first role model for the ghazal was granted to him through the blessing of Khizr and other Sufi saints. In addition, they describe the ghazal as a sacred poetic genre and acknowledge Sa'dī’s ghazals as exemplars of divine words and the water of life. These narratives situate Sa'dī as the poet who delivered God’s message in a sacred genre. Jāmī writes the following lines of poetry to highlight Sa'dī’s eternal status as related to the ghazal:

⁴⁴ Jāmī, *Bahārīstān*, 148. As Ingenito convincingly suggests, Jāmī’s recognition of Sa'dī as the first ghazal writer is related to the distinctive features of Sa'dī’s style that later became the “canonical pattern” for *ghazal*-writing (“Tabrizis in Shiraz,” 80).

⁴⁵ See Bilgramī, *Khazāna ‘Āmirira*, 360; Gūpāmūy, *Tazkira-yi Natāyij al-Afkār*, 36.

⁴⁶ See Ārzū, *Majma‘ al-Nafāyis*, vol. 2, 653.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 565. Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191), also known as *Shaykh-i Ishrāq* (Master of Illumination), is a celebrated Persian philosopher who established the Illuminationism school based on Zoroastrian and Platonic perspectives.

⁴⁸ Dāghistānī, *Rīyāz-al-Shu‘arā’*, vol. 1, 289.

“There are three prophets in poetry • though ‘there is no prophet after me’ / for the *masnavi*, *qasida*, and *ghazal* • Firdawsī, Anvarī, and Sa‘dī” (*dar shi‘r si kas payāambarān-and • har chand ki lā nabīyya ba‘dī / awsaf-u qasīda-u ghazal rā • Firdawsī-u Anvarī-u Sa‘dī*).⁴⁹ With these verses, Jāmī not only identifies these three poets as prophets, but also brings Persian poetry into the same domain of revelation.⁵⁰ He uses the rhetorical device known as *laff va nashr* (rolling and unrolling) to imply the sequence of divinity of these poets and speak to a kind of theology of genres as well.⁵¹ In the Islamic tradition, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad succeeded each other, and each perfected the previous one’s revelation: these three poets do the same in the realm of Persian poetry. These verses place the *ghazal* at the apex of poetry, having a special relationship with prophecy and sainthood, and place Sa‘dī in the role of the perfecter of poetry, analogous to the role Muhammad plays in the perfection of religion. Lastly, what we see here is the recognition that the *ghazal*, which formally is not much different from some of Sanā‘ī’s, ‘Attār’s, and others’ verses, is stylistically distinct, creating a gap between those poets and what Sa‘dī does. The recognition of “the” *ghazal* in Sa‘dī’s work revolves around Sa‘dī’s particular style, a style that elevates speech to the level of the divine and gets close to eternal truth.

This perspective illustrates a way of writing literary history that corresponds closely with ways of writing sacred history, in which the community of poets is organized around a select group of game-changing “prophets” or “saints” who are by definition among the “elect,” and whom very few can hope to supersede. Early modern scholars tried to explain the ranking of literary models in *ghazal*-writing by linking them to Sufi saints who possessed different levels of divine authority. In this way, they fashioned the *ghazal* as a genre deeply tied to the divine realm, in distinct contrast to the temporal setting of the *qasida* and its association with the court and praise of its patron. At the same time, they recognized a few master poets as permanent models for the *ghazal*, whose status would remain unachievable to other poets. In his account of Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī, Jāmī shows how Amīr Khusraw attempted to meet Khizr in the way that Sa‘dī had, but when he got there and begged him to throw his blessed saliva on his mouth, Khizr said, “Sa‘dī has already won this grace,” and it would not be repeated.⁵² Through this narrative, Jāmī identifies Sa‘dī as the main guardian of the *ghazal*, who was able to produce the real *ghazal* through his connection with the divine.⁵³

Safavid-Mughal scholars did not place all *ghazal* writers within the same rank. Instead, they divided poets into two main categories: innovative poets who served as role models, and imitators who followed the style set by those models. For these critics, the *ghazal* had not experienced meaningful change between the time of Sa‘dī as the initiator of the tradition and the emergence of Hāfiz. According to Ārzū and his colleagues, the *ghazal* after Sa‘dī became a prominent genre in the fourteenth century; poets like Khawājū, Amīr Khusraw, Khwājah Hasan Dihlavī, and Salmān Sāvajī merely followed in Sa‘dī’s path without any significant changes until Hāfiz, who, according to Ārzū, refashioned the technique (*tajdid-i fann*) by “giving new meaning and popularity to the wine-house of words.”⁵⁴ Ārzū’s observation indicates that Hāfiz’s contribution to the *ghazal* should be considered part of a progression of the tradition and not a dramatic change.

For Ārzū, the revolutionary stylistic change in the *ghazal* happened in the fifteenth century. He identifies Bābā Fighānī as the focal point of that transformation. Ārzū conclusively

⁴⁹ Jāmī, *Bahārīstān*, 148.

⁵⁰ Later on, these poets became known as “the three messengers” (*rusul-i salāsa*) in the *tazkira* tradition.

⁵¹ *Laff va nashr* is a literary device that correlates to two sets of literary elements, where the first element of the first set correlates with the first element of the second set, and likewise, the second element of the first set correlates with the second item in the second set, etc.

⁵² Jāmī, *Nafakhāt al-Uns*, 607.

⁵³ This might explain why Ārzū describes professional poets, including Bābā Fighānī, as the compiler (*khūsha chīn*) of Sa‘dī’s *ghazals*.

⁵⁴ Ārzū, *Majma‘ al-Nafāyis*, vol. 2, 1192. Also see Dāghistānī, *Rīyāz al-Shu‘arā’*, vol. 1, 289.

uses the phrase “the page turned and the goblet broke” (*ān varaq bargasht va ān qadah beshkast*) to address the radical change that arose from Fighānī’s new style.⁵⁵ Thereafter, Fighānī served as a model for many poets, including ‘Urfī Shirāzi, Shahīdī Qumī, and others, until the rise of Sā’ib and Asīr, who delivered new changes for the genre in the Safavid era.⁵⁶ Ārzū’s comment reflects the development of the ghazal tradition as a continuous chain of master-disciple relationships, or innovators and imitators, in which several poets, connected to each other through their imitation of a specific poet, fashioned their own community.

Lastly, for Ārzū and his peers, a poet was not an independent, self-conscious creator of poetic style but rather an actor who became aware of his situation and the energies he shared with the world of poetry in the process of shaping and reshaping it. Therefore, the notion of freshness (*tāzaḡī*) and imitation (*tatabbu‘*) were not mutually exclusive; rather, they were closely linked. For instance, ‘Urfī Shīrāzī (d. 999/1591) was recognized as one of the followers of Fighānī’s style, but, as Awhadī argued, ‘Urfī was able to create a new style in the ghazal, thus establishing himself as a role model for the moderns (*muta’akhhirīn*) and *tāza-gūyān* (recent poets).⁵⁷ This contribution created a literary network in which several poets were associated with one another through the master-disciple relationship, moving between imitation and innovation. Accordingly, the notion of freshness (*tāzaḡī*) and new style (*tarz-i tāza*) circulated and evolved among poets from one generation to the next. This takes us to another major question of contemporary scholarship—the concept of “new style” in relation to early modern Persian poetics.

Rethinking *Tarz-i Tāza* as Emblematic of Safavid-Mughal Poetics

A number of recent scholars have identified both *tarz-i tāza* (fresh style) and *tāza-gūyī* (fresh-speaking) as the stylistic characteristic of the early modern period.⁵⁸ Most of these studies are framed against an earlier term, popularized by Bahār, who identified sixteenth- through eighteenth-century poetry as the era of *sabk-i hindī* or “Indian style.”⁵⁹ Recent scholars have critiqued this term because of its geographical focus and nationalist implications, and instead adopted the idea of *tarz-i tāza* or *tāza-gūyī*, which was used in the *tazkira* tradition.⁶⁰ Although this movement is laudable, it has failed to resolve the problem on two levels. First, replacing one general term like *sabk-i hindī* with another general term like *tarz-i tāza* does not resolve the problematic lack of specificity, nor does it represent the diverse characteristics of early modern Persian poetry. It continues to present the Safavid-Mughal period as a homogenous stylistic era of the ghazal tradition. Of course, the poets of that era might have similar approaches to poetry, particularly as related to creating new meaning and images, but this does not mean they followed a single established poetic style. Therefore, I suggest that we use the insights gained from the *tazkira* tradition to gain a more nuanced vocabulary for describing literary diversity and development in this period.

As I have argued earlier, *tarz-i tāza* is a literary term used by poets and scholars from the medieval period onward to identify an innovative poetic style that superseded an older, established style. For example, Khāqānī announces his new style in the qasida as distinct from the model set by ‘Unsurī, and Nizāmī sees his new manner of writing *masnavī* set

⁵⁵ Ārzū, *Musmīr*, 10. For more discussion on Fighānī’s style and his influence on Safavid-Mughal poetry, see Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Awhadī, *‘Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn*, vol. 5, 2905.

⁵⁸ See Rajeev Kinra, “Fresh Words for a Fresh World”; also *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 201–39. For more debates on Indian style and *tarz-i tāza*, see Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity*; Mikkelson, “Of Parrots and Crows,” 522–23, and *Worlds of the Imagination*, 77–146; Schwartz, *Remapping Persian Literary History*, 14–17, 73; and Dudney, *India in the Persian World of Letters*, ch. 3.

⁵⁹ For more debates on *sabk-i hindī* and its implications, see Dudney, “Sabk-e Hendi,” 60–82.

⁶⁰ See for example, Rajeev Kinra: “Make it Fresh”; *Writing Self, Writing Empire*; and “Fresh Words for a Fresh World.” See also Faruqi, “Stranger in the City.”

against that of Sanā'ī. Similarly, Awhadī contrasts Muhtasham-i Kāshānī's new style to Vahshī Bāfqī's, contending that the former made the latter obsolete.⁶¹ This approach reveals a pattern in literary history in which master poets compete against one another, contesting dominance within a certain genre's ever-changing styles. What is significant about the Safavid-Mughal period is that the usage of *tarz-i tāza* and *tāza-gūyī* increased substantially in the *tazkira* tradition of this era. It suggests a rising communal self-consciousness around the importance of style in defining major movements in literary history. However, there are only a few poets that anthologists have identified as the true inventors of new styles: figures such as Fighānī, Asīr, and Sā'ib. Some of these figures established fresh styles that even obtained a name in Persian literary history, such as the *tarz-i khayāl*, created by Asīr, or the *tarz-i tamsīl*, fashioned by Sā'ib. The diversity of terms introduced within the conceptual framework of fresh stylistics demonstrates the need to be more nuanced in our understanding of *tarz-i tāza*, rather than simply using it as a blanket term to discuss all poetry across this vast temporal period, from the Timurids to the Safavids and Mughals.

The Safavid-Mughal scholars did not produce a detailed definition of *tarz-i tāza* and its implications for each poet. Accordingly, it is difficult to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of this stylistic concept in the *tazkira* tradition. As I discussed earlier, *tarz-i tāza* is a broad notion that manifests itself in different ways. In that sense, the early modern critics tended to use the indefinite phrase *tarzī tāza* (a new style). Even when they used *tarz-i tāza* as a definite noun, it did not necessarily refer to a singular established school, in the way that we identify Cubism or Expressionism. On its own, *tarz* can be used in definite and indefinite forms without too much impact. For example, Awhadī uses the definite form on one occasion to describe Vahshī Bāfqī's style with the phrase *sāhib-i ravish-i tāza* (the possessor of the new style), and uses the indefinite to address Valīdasht-i Bayāzī's poetry with the phrase "in poetry, he is the master of a new style" (*dar sukhan sāhib-i tarzī tāza ast*).⁶² However, definite and indefinite forms of *tarz* acquired different meanings when paired with another term, "creation" (*ikhtira*). For instance, Awhadī describes 'Urfī Shīrazī as "the creator (*mukhtari*) of a new style (*tarzī tāza*)"; but then Dāghistānī describes Fighānī as "the creator (*mukhtari*) of the new style (*tarz-i tāza*)."⁶³ We can conclude from this that, on its own, the difference between "a" and "the" fresh style is minimal; it only becomes critical when, as we see in the latter example, it is connected with the idea of "creation" (*ikhtirā*). In creating "the" fresh style (in Dāghistānī's words), Fighānī numbers among the rare poets who establish an enduring literary movement in the ghazal, whereas 'Urfī is notable for bringing a certain "freshness" to the "fresh style."

The multiple usages of *tarz-i tāza* and its different applications show that we cannot use it as a single term to describe the various literary movements and developments that took place in this long period.⁶⁴ It also shows that creation (*ikhtira*) is an important concept when tracking the stylistic changes in the master-disciple genealogy of ghazal poetry. By paying attention to such distinctions, we can move toward a more precise and historically grounded vocabulary for the analysis of Persian literary history. To demonstrate this, in the following section I discuss two of the most important stylistic schools identified by the *tazkira* writers in the early modern period, the *tarz-i tamsīl* and the *tarz-i khayāl*, which bring out the heterogeneity of *tarz-i tāza* and foreground the workings of the master-disciple relationship.

⁶¹ Awhadī, *'Arafāt al-Āshiqīn*, vol. 7, 4581.

⁶² *Ibid.*, vol. 7, 4581, 4622.

⁶³ Awhadī, *'Arafāt al-Āshiqīn*, vol. 5, 2905; Dāghistānī, *Rīyāz al-Shu'arā*, vol. 1, 485.

⁶⁴ This is in contrast to the way the term has been used by some scholars, such as Husayn Hasan-Pūr Ālāshtī, who uses *tarz-i tāza* as a substitute for *sabk-i hindī*, understood to be a monotonous and unified style, claiming that "the Persian *ghazal* across the length of these three centuries [seventeenth to nineteenth] is devoid of any diversity in style and structure. All of the poets composed poetry in a similar manner and style, and the taste that was dominant over these three centuries was a single taste" (*Tarz-i Tāza*, 22).

The *Tarz-i Khayāl* and the *Tarz-i Tamsil*: Two Major Literary Styles in the Safavid-Mughal Era

Mīrzā Jalāl-i Asīr (d. 1049/1639) and Sāʿib-i Tabrīzī (d. 1086/1676) are two distinguished poets whose literary styles became dominant in the Safavid-Mughal era. According to Ārzū, the *tarz-i khayāl* was fashioned by Asīr and was embraced by a few poets, mostly Indian, such as Nāsir ʿAlī Sirhindī (d. 1108/1696) and Bīdil Dihlavī (d. 1133/1720). The *tarz-i Sāʿib* (Sāʿib's style), also known as the *tarz-i tamsil*, was an innovation of Sāʿib and was followed by most Iranian and Indian poets.⁶⁵ These two poetic styles are well identified in the *tazkira* tradition, and most scholars, including Dāghistānī, Khushgū, and Ārzū, discuss them in detail.⁶⁶ According to these critics, the *tarz-i khayāl* differs sharply from the *tarz-i tamsil*.⁶⁷ They describe the followers of the former as inclined to deploy bizarre rhetorical and literary devices to impede, interfere with, and hinder their readers' arrival at meaning. Whereas the followers of the *tarz-i tamsil* are devoted to the possibility of clear communication with readers, the practitioners of the *tarz-i khayāl* are interested in a special aspect of verbal communication called "abstruse meaning" (*ghumūzat-i maʿnī*) and "refinement of imagination" (*nāzūkī-yi khayāl*) which interferes with these very processes of communication and understanding. In that regard, they expand the distance between the signifier and the signified and make readers pause over what they are reading.⁶⁸

The distinction between these two dominant Safavid-Mughal poetic styles created a conflict among practitioners of each at various levels. According to Ārzū, some of the modern poets (*mutaʾakhhirīn*) not only did not practice the *tarz-i tamsil* themselves, but also did not like it in others. For example, Irādat Khān-i Vāzih was a poet who, according to Ārzū, disparaged the *tarz-i tamsil*, and wrote a *masnavī* in the *tarz-i khayāl* such that many of his poems are not comprehensible.⁶⁹ Asīr's poetic style, on the other hand, was neglected by Iranian poets to such an extent that his poetic compendium (*divan*) was not available in Iran.⁷⁰ To support this, Ārzū refers to Hazīn Lāhījī (d. 1181/1766), who said that "he obtained a copy of Asīr's *divan* in Isfahan only after much searching and effort."⁷¹ These examples suggest that different poetic styles gained favor among different communities of poets, scholars, and patrons.

⁶⁵ Ārzū, *Majmaʿ al-Nafāyis*, vol. 2, 1192. Both the terms Iranian and Indian are used by Ārzū. Also see Khushgū, *Safīna Khushgū*, 19–20. For details on Sāʿib's poetic style and its reception see Losensky, "Saʿeb Tabrizi." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. July 20, 2003. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/saeb-tabrizi>.

⁶⁶ Ārzū defines *tarz-i tamsil* (which I tentatively translate as "the style of analogy") as a simile-based style in which the first hemistich serves as a vehicle for the second, or vice versa, and he considers it the best kind of *tamsil* (*bihtarīn tamsil ān ast ki tamām-i misraʿ-i duvum, tamsil-i avval bāshad va gāhī bar ʿaks*). See Ārzū, *ʿAtīyya Kubrā*, 67.

⁶⁷ This is in contrast with the perspective of modern scholars like Zipoli, who sees Sāʿib as the sole representative of Indian style and determinately claims that "the Indian school is equal with the style of Sāʿib and Sāʿib's style is equal to the Indian school" (*Chirā Sabk-i Hindī*, 30). Nevertheless, Zipoli was aware of the temporality of his claim and fairly argued that there might be other influential poets who were equal to Sāʿib. However, since there is no sufficient scholarship on other poets, we have to accept his statement. This shows the extent to which an examination of critical literary texts produced in the Safavid-Mughal era may shed new light on our understanding of the poetic style of that era.

⁶⁸ Following this division, Futūhī Rūd-Mīʿjanī offers *sabk-i nāzūk khayāl-i isfāhānī* (the subtle style of Isfahān) for poetic style in the sixteenth century and *sabk-i dūr khayāl-i hindī* (the far-fetched, imaginative, Indian style) for the eighteenth century ("Nāzūk Khayālī-yi Isfāhānī," 51–56). These terms, however, reflect a sharp division between places (Iran and India) and times (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) that is not evident in the *tazkiras* themselves. In addition, as Mana Kia has convincingly argued, the Safavid-Mughal period is identified with people moving across the Persianate world who are related to each other through a shared culture of the "social ethics of *adab*." For her full argument see Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 97–194. Similarly, Arthur Dudley convincingly argues that there is no difference between "Iranian Persian" and "Indian Persian" in the Safavid-Mughal era. See Dudley, "Going Native."

⁶⁹ Ārzū, *Majmaʿ al-Nafāyis*, vol. 3, 1765. For more details and features of these two styles, see Ārzū, *ʿAtīyya Kubrā*, 67.

⁷⁰ Ārzū, *Majmaʿ al-Nafāyis*, vol. 1, 119.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Although in his *tazkira*, Ārzū creates a community of poets through their pen names regardless of their time and place, he uses ethnic and geographic factors to elaborate the reception of a specific style. He explains the marginalization of Asīr's poetry in Iran through this lens, claiming that the abstractness and ambiguity of his poetry does not agree with Iranians' literary tastes.⁷² This is in contrast to Indian readers who, according to Dāghistānī and Ārzū, embraced Asīr's poetic style because of its abstraction and enigmatic features.⁷³ Dāghistānī writes: "Some of his [Asīr's] poetry is naked from the clothes of meaning (meaningless); therefore, his *divan* is extremely popular in Hindustan, because most Indian people are always mirthful out of the agreeable scent of bang⁷⁴ (*sarkhush az nasha' bang*), and the meaningless poems that have been written in drunkenness are perfectly suited with these peoples' minds and intelligence."⁷⁵ These passages show how the early modern scholars expanded their understanding of stylistic change from the master-disciple relationship to include the idea of geographical and cultural differences. It might explain why modern scholars like Bahār understand "place and race" as elements of style development.

Finally, the contributions of early modern scholars allow us to understand poetic history and the identification of certain approaches with geographical origin, and not in the ways assumed by the contemporary critics of *sabk-i hindī*. These elements are important as we move into the nineteenth century, when scholars were beginning to discuss national identities in new ways. Rather than blaming Indians for ruining poetry, as some of its critics have suggested, the *sabk-i hindī* shows how distinctive styles came to be associated with various regions of the Persianate world.

Conclusion

In this article, I show how the concept of *tarz* became a dominant hermeneutic principle in the history of premodern Persian poetry, a method of talking about genre, history, poetic style, lineage, and genealogy. I argue that *tarz* served as a powerful stylistic tool that evolved across centuries and played a pivotal role in the construction of early modern Persian literary history. Although *tarz* is a capacious and slippery term, the investigation of this term and its diverse implications in the *tazkira* tradition allow us to understand Safavid-Mughal literary historiographers on their own terms and subsequently develop a more nuanced vocabulary for describing how style was treated by poets and critics in that era. By relying on primary sources in different genres, particularly the *tazkira*, this article shows the importance of style and the way in which larger investigation into its usage in the premodern era can open new venues of scholarship.

The advancement of *tarz* produces a framework for understanding Persian poetry, and literary history more broadly, altogether different from modern frameworks, which tend to be grounded in Western assumptions. Ārzū and his colleagues' discussion of the historiography of the ghazal shows that the invention of a unified Persian literary history does not depend on a specific place or time. What connects different people is the ghazal itself, as it creates a community of poets across time and space. Within this process of ghazal-making, each individual poet has his own subjective engagement and interpretation of the genre, thus

⁷² Dudney discusses the ways in which Ārzū tried to respond to the debate regarding Indian authorship in Persian poetry, and suggests, "As a keen researcher, he was aware, perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, of regional differences within the Persian cosmopolis." See "Sabk-e Hendi," 72. Although I agree with Dudney that Ārzū shows more regional consciousness in his works, I have shown in this article how this is not unique to him but rather the product of a larger milieu.

⁷³ According to Ārzū, Asīr's poetry became popular in India to such an extent that his *divan* became the faith of poets, and most modern poets (*muta'akhhirīn*) in India took his style as the model of eloquence (*sar khatt-i fasāhat*) and followed him. See *Majma' al-Nafā'is*, vol. 1, 119.

⁷⁴ "Bang" or *bhāng* is a preparation of cannabis, smoked or consumed as a beverage on the Indian subcontinent.

⁷⁵ Dāghistānī, *Rīyāz al-Shu'arā*, vol. 1, 68.

creating his own distinctive style. Influential poets used the ghazal as a medium to create their own subjectivity. In the genealogy of the ghazal, Safavid-Mughal scholars investigated influential poets who fashioned certain ways of writing the ghazal that were new to the tradition, and therefore established themselves as literary models.

Safavid-Mughal critics had a sense of how the ghazal was fashioned and developed through the centuries that differs substantially from the literary history that came into vogue in the twentieth century. As one of the main sources of literary stylistics and criticism in the Persianate tradition, the Safavid-Mughal *tazkira* tradition offers a distinct model for interpreting literary history and brings to light a central concept of Persian literary history that has often been neglected or misinterpreted in modern scholarship.

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