

REINTERPRETING AL-BUHTURĪ'S ĪWĀN KISRĀ ODE: TEARS OF AFFECTION FOR THE CYCLES OF HISTORY

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Abstract

Scholars have conventionally interpreted the Iwan Kisra Ode as an anti-imperial ode critical of the Abbasids in a time of decline evinced by the murder of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil and the emerging power of the Turkic guards at Samarra. This article re-examines al-Buhturi's own motives to demonstrate that an anti-imperial ode would be anathema to his interests and posits an alternative interpretation. The analysis is based on extensive Abbasid lore and a close reading of the ode. It suggests that the ode had the effect of redeeming the Abbasids in order to avoid civil strife in a time of danger.

In the winter of 861, the Caliph al-Mutawakkil was assassinated by Turkic body guards in a plot that implicated his heir apparent, al-Muntaṣir bil-lāh (d. 862).¹ This event constituted the first patricidal regicide of Islamic history and forced the Umma—ostensibly sacred—to recall the profaning traumas of the first and second civil wars (*fitan*, sg. *fitna*).² Sometime later

¹ This article draws on Chapter Five (Mythologizing Samarra) of the author's dissertation, "Ardor for Memory: Mythicizing the Patricide of al-Mutawakkil in Court Poetry" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2002). I would like to thank Suzanne Stetkevych for her comments on earlier drafts. Research was conducted with the support of a Fulbright-Hays Training Grant, part of the Doctoral Dissertation Research Program of the US Department of Education. I am indebted to the Fulbright commissions of Egypt, Germany, and Spain for their assistance during 1998-1999. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

² Tayeb El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narratives of the Abbasid Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 192-193; cf. Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, 11 vols., Dhakhā'ir al-ʿArab, 30 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960-69), 9:225; Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, 4 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, n.d. [1948?]), 4:115-122. See also Matthew Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra (A.H. 200-275/815-889 C.E.)* (Albany, NY: SUNY), 82, where he contends, based on numismatic analysis by Michael Bates, that al-Mutawakkil favored al-Mu'tazz as heir. El-Hibri, however, following al-Ṭabarī's material, reaches the conclusion that the Caliph supported al-Muntaṣir, but shifted under pressure (El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 192-193).

during the post-Mutawakkil period, the court poet al-Buḥturī (d. 897) composed an unusual, but intense poem.³ In it, he leaves behind haughty patrons and the urban setting of Samarra and ventures out to the ruins of a Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon, 24 miles south of Baghdad famed for its sole remaining ruin, Khosrow's Arched Hall, or Īwān KISRĀ.

The poem is unusual in several ways: first, unlike most of his poetry, which he addresses to a named benefactor or at least a recipient, the Īwān KISRĀ poem is not a communication to a specific person. This otherwise audience-oriented poet was addressing no one in particular. Second, in contrast with his long poetic practice, this ode does not follow the conventional tripartite pattern of the ode composed of elegiac prelude (*nasīb*), journey section (*raḥīl*), then a third communal theme, such as praise (*madīḥ*) or lampoon (*hijāʿ*), nor the bipartite variety that elides the *raḥīl*. Instead, he begins with expressions of indignation and disappointment (roughly ll. 1-10), channeled into a short camel journey (roughly ll. 11-13), and then a tribute to the Sasanian palace (ll. 14-56). Yet again the tribute is saturated with a mood not of triumph but ultimately lyricism, for these are not present, but former glories. The more glorious the Sasanian achievements are, the more wistful the poet becomes. In effect, the "praise section" here is unexpectedly like the elegiac *nasīb*. Instead of triumphant closure, this poem gives us perpetual tears and yearning dedicated to the glory of the Sasanian.

Three modern scholars have taken al-Buḥturī's grief and praise for the Sasanian ruins as a veiled critique of the Abbasid dynasty as well as its cultural or poetic conventions. They note that al-Buḥturī's indignant tone resembles that of the brigand poet (*suʿlūk*) of pre-Islamic times. As part of al-Buḥturī's protest, he lambastes the "vilest of the vile" and a "cousin," all of whom have been taken to refer to specific people.⁴ Serrano argues that the poet's choice of Persian abodes over the classical Bedouin sort suggests a harsh criticism, not only of the Abbasids, but of traditional Arab poetics and

³ Though many odes by al-Buḥturī are readily set to an occasion, this is not one of them, indicating that the exact occasion was not aesthetically relevant to the text. Al-Ṣayrafī speculates that the ode was composed in 883, though 861 is equally likely, see Ḥasan Kāmil al-Ṣayrafī, *Dīwān al-Buḥturī*, 5 vols., ed. Ḥasan Kāmil al-Ṣayrafī, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1977) 5:2753.

⁴ Al-Ṣayrafī, *Dīwān al-Buḥturī*, 2:1152, 5:2753, 2755; Shawqī Ḍayf, *Al-ʿAṣr al-ʿAbbāsī al-Thānī*, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-ʿArabī*, 4, 7th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1990), 229-231; Akiko Motoyoshi, "Reality and Reverie: Wine and Ekphrasis in the ʿAbbāsīd Poetry of Abū Nuwās and al-Buḥturī" in *AJAMES* 14 (1999): 96; Richard A. Serrano, "al-Buḥturī's Poetics of Persian Abodes" in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 28 (1997):69, 79. Serrano's thesis has been reworked in Richard A. Serrano, "Al-Buhturi's Poetics of Persian Abodes," in his *Neither a Borrower: Forging Traditions in French, Chinese and Arabic Poetry* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 8-48.

culture.⁵ The assumption behind this theory is that al-Buḥturī became disappointed in the Abbasids (and their culture) and lost faith, thus composing an anti-imperial ode. To date, this anti-imperial theory has not been challenged and stands as conventional wisdom in Arabic literary scholarship.

The anti-imperial reading generates irreducible problems. ~~However,~~ for Al-Buḥturī meticulously developed a career that would protect his chief personal interests in life—his professional reputation as a poet in Iraq and his property in Syria.⁶ As for the first interest, we are told that he owned property in his hometown of Manbij, Syria, in the environs of Aleppo, and thus visited Manbij repeatedly while living in Iraq and petitioned the governor (*wālī*) of Manbij in order to protect his property interests.⁷ This deep attachment, be it material, social or emotional, was symbolized and privatized in his ghazals to his legendary first love ‘Alwa (or ‘Alw) bint Zurayqa of Syria.

As for the second interest, the anti-imperial reading would stand as anathema to al-Buḥturī’s public persona as court poet, specializing in panegyric that aims to build the public image of men of state: He is reputed to have shown an interest in this profession early as a teenager when he traipsed about the local mosque in Manbij reciting poetry and declaiming his first panegyrics by leaning out of the mosque to praise the humble merchants of onions and eggplants.⁸ These stories—regardless of their facticity—indicate a public *reputation* for panegyric, i.e. the business of magnifying Abbasid

⁵ Serrano, “al-Buḥturī’s Poetics,” 69, 86; see also Julie Scott Meisami, “Poetic Microcosms: The Persian Qasida to the End of the Twelfth Century,” in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, Studies in Arabic Literature (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 175.

⁶ Biographies of al-Buḥturī may be found in the following: Ṣāliḥ al-Ashtar, “Un poète arabe du III^e siècle de l’hégire (IX^e de J.-C.), Buḥturī,” (Ph. D. diss., Sorbonne University, 1953); ‘Abd al-Rahīm b. Aḥmad al-‘Abbāsī, *Ma‘āhid al-Tanṣīṣ ‘alā Shawāhid al-Talkhīs*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘āda, 1947), 1:234-247; al-Isbahani, *Kitāb al-Aghani*, ed. al-Najdī Nāṣif, under direction of Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: al-Hay‘ah al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb, 1992-1993), 21:37-53; Abū al-‘Abbās b. Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A‘yān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1968-1972), 6:21-31; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1966), 13:446-450; Charles Pellat, “al-Buḥturī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 2:1289-1290 [= *EI*², s.v. “al-Buḥturī”]; ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Sam‘ānī, *al-Ansab*, ed. ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Yaḥyā al-Mu‘allamī (Hyderabad Deccan, India: Maṭba‘at Majlis Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1962-1982), 2:101-102; Abū Bakr b. Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī, *Akhhār al-Buḥturī wa Dhayl al-Akhhār*, ed. Ṣāliḥ al-Ashtar (Damascus: Al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Arabī); Yāqūt, *Kitāb Irshād al-Arib fī Ma‘rifat al-Adīb*, ed. D. S. Margoliouth (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Hindiyya, 1923-1925), 1:81; 2:295,423; 5:252,339; 7:226-333; and Samer Ali, “Al-Buḥturī,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, ed. M. Cooperson and S. M. Toorawa (Charleston: Brucoli & Layman, 2005).

⁷ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 6:30

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6:22.

men from the humblest upward. In his early twenties (the 840s), he judiciously scaled the Abbasid hierarchy one patron at a time—focusing on Ṭaʿīs and Syrians like himself—in order to reach the defining moment of his career, in 847, when he delivered his first Abbasid caliphal ode at the Jawsaq al-Khāqānī palace in Samarra.⁹ Al-Buḥturī went on to serve a total of *six* rulers: al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861), al-Muntaṣir (r. 861-862), al-Mustaʿin (r. 862-866), al-Muʿtazz, al-Muhtadī (r. 869-870) and al-Muʿtamid (r. 870-892), in addition to their viziers, commanders, judges, secretaries, etc.¹⁰ He gave to generations a *dīwān* collection larger than Abū Tammām and al-Mutanabbī's combined, chiefly because of his verbal endorsements of the Abbasid empire.¹¹ Even al-Muhtadī, known for his asceticism and dislike of poets, had to concede al-Buḥturī's triumph in promoting the Abbasid dynasty, despite the throes of time, calling him “the orator of our family and the poet of our dynasty.”¹² If we take 821 to be al-Buḥturī's year of birth, he was at the age of forty when the murder occurred, but continued to work at the Abbasid court another twenty-nine years.¹³ I propose that the arch of al-Buḥturī's career was not propelled by faith in the Abbasids, but by the understandable bourgeois interests of reputation and property.

One might counter argue that he finally became disappointed with the Abbasids when he transferred his allegiance to the Tulunids of Cairo in 890. A closer look at the ode and its context, however, will show that he redirected his praise services just when Syria came under the property tax control of Khumarawayh Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Tūlūn.¹⁴ This would suggest that his transfer of allegiance from the Abbasids to the Tulunids was motivated by his property interests in Manbij. Safeguarding his interests, al-Buḥturī remained particularly loyal to Tughja Ibn Juff, a military commander who rose to the governorship of Syria. In a modern anti-monarchical era, it may seem an alluring prospect to identify a court poet who finally denounces the ideology of his patrons, but these are modern attitudes imported into a medieval subject driven by the romantic dogma of poetic sincerity. Al-Buḥturī was the consummate poet of the empire, why would he jeopardize his life interests? Even this cursory examination should suggest that his

⁹ Ali, “Al-Buhturi,” in *Dictionary*, 2005.

¹⁰ Samer Ali, “Praise for Murder?: Two Odes by al-Buḥturī surrounding an Abbasid Patricide,” in *Writers and Rulers: Perspectives on Their Relation from Abbasid to Safavid Times*, vol. 16 in Series Literaturen im Kontext, ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Louise Marlow (Wiesbaden, Germany: Verlag), 1-38.

¹¹ Ali, “Al-Buhturi,” in *Dictionary*, 2005).

¹² Muḥammad b. al-ʿImrānī, *al-Inbāʾ fī Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ*, (Leiden: Netherlands Institute [Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī], 1973), 136.

¹³ *EP*, s.v. “al-Buḥturī”.

¹⁴ Al-Buḥturī, *Dīwān al-Buḥturī*, 1977, 1: ode 19.

pragmatic goals, not faith in the Abbasids, spurred him to protect their reputation (and then the Tulunids') during their reign and their legacy for generations thereafter.

Moreover, it would appear that the poet avoided methods of resistance employing direct confrontation. Given the executive power of the Caliph and the neo-Sasanian imperative of preserving his dignity, the method of resistance that courtiers generally found effective was change through engagement—and a measure of artifice. This principle of engaged resistance was captured in courtly advice manuals. In dealing with caliphs and sultans, if you are a courtier you must “teach them (*tu'allimahum*) as though they teach you, educate them (*tu'addibahum*) as though they educate you; if not, then stay as far away as possible!”¹⁵ The aim was to blandish, coax, nudge, guilt, or even shame the ruler into action using verbal artifice to preserve the dignity of the office. With respect to al-Buḥturī, we can note several examples where he seems to have used his skill and prestige as a state poet in order to influence caliphal policy.¹⁶

Literature is categorically indeterminant in meaning, and in this analysis of the *Īwān Kisrā*, I suggest in the spirit of collegial debate an alternative to the anti-imperial interpretation based on inter-reference with oral lore of the Abbasid era recorded by Abū Ḥanīfa Aḥmad al-Dīnawarī (d. ca. 895) in his *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*. I will show direct allegorical parallels between Abbasid and Sasanian kings, which render the *Īwān Kisrā* ode not a critique but a redemption for the troubled Abbasids by a poet who was deeply invested in the institution he served.

In particular, al-Buḥturī names two Sasanian rulers in his ode who were targets of their son's violence. Abbasid lore of the Sasanian period identifies al-Muntaṣir with one of the rebellious Sasanian sons.¹⁷ In this light, the Sasanians are tragically flawed like the Abbasids; sympathy for the former extends to

¹⁵ Abū al-Faḍl Ja'far b. Shams al-Khilāfah Mujidd al-Mulk, *Kitāb al-Ādāb*, 2nd ed., ed. Muḥammad Amin al-Khānjī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1993), 29.

¹⁶ For al-Buḥturī's endorsement of al-Mu'tazz, see Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shābushtī, *al-Diyārāt*, ed. Kūrkiš 'Awwād (Beirut: Dār al-Rā'id al-'Arabī, 1986), 150-156 and Ibn al-'Imrānī, *al-Inbā'*, 118-119 and his praise ode jointly to al-Mu'tazz and al-Mutawakkil in al-Buḥturī, *Dīwān al-Buḥturī*, 2: ode 277 on the occasion of al-Mu'tazz's circumcision and seating at Bulkuwāra. For al-Buḥturī's failure to serve al-Muntaṣir as state poet, see Ibn al-'Imrānī, *al-Inbā'*, 117. Note also his decision to stigmatize, then redeem al-Muntaṣir in Ali, “Praise for Murder?” in *Writers and Rulers*, 1-38. While this may seem on the surface an about-face, it is telling that he suffered no negative consequences for besmearing the caliph, and in effect the two odes stand as a token of his preeminence. Moreover, he was never required to offer an ode of apology (*i'tidhār*) for his assault, since al-Muntaṣir urgently needed his poetic services.

¹⁷ Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Tāj fī Akhlāq al-Mulūk*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī (Cairo: al-Maṭb'ah al-Amiriyya, 1914), 9, n. 1.

the latter allegorically. More generally, the juxtaposition emphasizes Fate's cycles of glory and decay. Rather than rebuking the Abbasids, al-Buḥturī in effect mythologizes the first regicide of the Abbasid dynasty in order to prevent schism (*fitna*) in a community already traumatized by civil wars.

The poet's reaction to tragedy, moreover, is ultimately not one of self-centered indignation, as would befit the brigand poet (*su'lūk*). Rather, he gives us a second allegory of mature reconciliation. The poet depicts with touching sympathy a scene where oedipal tension is resolved in a joyful vignette of drinking and camaraderie. He envisions wine, not blood, being shed. In fact, al-Buḥturī's own son, Abū al-Ghawth, makes an appearance linking the universal tensions between the young and the old with the poet's own life. In the context of sin and tragedy caused by the regicide/patricide of al-Mutawakkil and the supremacy of the Turkic guards at the court, this scene of reunion and reconciliation moves the poet to tears and finally closure. The poet dedicates his tears to the mighty who fall tragically. In light of the parallel he establishes between the Sasanians and their Arab Abbasid successors, those tears extend to the Abbasids allegorically. Though old sins and the traumas are fully recognized, no person is beyond redemption in this ode. The only irredeemable "villain" is Fate, with its vicious cycles of glory, decadence and decay. It will become evident, in the course of this discussion, that the cycles of Fate underpin notions of history and the destiny of the community in medieval Islamic culture.

A noteworthy precursor to al-Buḥturī's poem at Īwān Kisrā was composed by Abū al-ʿAtāhiya (d. 825). A brief look will serve to illustrate al-Buḥturī's tragic tone by comparison. The earlier poet similarly incorporated the memory of legendary Persian palaces, al-Khawarnaq and al-Sadīr, in a poem to the Caliph al-Hādī (r. 785-786). The opening lines of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya's poem commence with a typical recollection of ruins. Like al-Buḥturī's remains, his are not the frail remains of camel nomads, but rather the ruins of bygone royalty.¹⁸ He proceeds with images of heavenly delight in the company of mythic companions who drink in the paradisiacal setting.¹⁹ The opening is marked as *nasīb* by its recollection of ruins, images of delight, and memories of happiness, which remain sadly only memories.²⁰ The *nasīb* imagery extends unexpectedly for 17 lines in an ode that is only 23 lines in length. As if awakened from a dream, the poet then signals a change of mood that directs him toward his benefactor, the Caliph al-Hādī. In a crescendo of travel images, Abū al-ʿAtāhiya moves himself and his audience

¹⁸ Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-71.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

to the culmination of the ode, valorizing the benefactor who sustains the glory of the dynasty. Though technically he reserves only the last two verses for that valor, the whole poem in retrospect, we discover, valorized him from the beginning.²¹ As great as the palaces and joys of yore may be, those of the future, promoted by the benefactor, are even greater.²² As it turns out, the Caliph is “the lord of palaces and cities” above all. The patron *is* the hero who guards the future; he renews the glories that fade.²³ In this short ode, the poet has provoked such intense yearning, and the gracious patron fulfills it completely.

Al-Buḥturī’s poem at Īwān Kisrā, in contrast, provides no resolution. At the outset, the poem’s unusual features—no single recipient nor typical structure—link it to the well-known but archaic Bedouin verse of the *su‘lūk* poet. The similarity with brigand poetry gives proponents of the anti-imperial interpretation some basis, so it would be worthwhile to clarify both the limits of that similarity *and* the key differences that set Īwān Kisrā ode apart.

As a literary type, the brigand poet was the outlaw of Bedouin society who lived as an outcast of his tribe and was haunted by his crimes.²⁴ His ethic is not that of tribal loyalty and duty, but antisocial individualism.²⁵ At root, the brigand poet is alone against the world, relying on ruses and flight for survival, and identifies ultimately with beasts of prey.²⁶ In like manner, al-Buḥturī’s poem begins with an indignant and mercurial tone, as evidenced in lines 1 and 10 particularly. The poet certainly opens with a voice associated with the brigand poet, but ultimately, his tone of bitterness and alienation relents. He escapes not to the open desert to commune with howling beasts, as would befit the brigand, but to the ruins of a luxurious palace, to the seat of an august empire. Suddenly, he has made an artistic and ideological decision, leaving the desert wilderness for the brigand and choosing the evidence of a bygone empire.

His defiant beginning (ll. 1-10, Appendix A and B) sharply disassociates him from a disappointing present that is readily perceived in the *nasīb* of his Samarran poetry. Assumptions of mistreatments, which underpin the anti-imperial reading,²⁷ are consistent with the brigand-like rhetoric in the

²¹ Ibid., 73.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Suzanne P. Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 153. For more on brigand poetry, see Yūsuf Khulayyif, *al-Shu‘arā’ al-Ṣa‘ālik fī al-‘Aṣr al-Jāhili* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1959).

²⁵ Ibid., 88.

²⁶ Ibid., 91.

²⁷ Al-Ṣayrafī, *Dīwān al-Buḥturī*, 2:1152, 5:2753, 2755; ḳayf, *Al-‘Aṣr al-‘Abbāsī al-Thānī*, 229-231; Motoyoshi, “Reality and Reverie,” 96; Serrano, “al-Buḥturī’s Poetics of Persian Abodes,” 69, 79.

opening. The voice of the brigand poet echoes when one compares al-Buḥturī's tone to that of the pre-Islamic brigand, al-Shanfarā, in his renowned *Ode of the Arabs Ending in Lām* [*Lāmiyat al-ʿArab*]:

To recompense the loss of those who do not requite my kindness,

 I have three companions—an emboldened heart,
 a white polished sword,
 a slender yellow bow (ll. 10-11).²⁸

Like the brigand poet who is haunted by his past, who perpetually feels betrayed, al-Buḥturī, too, conveys a similar spirit as his ode opens. It is not totally surprising that some scholars have in this vein presumed the poem to have been composed in 861, immediately after the murder, rendering it a kind of “pilgrimage” that enables the poet to recover from trauma.²⁹ Here, one can see the rhetorical effect of his brigand-like themes, which give the artful impression of a poet cast out from society, anathematized. However, whereas brigand-hood is artistically a permanent state, pilgrimage is temporary and purposeful. The impression of pilgrimage, albeit illusory, gives context and meaning to the poem. It indicates a valid perception that there is something ultimately goal-oriented about the extra-societal interim. Dayf hints at this issue when he says that al-Buḥturī composed the poem to “weep thereby his worry and grief at the murder of al-Mutawakkil.”³⁰ More, however, is at stake than the murder of a single caliph or the poet's inward feelings. Unlike the brigand whose problems are individual and whose solutions are antisocial, al-Buḥturī channels anger and progresses beyond that.

The poet's thematic progression is, however, arduous. The poet not only utters his intention to move toward his destination, but must justify himself (ll. 11-12). In line 13, he is once again driven to elaborate on his reasons. The Abbasids, though Muslim and linguistically Arab, were the ideological successors of the Sasanian dynasty in adopting its principles of monarchy.³¹ In artistic terms, al-Buḥturī is summoning the misfortunes of Abbasid culture on the cusp of his transition to the ruins. These are, however, the ruins of a “parent” civilization that Abbasid's both cherished and plundered.³² The

²⁸ Translation from S. Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals*, 144.

²⁹ Al-Ṣayrafī, *Dīwān al-Buḥturī*, 5:2755; ḳayf, *Al-ʿAṣr al-ʿAbbāsī al-Thānī*, 229.

³⁰ Dayf, *Al-ʿAṣr al-ʿAbbāsī al-Thānī*, 231.

³¹ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:282-283.

³² The Caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754-775) is said to have plundered Ctesiphon to use its materials for his new imperial city, Baghdad. However, when he sought to dismantle the Īwān KISRĀ of the Sasanian palace, the goal proved too daunting and expensive to accomplish. He was forced to abandon the project having left barely a dent, ʿAbd al-Malik al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-Qulūb fil-Muḍāf wal-Mansūb*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Dhakhāʾir al

poet's journey thus redresses oedipal anxiety on the familial, dynastic, and civilizational level.

His first words of the glory for the Sasanians express open kindness and charity (ll. 14-15). Though the Arab poet shows goodwill toward them, he draws attention not only to their prosperous realm, but to their guarded northern frontiers along the Caucasus. That border is presented here as mythically inviolable, tiring, and baffling the human gaze. The phrasing evokes Qur'anic diction describing the effect of God's craftsmanship on any gaze that might attempt to find flaws: It is He "who created the Seven Heavens in layers. In the Creation of the Compassionate, you do not see any flaws? Look again, do you see a single breach? Look again and again, your gaze will fall, tired and baffled."³³ The Sasanians' level of perfection is, like God's, not in vain. Al-Buḥturī's reference to the frontiers raises a key theme he later develops: security of family, dynasty, and civilization. He rekindles the memory of a Sasanian realm whose prosperity is guarded by pragmatic, presumably iron-clad, defenses. In lines 16 and 17, the guarded prosperity of that empire stands antithetical to a vulnerable barren terrain. The verses, of course, establish an antithesis between the august heritage of the Sasanians and the "simple" abodes of Bedouins. It might even tempt one to consider al-Buḥturī's subsequent verse as a veiled critique of Arab culture and of old Bedouin poetics.³⁴ Certainly this would be likely if al-Buḥturī had continued with the voice of the defiant brigand. However, line 16 in particular distinguishes him thematically and poetically from the brigand who would precisely opt for the antisocial wasteland. More importantly, al-Buḥturī effectively disassociates himself from the voice of the brigand when he discloses a deep attachment to imperial heritage. As al-Buḥturī develops the themes of his ode at the "grave" of the Sasanian, it will become clearer that his commentary serves as an allegory for something more mythic and universal.

After contrasting desert wilderness with imperial glory, the impermanence of that glory takes precedence, and al-Buḥturī reframes the topic with a prominent use of the perfect tense. To compound the elegiac mood, the first subject of the verb is Time (i.e., Fate) itself (ll. 18-20). The mighty are not

³² Arab, 57 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1985), 181. Nevertheless, caliphs would make excursions to the nearby ruins, as did al-Mutawakkil (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 9:166).

³³ Qur'an 67:3-4.

³⁴ Serrano, "al-Buḥturī's Poetics of Persian Abodes," 69; Motoyoshi, "Reality and Reverie," 109. For more on the function of epic and epic-like panegyric in supporting empire, see David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 133; and Suzanne P. Stetkeych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

immune from the vicissitudes of Time. As a villain, Time ensures decay, echoing the lamentations of the conventional *nasīb* where Fate, and its metonymies (Time, Death, Days or Nights) victimize innocent life perennially.³⁵ The poet, for a moment, dwells on the erstwhile glory of the Sasanians. Their bustling structures become fallen shells, reminiscent of tombs.

The poet, however, does not bear the weight alone. He finds solace in the company of remembered kings, such as Anūshirvān (ll. 21-23). At first it would appear that the poet is surrendering to reverie, but there seems to be deeper allegorical purpose. According to oral lore compiled by al-Dīnawarī, a contemporary of al-Buḥturī, Anūshirvān Khosrow I (r. 530-579) fought back the Byzantines in the celebrated battle of 540 wherein he seized Antioch, one of the most prized cities of the enemy.³⁶ He was a model king for the Abbasids,³⁷ but his legacy is not solely triumphant. Or rather, al-Dīnawarī's narratives insinuate that he could repel the mighty Byzantines, but he could not avert oedipal strife at home.³⁸ In effect, knowledge of Sasanian lore can enable us to see more clearly al-Buḥturī's theme of civilizational security as it is shaken by family trauma.

Though Anūshirvān's martial might was incomparable and his northern borders stretched securely between the Caspian and Black Sea, he could hardly remain immune from domestic upheaval. We are told that he had a son by a woman of exceptional beauty who was Christian.³⁹ He wanted her to convert to Zoroastrianism as a gesture of her love for him, but she refused.⁴⁰ The son, standing in solidarity with his mother, also refused to convert. This provoked the father's anger and caused him to imprison the prince. While Anūshirvān was at the frontier fighting the Byzantines, he fell ill to a deadly disease. When the son received news, he escaped prison, assembled his allies, and captured a city for its financial resources.⁴¹ When the intelligence network delivered the news to the father, he declared the son an enemy of the state. Without regard for familial sentiment, he ordered the prince killed.⁴² The father miraculously recovered from his illness, hunted

³⁵ Stefan Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century" in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 8 (1977):32.

³⁶ Abū Ḥanīfa Aḥmad al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl*, ed. 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Āmir and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, [1959]), 69; al-Ṭabari, *Tārīkh*, 2:102, 149.

³⁷ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:282.

³⁸ Al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl*, 69.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

the son down, and had him killed without pause or clemency.⁴³ Crisis was averted for the state, only to underscore the tension of oedipal replacement within the context of the family. Moreover, al-Dīnawarī hinted at the futility of attempting to avert Fate. He ominously foreshadowed in his narrative the fated replacement of the Sasanians by another younger civilizational system: “The Prophet . . . was born at the end of the reign of Anūshirvān.”⁴⁴ On the rhetorical and symbolic level, the oedipal threat to Anūshirvān was artistically and psychologically linked to the threat of Muḥammad’s new order. Al-Buḥturī thus seems to allude to layers of oedipal strife that are familial, dynastic and civilizational.

The poem continues with glory on the surface betraying darker layers of inter-reference (ll. 24-26). The man (in the poem) who could command the motions of his soldiers stands in contrast to the man (in lore) whose overweening manner provoked domestic rebellion. The poet, however, pulls his audience closer to the source of his description. For the first time, he draws attention to the panel depicting the Battle of Antioch. Most importantly, he focuses on the psychic-artistic gaps between his verbal description, the actual panel, and the viewer’s eye (ll. 27-28).⁴⁵ The viewer is not only invited to experience the panel visually, but to explore the panel vicariously by touch. One is enticed by a rich layering of artistry: the poet’s, the panel’s and one’s own imagination of sight and touch. The poet appeals to the senses to draw his audience into his poetic experience. At a critical moment, we are in effect invited to identify with the poet. The identification helps to transfigure the theme of imperial security to one of individual security, that is, mortality.

Precisely at the moment when we are welcomed into the poet’s experience, he introduces his son. Abū al-Ghawth makes an appearance as the libation bearer (ll. 29-30). In a haze of reverie, Anūshirvān, the Sasanian father, becomes Abū al-Ghawth the Arab son. These libations of wine are part of the iconography of immortality.⁴⁶ Here the life-giving liquid does not flow from the ancients, rather the poet dreams of his son serving him the wine of everlasting bliss out of loyalty. This idyllic image stands conspicuously in tension with Anūshirvān’s own strife with his son. He implicitly questions the gap between ideals and realities, dream state and wakefulness. It is a question he soon asks explicitly.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁵ Motoyoshi, “Reality and Reverie,” 106, 107.

⁴⁶ Cf. Suzanne P. Stetkevych, “Intoxication and Immortality: Wine and Associated Imagery in al-Ma‘arrī’s Garden,” in *Critical Pilgrimages: The Arabic Literary Tradition*, ed. F. Malt-Douglas, spec. issue of *Literature East and West* 25 (1989):29-48.

In the meantime, al-Buḥturī's wine appears to be a promising liquid in times of tension (ll. 31-32). The poet's resort to wine displaces tensions and evokes an image of reconciliation. In pre-Islamic times, the shedding of both wine and blood was associated with immortality,⁴⁷ but the poet in the wake of references to bloodshed promotes instead restoration and contentment by wine. The beverage directly affects the heart. At last, an elite assembly of otherwise vying men gather in a mythic garden in a spirit of camaraderie and graciously share the drink of everlasting life.⁴⁸

Within this garden scene, the next persona to join the gathering is Khosrow II Aparvīz (r. 591-628; l. 33) along with his prized minstrel, Balahbadh. Aparvīz is the last of the Sasanian royalty to partake in the communal wine; he too witnessed a tormented conflict with his son. Though he was born the son of a competent and scrupulous king, Hurmizd IV, according to al-Dīnawarī's narratives, Aparvīz himself became a plague upon the land. He was unsuccessful in battle and unjust to nobles under his command.⁴⁹ The nobility effectively dethroned him and gave his son, Shīrūya (r. 628-629), an ultimatum forcing the young man to order the execution of his corrupt father and replace him immediately.⁵⁰ Shīrūya asked for one day to contemplate the matter.

The next morning Shīrūya drafted a letter of execution to be sent to Aparvīz. The son rose up against the "tyrannical" father and wrote a long shocking document that began with these words: "What will befall you is a punishment from God for the legacy of your misdeeds!"⁵¹ Both at the level of family and dynasty, the son/successor had replaced the father/predecessor and seized the symbols of his authority. On a civilizational level, al-Dīnawarī continues to synchronize the oedipal coup with the Islamic rise to glory and the Arab conquest of Mesopotamia: "It was in the ninth year of the Prophet's migration."⁵² Despite his Arab lineage, al-Buḥturī's own attitude in the ode toward the Sasanian downfall is never less than sympathetic. Anūshirvān and Aparvīz sowed the seeds of their own tragedy, but al-Buḥturī voices their praise compassionately and offers them the bliss of wine and the joy of camaraderie; though he is an Arab, he promotes their memory in reconciliation. Perhaps the most unsettling line of the poem is when he begins to question the possibility of reconciliation in reality:

⁴⁷ Cf. S. Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals*, 41-42.

⁴⁸ Cf. S. Stetkevych, "Intoxication and Immortality," 35.

⁴⁹ al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, 107.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 107.

A dream that closes my eye to doubt?
Or desire that alters my fancy and guesses? (l. 34)

These questions remain unanswered in the poem. Thus, for the remainder, he undertakes an extended effort to memorialize the Sasanians with implications for Abbasid social memory.

The rest of the poem, lines 35-56, rigorously eschews questions about conflict. Instead, al-Buḥturī launches a focused elegy of the Sasanians. The lyrical mood in this section enables the poet to maximize yearning and sympathy for the Sasanians. In this manner, he proposes a series of “recollections” in order for his audience to come to terms with the House of Sāsān, and by extension with the House of ‘Abbās.

The significance of al-Buḥturī’s words to the Sasanians is profound. As a luminary of Arab culture, he can implicitly make amends like no other orator for the violence that supplanted the House of Sāsān. The sight of the desolate building prompts him to voice the distress and sadness that Time brought upon it (ll. 36-37). Any suggestion of blame remains implicit, because the ultimate culprit is Time, the *nasībic* enemy of all organized human life. In line 39, the weight of Time is presented as an immovable beast upon the site (l. 39-40). Al-Buḥturī’s manner of recollection carefully evokes not blame but grief, because axiomatically the tragic turns of Fate are universally outside the realm of human control. The language of Fate and tragedy shifts attention away from human (Arab) culpability, but nonetheless offers the bygone Sasanians the veneration due to them as predecessors of the Arabs in Mesopotamia. In the formula of elegy, the greater the glory of the deceased, the greater the offering of blood or tears must be to placate the haunting claims of the dead. After admitting the injustice of plunder committed upon the Sasanian Arch by Time in line 40, he proceeds to celebrate the height of the ramparts and mountains that defend it (l. 41-42), the vastness of the Sasanian armies (l. 45), the size of crowds made to wait for audience (l. 46), and the talent of court minstrels (l. 47). In a critical moment, al-Buḥturī’s recollection technique reclaims these bygone wonders from the distant (alien) past. He brings them into the recent (Arab) past (l. 48-49). The poetic practice of nostalgia refurbishes Abbasid cultural memory of the Sasanian. The military divide between Arab and Sasanian, conqueror and conquered, is overturned in favor of a project to assimilate their heritage and credit them. As al-Buḥturī suggests, the past seems closer than one might think.

In the next two lines, al-Buḥturī fulfills the obligations of a loyal poet grieving his deceased kin. Note here, however, that he cannot call for vengeance against the killers (Arabs) in the classical heroic mode, and thus offers libations of tears implicitly renouncing armed heroism (ll. 50-51). While his

tears and commemoration serve important social functions in Abbasid society, his choice of tears instead of blood as an oblation deserves notice. S. Stetkevych notes that pre-Islamic poetry of elegy is predominantly chanted for fallen kinsmen in battle.⁵³ The heroic, manly ideal of tribal society was to protect the sanctity of a warrior's blood by memorializing vengeance sought and achieved.⁵⁴ As a counterpart to elegy composed by men, calls for vengeance composed by women do not offer libations of blood but tears.⁵⁵ One can sense then in al-Buḥturī's decision to offer tears that he opts out of the external violence of bloodshed and instead subordinates himself to demands that are consistent with Abbasid imperial interests. If his ode to the Sasanians stands allegorically for the Abbasids, one can be sure that he offers tears and remembrance, not blood and vengeance, to the two families, dynasties, and civilizations. What we have then are tears sublimated into a token of self-redemption. The poem that began with the voice of the bitter brigand now concludes with renewed resolve to recollect the estranged past.

In the next lines, al-Buḥturī recognizes the claims of the Sasanians on him through a bond of kinship not by birth, but by "favor" (i.e. cultural influence; ll. 52-55). In line 54-55, al-Buḥturī nostalgically recalls the intervention of the Sasanians in pre-Islamic Arabia, though this event is commonly reported as a mixed blessing. His recollection re-invents a checkered event in order to honor Persian culture. According to Abbasid narrative, the Sasanian occupation of Yemen replaced an occupation by the Christian Aksumite commander Aryāṭ and his successor Abraha. Al-Buḥturī's first embellishment is to re-invent legend and lore, which indicate that the Sasanian armies faced Abraha not Aryāṭ; in fact the latter was dealt his fatal blow not by the Sasanians, but by his successor Abraha.⁵⁶ Second, according to Abbasid sources, Anūshirvān sent Sasanian forces to expel Abraha's army from Yemen, but the Sasanians exploited Yemen as a satrapy, and Anūshirvān ordered a series of massacres during the thirty year occupation of Yemen until the last Persian ruler converted to Islam in 628.⁵⁷ Allowing a sweet innovation to triumph over a bitter memory, al-Buḥturī seems to accentuate the positive by casting the Sasanians as the liberators and allies of the Arab race. There is some basis for this new artifice, since Aryāṭ and Abraha launched massacres of Jews in Yemen, and Abraha menaced the Holy House at Mecca in 570 because it rivaled his own in Sanaa.⁵⁸ Though the

⁵³ S. Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals*, 219.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; *ibid.*, 199.

⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:129; Dīnawarī, *al-Akhhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, 62.

⁵⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:147.

⁵⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:129-131; Dīnawarī, *al-Akhhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, 62.

Sasanians did not make themselves liked in Yemen, for Mecca the result of the Persian occupation thwarted further attacks on the Holy House. In a spirit of lyricism, al-Buḥturī records the Sasanian occupation as an unequivocal “liberation” that supported pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arab dominion.

The ultimate verse then opens into a final expression of goodwill, based on this “positive” cultural experience with the Persians (l. 56). Al-Buḥturī’s openness to other races, to be sure, needs to be seen in the context of Arab-Muslim sacral history. Benedict Anderson notes that the great sacral communities of the pre-modern world, whether Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, were imaginable first and foremost because there were super-ordinate principles that gave them a feeling of being at the center cosmically, regardless of their ethnic composition.⁵⁹ The sacredness of the leader, history and, above all, language gave members of the community a sense of cosmic privilege, and most importantly, an impulse to domesticate people of wide ranging ethnicity.⁶⁰ Indeed, conversion “to Islam” in the medieval period in most cases was not predicated on a change of heart; joining a new religion meant, above all, joining a new community.⁶¹ The equation of religious and communal identity, DeWeese explains, actually encouraged the expectation that people would come into the fold of their new religion not as individuals, but often as groups of kin or locality.⁶² One should note that from the perspective of the sacral community, such conversions were not baseless. The sacral efficacy of the community, by means of its leader, its history and language, promoted a tireless belief in the power of the community to redeem newcomers who were not pariahs, but fertile new ground for communal growth.⁶³ One can imagine that al-Buḥturī’s openness to other groups, after a splendid tribute to one of them, gave this poem an exceptional appeal among Muslims who were non-Arab. In effect, it validated their ethnic origin, whatever it may have been, and conferred upon them the privilege of membership in a vast sacral community.

Moreover, al-Buḥturī’s poem contributes to a view of cultural assimilation that balanced the one extreme of the Shu‘ūbiyya movement, which looked to Persian culture over all others for models, and the other extreme

⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13-24, 36.

⁶¹ Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tūkles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, *Hermeneutics: Studies in the History of Religion*, ed. Kees W. Bolle (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 24.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.* 26, Anderson, *Imagined*, 14-15.

of traditionalists who saw Arab culture as the only viable model.⁶⁴ Al-Buḥturī's approach promotes a synthesis of cultural contributions ("favors"). His elegy of the Sasanians heightens a sense of yearning for their abode, but within the context of his allegory, a yearning likewise for the Abbasid abode. He cultivates a hunger for memory of a dual past using the idiom of *nasīb* to evoke nostalgia. He and many others seek to nourish that desire by reclaiming knowledge of the Sasanian past.

Al-Buḥturī redeems the once-estranged Sasanians as well as the Abbasids by lamenting the cycles of Fate and offering tears of affection and devotion. In this article, I have illustrated how al-Buḥturī's *Īwān Kisrā* can be read as an allegory with reference to oral lore of the Abbasid era recorded by al-Dīnawarī in his *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*. From this perspective, al-Buḥturī raises vividly the archetypal issues that ultimately transform a sordid palace scandal into a tragedy of universal relevance and appeal. Composed after the murder, the poem forced larger questions on the stage, such as who/what is fundamentally to blame, who deserves their fate, and why power is cyclical. The poet's response, no doubt, is that of an imperial poet concerned not with other-worldly redemptions, but those of this one.

⁶⁴ *EP*, s.v. "Shu'ūbiyya."

APPENDIX A
TRANSLATION⁶⁵

- 1 I saved myself from what defiles my self
and rose above the largess of every craven coward.
I endured when Time shook me,
seeking misery and reversal for me.
Mere subsistence from the dregs of life have I.
Days have rationed it inadequately.
Stark is the difference between him who drinks at will twice a day
and him who drinks every fourth day.
- 5 As if Time's inclinations are
predicated on the vilest of the vile.
My purchase of Iraq was a swindler's ploy,
after my sale of Syria, a trickster's sale.
Do not test me endlessly about my knowledge
of these ordeals to deny my misfortunes.
You once knew me as a man of qualities,
disdaining petty matters, undaunted.
But the scorn of my cousin,
after heartfelt kindness and amity, disturbs me.
- 10 When I am scorned, I am likely
to be seen rising not where I spent the night.
Sorrows attend my saddle. I direct
my stout she-camel to Madā'in [Ctesiphon].
I console myself for such luck
and find solace in a site for the Sasanians, ruined.
Perpetual misfortune reminds me of them;
misfortune makes one remember and forget.
They live the good life, shaded by guarded peaks,
which tire and baffle the gaze.
- 15 Its gates, on Qabq Mountain, are secure, extending to the
uplands of Khilāṭ and Muks.⁶⁶
The abodes are unlike the ruins of Su'dā,
in a wasteland, bare and plantless.
Heroic feats—were it not for my partiality—the

⁶⁵ The translation is my own with reference to Motoyoshi, "Reality and Reverie," 92-96; and A. J. Arberry, *Arabic Poetry: A Primer for Students* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 72-80.

⁶⁶ The traditional northern border of the empire between the Caspian and Black Sea.

- feats of 'Ans and 'Abs would not surpass them.
 Time despoiled their era of vitality. It
 devolved to worn-out rags.
 As if the Arched Hall, for lack of humanity, and sheer abandonment,
 is a grave's edifice.
- 20 If you saw it, you would know that the nights
 are holding a funeral in it after a wedding.
 It would inform you of a troop's marvels,
 their record does not gray with obscurity.
 When you see a panel of the Battle at Antioch,
 you tremble among Byzantines and Persians.
 The Fates stand still, while Anūshirvān
 leads the ranks onward under the banner
 In a deep green robe over yellow.
 It appears dyed in saffron.
- 25 Men in combat are under his command.
 Some are quiet and hushed.
 Some are intense, rushing forward with spear-points.
 Others are cautious of them, using shields.
 The eye depicts them very much alive:
 they have between them speechless signs.
 My wonder about them boils till
 my hand explores them with a touch.
 Abū al-Ghawth [poet's son] had poured me a drink without stinting,
 for the two armies, a draft
- 30 of wine. You would think it a star
 lighting the night or sun's luscious kiss.
 You see, when it renews joy and
 contentment for the drinker, one sip after the other,
 That it was poured into glasses—into every heart.
 It is beloved to every soul.
 I fancied Kisrā Aparvīz handing me
 a drink and al-Balahbadh [king's minstrel] my companion.
 A dream that closes my eye to doubt?
 Or desire that alters my fancy and guesses?
- 35 As if the Arched Hall, by its wondrous craftsmanship,
 were hollowed in the cliff of a mountain side.
 It would be thought, from its sadness—
 to the eyes of morning and evening visitors—
 Distraught like a man torn from the company of loved ones,
 or distressed by the breaking of nuptials.
 Nights have reversed its luck. There, Jupiter

whiled the night but as a star of misfortune.
 It shows hardiness, but the cruel weight of Time
 is fixed upon it.
 40 It's no stigma that it was ravished of
 silken carpets, stripped of damask drapes.
 Towering, its ramparts rise high,
 It looms over the summits of *Riḍwā* and *Quds*.
 Donning white clouds, you do not
 glimpse of them but cotton tunics.
 It is not quite known: Is it the work of humans for jinn
 to live in or the work of jinn for humans?
 Yet, as I gaze upon it, it attests
 its builder is among kings not the least a cipher.
 45 As though I see generals and troops,
 as far as the eye can see.
 As though foreign embassies suffer in the sun.
 They are dismayed standing behind crowds, kept waiting.
 As though minstrels in the Hall's center
 croon lyrics between plum-like lips.
 As though the gathering were the day before yesterday
 and the hurry of departure just yesterday.
 As though the seeker of their trail could hope
 to catch up with them the morning of the fifth day.
 50 It was built up for joy forever, but
 their domain is for condolence and consolation now.
 It deserves that I lend it my tears,
 tears committed to affection, devoted.
 I feel this, though the abode is not my abode
 —by blood—nor this race my race.
 Beyond their graces toward my people,
 they seeded, out of their goodness, fine sprouts.
 They backed our dominion and buttressed its might
 with warriors under armor, zealous.
 55 They helped against Aryāṭ's regiment
 by stabbing chests and spearing.
 I find myself thereafter completely enamored
 by noble men of every race and origin.

APPENDIX B
TRANSLITERATION

- ʃuntu naʃsī ʿammā yudannisu naʃsī
 wa-taraffaʿtu ʿan jadā kulli jibsi
 wa-tamāsaktu ḥīna zaʿzaʿanī d-dah-
 ru l-timāsan minhu li-taʿsī wa-naksī
 bulaghun min ʃubābati l-ʿayshi ʿindī
 ʔaffafat-hā l-ayāmu tatʔifa bakhsi
 wa-baʿīdun mā bayna wāridi rifhin
 ʿalalin shurbuhu wa-wāridi khimsi
 5 wa-kaʿanna z-zamāna aʃbaḥa maḥmū-
 lan hawāhu maʿa l-akhassi l-akhassi
 wa-shtirāʿī l-ʿirāqa khuttatu ghabnin
 baʿda bayʿī sh-shaʿāma bayʿata waksi
 lā taruznī muzāwīlan li-khtibārī
 baʿda hādhi l-balwā fa-tunkira massī
 wa-qadīman ʿahidtanī dhā hanātin
 ābiyātin ʿalā d-danīyāti shumsi
 wa-laqad rābanī nubuwwu bni ʿammī
 baʿda līnin min jānibayhi wa-unsi
 10 wa idhā mā jufītu kuntu jadīran
 an urā ghayra muʃbihin ḥaythu umsi
 ḥadarat rahliya l-humūmu fa-wajjah-
 tu ilā abyadi l-madāʿini ʿansi
 atasallā ʿan-i l-ḥuzūzi wa-āsā
 li-maḥallin min āli sāsāna darsi
 adhkaratnihim-u l-khutūbu t-tawālī
 wa-laqad tudhkiru l-khutūbu wa-tunsi
 wa-humu khāfidūna fī ʔilli ʿālin
 mushrifin yaḥsiru l-ʿuyūna wa-yukhsī
 15 mughlaqin bābuhu ʿalā jabali l-qab-
 qi ilā dāratay khilāṭa wa-muksi
 ḥilalun lam takun ka-aṭlāli suʿdā
 fī qifārin min-i l-basābisi mulsi
 wa-masāʿin lawlā l-muḥābātu minnī
 lam tuṭiqhā masʿātu ʿansi wa-ʿabsi
 naqala d-dahru ʿahdahunna ʿani j-jid
 dati ḥattā rajʿna anḍāʿa lubsi
 fa-kaʿanna j-jirmāz min ʿadami l-un-
 si wa-ikhlālihi baniyyatu ramsi

- 20 *law tarāhu ‘alimta anna l-layālī*
ja‘alat fīhi ma’taman ba‘da ‘ursi
wa-hwa yunbika ‘an ‘ajā’ibi qawmin
lā yushābu l-bayānu fīhim bi-labsi
wa-idhā mā ra’ayta šūrata anṭā-
kiyyata rta‘ata bayna rūmin wa fursi
wa l-manāyā mawāthilun wa-anūshir-
wān yuzjī ṣ-ṣufūfa taḥta d-dirafsi
fī-khdirārin min-i l-libāsi ‘alā aṣ-
fara yakhtālu fī ṣabīghati warsi
- 25 *wa-‘irāku r-rijālī bayna yadayhi*
fī khufūtin minhum wa-ighmādi jarsi
min mushihīn yahwī bi-‘āmili rumhin
wa-mulihīn min-i s-sināni bi-tursi
taṣifu l-Ṭaynu annahum jiddu ahyā-
’in lahum baynahum ishāratu khursi
yaghtalī fīhim-i r-tiyābiya ḥattā
tataqarrāhumu yadāya bi-lamsi
qad saqānī wa-lam yuṣarrid abū l-ghaw-
thi ‘alā l-‘askarayni shurbata khulsi
- 30 *min mudāmin tazunnuhā wa-hya najmun*
ḍawwa’a l-layla aw mujājatu shamsi
wa-tarāhā idhā ajaddat surūran
wa-rtiyāḥan li-sh-shāribi l-mutaḥassī
ufrighat fī z-zujāji min kulli qalbin
fa-hya maḥbūbatun ilā kulli nafsi
wa-tawahhamtu anna kisrā abarwī-
za mu‘āṭiyya wa-l-balahbadha unsi
ḥulumun muṭbiqun ‘alā sh-shakki ‘aynī
am amānin ghayyarna zannī wa-ḥadsī
- 35 *wa-kanna l-īwāna min ‘ajabi ṣan-*
‘ati jawbun fī janbi ar‘ana jilsi
yutazannā min-i l-ka’ābati idh yab-
dū li-‘aynay muṣabbihīn aw mumassī
muz‘ajan bil-firāqi ‘an unsi alfin
‘azza aw murhaqan bi-taṭlīq ‘irsin
‘akasad ḥazzahu l-layālī wa-bāta l-
mushtarī fīhi wa-hwa kawkabu naḥsi
fa-hwa yubdī tajalludan wa-‘alayhi
kalkalun min kalākili d-dahri mursī
- 40 *lam ya‘ibhu an buzza min busuṭi d-dī-*

- bāji wa-stulla min sutūri d-dimaqsi*
mushmakhirrun ta'lū lahu shurufātun
rufī'at fī ru'ūsi raḍwā wa quḍsi
lābisātun min-i l-bayāḍi fa-mā tub-
ṣīru minhā illā ghalā'ila bursi
laysa yudrā aṣun'u insin li-jinnin
sakanūhu am ṣun'u jinnin li-insi
ghayra annī arāhu yashhadu anna lam
yaku bānīhi fī l-mulūki bi-niksi
45 *fa-ka'annī arā l-marātiba wa l-qaw-*
ma idhā mā balaghtu ākhira ḥissī
wa-ka'anna l-wufūda ḍāḥīna ḥasrā
min wuqūfin khalfa z-zihāmi wa-khunsi
wa-ka'anna l-qiyāna waṣṭa l-maqāṣī-
ri yurajji'na bayna ḥuwwin wa-lu'si
wa-ka'anna l-liqā'a awwalu min am-
si wa-washka l-firāqi awwalu amsi
wa-ka'anna l-ladhī yurīdu t-tibā'an
ṭāmi'un fī luhūqihim ṣubḥa khamsi
50 *'ummirat li-s-surūri dahran fa-ṣārat*
li-t-ta'azzī ribā'uhum wa-t-ta'assī
fa-lahā an u'īnahā bi-dumū'in
mūqafātin 'alā ṣ-ṣabābati ḥubsi
dhāka 'indī wa-laysat-a d-dāru dārī
bi-qtirābin minhā wa-lā j-jinsu jinsī
ghayra nu'mā li-ahlihā 'inda ahlī
gharasū min zakā'ihā khayra ghursi
ayyadū mulkanā wa-shaddū quwāhu
bi-kumātin tahta s-sanawwari ḥumsī
55 *wa-a'ānū 'alā katā'ib aryā-*
ṭa bi-ṭa'nin 'alā n-nuḥūri wa-da'asi
wa-arānī min ba'du aklafu bi-l-ash-
rāfi ṭurran min kulli sinkhin wa-issī