

Continuity and Ruptures in the History of Iran: Origins of Heretical and Debauched Themes in Classical New Persian Poetry

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This article is about the impact of pre-Islamic¹ and Islamic elements on the development of classical new Persian poetry. New Persian poetry emerged in the tenth century, therefore three centuries after the Arab conquest and the Islamization of Iran (battle of Nihavand 642). Little is known about pre-Islamic Persian poetry of the Sasanian period (224–651). The word “classical” as referred to Persian poetry indicates the poetry of a golden literary age that partially corresponds chronologically to the Western Middle Ages but continues much further, given that classical literary forms survive in Iran until the nineteenth century. The word “new Persian” indicates the Persian language that emerged in the ninth century after two centuries of Arabization. New Persian has assimilated a great number of Arab words and is usually divided into classical Persian and modern Persian. This article analyses more specifically the genesis of some conventional themes of classical Persian poetry which refer to Zoroastrian and other heretical rituals and to debauched behaviors associated with eroticism and wine. These themes are typical of Persian lyric, especially of the erotic-mystic *ghazal*,² but they can be found more generally in all classical Persian poetry. The purpose of this article is to highlight, through the analysis of the origin of these themes, the complex question of continuity and rupture in the history of Iran, a question that needs to be analyzed in its holistic dimension: historically, politically, socially and culturally. The history of Iran has been constantly characterized by a succession of periods of openness and assimilation of external cultures and periods of closeness and archaizing “national” renaissances. The former appear to be the most fecund phases of this history, as the emergence of classical Persian poetry shows.

1 Pre-Islamic refers to the period prior to the rise of Islam in the 630s.

2 The *ghazal*, a poetical composition of five to fifteen distichs, with a rhyme pattern aa, ba, ca etc., is “the truest and most pleasing expression of lyricism, particularly of the erotic and the mystical but also of the meditative and even of the panegyric (Hāfiz)”, Rypka 1968, 95.

I argue that the development of these peculiar heretical and debauched themes of Persian lyric has been the result of a complex process of combination of Persian and Arabic pre-Islamic and Islamic elements, all belonging to the fecund ground of cosmopolitan Hellenism and its late antique and medieval heritage.

I will proceed as follows. Firstly, I will start with some general considerations on the history of Iran that allow me to put the question of continuity and rupture in the history of literature within a more general historiographical framework. Secondly, I will quote a well-known *ghazal* of Ḥāfīz (fl. 14th century) known after its first verse as “For years my heart enquired of me where Jamshīd’s sacred cup would be”. This *ghazal* provides a concrete example of these heretical and debauched themes throughout my article. Thirdly, I will make some general remarks on the existing sources of Sasanian poetry and the hypotheses of a Sasanian origin of the new Persian quatrain (*rubāʿī*) and *ghazal*. Fourthly, I will refer to Zoroastrian prejudices against poetry and singing in pre-Islamic Iran. Fifthly, I will mention the existence of pre-Islamic and Islamic themes in Arab poetry associating Christian rituals, wine and eroticism, and their impact on classical Persian poetry. Sixthly, I will refer to the Qur’ān’s “condemnation” of poetry and to the existence of prejudices against singing in orthodox Islam. Finally, I will argue that the Sufi (ṣūfī)³ movement known as *malāmātīyya* (self-blame), which emerged in the ninth/tenth century in Khorasan (North-Eastern Iran), played a decisive role in the formation of the heretical and debauched themes that characterize classical Persian lyric, providing all other before-mentioned elements with internal logic and coherence. My reflections concern the literary history of Iran but rely upon a more general historiographical question: the complex interaction between continuity and rupture in the history of civilizations.⁴

Considerations on the History of Iran from the Antiquity to the Present

The history of Iran shows that the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries’ separation between Classical studies and Oriental studies needs to be reconsidered.

3 Sufis is Islamic mysticism, from *ṣūf*; “wool”, of which the tunic of the early Muslim ascetics was made.

4 In this article I develop ideas already expressed by previous scholars, and particularly the Italian Iranologue Alessandro Bausani (1921–1988) whose opinions on the topic discussed here have not been fully appreciated by scholars internationally. For a bibliography of his writings see Ventura 1981, 7-16; Scarcia and Rostagno 1991; Scarcia 2008.

On the one side if one intends the word “Classics” in the sense of the Greek and Roman heritage, Iran has given an important contribution to the cosmopolitan Hellenistic (356–323 BCE) civilization and its reception in the Middle Ages since Alexandre the Great’s conquest of Iran (331 BCE), during the Seleucid then the Parthian-Arsacid era (fourth century BCE to third century CE), during the Sasanian period (3rd–7th century) and finally during the Islamic era. On the other side if one intends the word “Classics” in a universal and non-Eurocentric sense, that is to say a cultural model of the past that continues to be a reference and a source of imitation in the present, the Persian culture of the Islamic era represents the “Classics” for the whole geographic area of non-Arab Oriental Islam. Until today Central Asia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Muslim India consider the Islamic Persian civilization as a literary, artistic and cultural model. This large area of Oriental non-Arab Islam derives its cultural homogeneity from a common Persian background “color”.

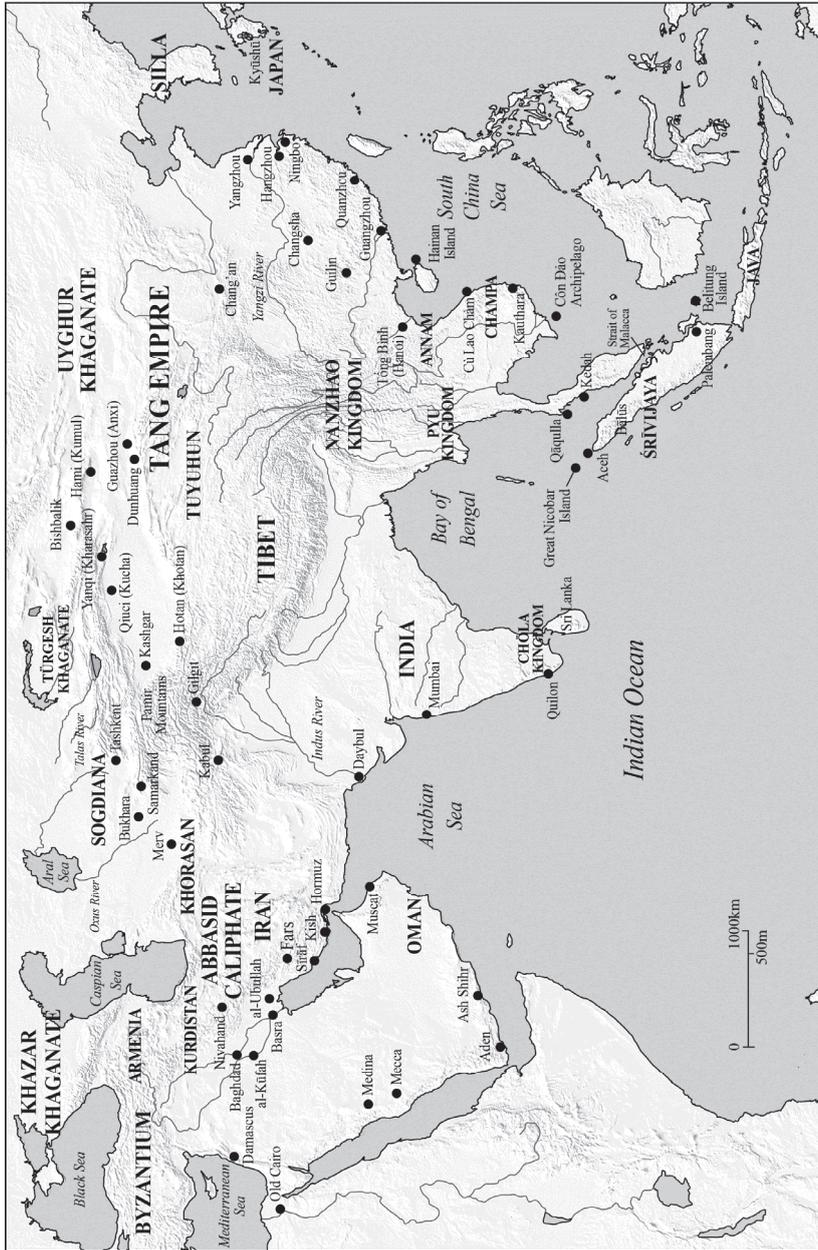
The question of continuity and rupture emerges regularly in the historiography of civilizations.⁵ It is the task of the historian to distinguish in this respect between ideological elements and reliable historical data. For instance a continuity with the political history of Rome has been claimed to different extents and in different contexts by Charles the Great (c. 747–814), by the Roman Empire of the East, by the ephemeral empire of fascist Italy and finally by the European Union in the twentieth century whose ideologues refer to Charlemagne as their ancestor.⁶ Historical ruptures have been claimed by Christianity and Islam vis-à-vis the pagan eras or recently, in a different context, by some Western ideologues of capitalism after the fall of the Soviet Union.⁷ Also in the history of Iran we find, until very recently, claims of continuity and, to a lesser extent, claims of ruptures.

The etymology of Iran derives from Ancient Persian *airiyanem vaējo*, “the land of the Arians”. Also known as Persia, from the name of its Southern province (today’s Fars), Iran is situated between Mesopotamia and the Near East at West and India, China and Central Asia at East and North. For its geographical position Iran has been since the most ancient times a land cultural syncretism and meeting points, but also a land of political invasions leading to the constant risk of being assimilated by its neighbors.

5 Burbank and Cooper 2011, 16f.

6 These claims are rejected namely by Jacques Le Goff (2014) of the *Annales*’ historiographic school.

7 Fukuyama 1992.



Map: Asia in the eighth and ninth century

The history of Iran has been characterized by a succession of periods of cultural assimilation and syncretism and, as a reaction to them, by periods of cultural closure and archaizing “national” renaissances. The national renaissances that have rhythmized the history of Iran since Antiquity, although partially artificial, succeeded in preserving the Iranian “nation” throughout the centuries. However, culturally speaking, the archaizing periods of “national renaissance” have not been the most fruitful ones, comparing with the periods of openness and cultural assimilation.

After a primitive phase of syncretism between the Ancient Arian, Elamite and Mesopotamian cultures (until the 6th century BCE), the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE) brought the very first archaizing “national” renaissance (6th–4th century BCE). The inscription of Bisutun in Kermanshah (Western Iran) affirms the political-religious legitimacy of the reign of Darius, the king of kings, which is presented as the restorer of an ancient order.⁸

The invasion of Alexander the Great and the following Seleucid and the Parthian era (fourth century BCE–third century CE) were periods of assimilation of the Hellenistic culture. Beside the Aramaic, which was the administrative language of the Achaemenid, Greek became the official language of the court and the administration. The Parthian rule was followed by the archaizing “national” renaissance of the Sasanians (3rd–7th century), who called themselves *Shāhān shāh Erān* (the king of the kings of Iran), restoring the Achaemenid title of the Iranian monarchs. The Arab-Islamic invasion of Iran (7th century) inaugurated a new period of cultural assimilation and syncretism, probably the most fecund of the history of Iran,⁹ which led to the birth of the new-Persian language and literature and to the increasing political autonomy of Iranian dynasties within the Abbasid caliphate. The destructive Mongol invasions of Iran (13th–14th century) prevented and postponed a new phase of political “national” renaissance to a later period. The latter took place under the Safavid dynasty (16th–18th century) whose sovereigns, under the banner of Islamic Shiism,¹⁰ took the

8 King and Thompson 1907; Schmitt 2013.

9 At least for the literary history. However, on the basis of available sources Lucio Russo (2003) presumes a brilliant scientific culture in the Seleucid era.

10 Shiism is the second greatest branch of Islam (the first is Sunnism). *Shī‘a* means “faction”, the faction of ‘Alī (d. 661), cousin and brother in law of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 632). The Shiites believe that the Prophet had appointed ‘Alī as his spiritual and political successor, and first *Imām* (guide). For the majority of Shiites there have been 12 *Imāms*, descendants of ‘Alī. The *Imām* has a doctrinal authority, intercedes for men and is infallible (for some extreme Shiites even divine). The twelfth *Imām* did not die but disappeared (874) and will return at the end of the times.

ancient Sasanian title of *Shāhīnshāh-i Irān* and claimed divine ascendancy. The next period of cultural assimilation and syncretism took place at the time of the European expansion (19th–20th century), when the Iranians became abruptly aware of their scientific, technological and cultural backwardness and opened themselves to the European culture. This phase was followed once again by an archaizing “national” renaissance at the time of the Pahlavi dynasty (who called themselves again *Shāhīnshāh-i Irān*, 1925–1978), promoting a project of capitalist modernization and a new “national renaissance”. Culturally speaking the Pahlavi renaissance remained to a great extent artificial, combined as it was with an exterior Westernization of the ruling class.¹¹ The subsequent “alternative” national renaissance was brought about by the Islamic revolution (1978) and emphasized the Iranian Shiite national identity more than the Achaemenid one, but it did not provide a durable solution to the economic failures of the Pahlavi era.¹² It is too early to say if the recent diplomatic, political and cultural reforms of the government of President Hassan Rouhani (elected in 2013) are the beginning of a new phase in the history of Iran. Up to the present day sectors of the Iranian urban bourgeoisie, unsatisfied of its social role, look at the West as a solution to their social and economic frustration and continue to refer confusedly to pre-Islamic Zoroastrian Iran as to an idealized enlightened past that would have been destroyed by the “backward” Islamic conquest of the Arabs.

The question of continuity and rupture in the history of Iran should be considered from a *longue durée* perspective. It is a complex question that cannot be solved simplistically in favor of the first or the second option. In this article I show how the analysis in terms of continuity and rupture can be applied to the field of the literary history of Iran as a meaningful example for more general historical considerations. We are going to see that it can be legitimately claimed that both pre-Islamic and Islamic elements contributed to the development of the heretical and debauched themes of Persian lyric. Strangely enough for a modern reader who is not acquainted with it, Persian lyric constantly refers to heresy, Zoroastrian priests, heretical Christian and Mazdaic ceremonies using wine,

11 See the celebration of 2,500 years of the Persian Empire in Persepolis (12–16 October 1971) organized by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in order to show the glorious continuity between the Achaemenids and his dynasty. These pompous celebrations, attended by a great number of world leaders, were accompanied by the highest French cuisine and Western etiquette.

12 According to Amin 2014, 63, “In Iran the duo of lumpen-development and control of the society by the Mullah delegate the country to the downward spiral.” On the succession of periods of national closure and syncretistic openness in the *longue durée* of history of Iran see Bausani 1971a. On the question of the Iranian historical identity past and present see Bausani 1960, 31-50; Ashraf 2012.

ignominious death on the gallows or on the cross (which for Islam, unlike Christianity, is a shameful and not a redemptive death), and debauched behavior that are severely reprehended by Islam. It would not be correct to interpret these themes as a nationalist Iranian anti-Islamic reaction, as an evidence for a linear cultural continuity between pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran. It is true that after the Arab conquest of Iran a cultural debate called *shu'ūbiyya* emerged and opposed the tenors of the Arab culture to the tenors of the Iranian culture. It is also true that the Persian elite expressed throughout the centuries various anti-Arab ethnocentric prejudices.¹³ However the *shu'ūbiyya* was a cultural debate among the educated Muslim elite and never challenged Islam. Within the *shu'ūbiyya* there were also pro-Arab Iranians and pro-Iranian Arabs. A more attentive analysis of the blasphemous themes of Persian lyric shows instead that they are the result of a combination of pre-Islamic and Islamic elements among which Sufism (Islamic mysticism) played a decisive role.

A *ghazal* of Ḥāfiẓ: “For Years My Heart Inquired of Me Where Jamshīd’s Sacred Cup Might Be”

Below I quote a well-known *ghazal* of Ḥāfiẓ known after its first verse as “For years my heart enquired of me where Jamshīd’s sacred cup would be”. It provides a concrete example of the heretical and debauched themes characterizing Persian lyric.

سال‌ها دل طلب جام جم از ما می‌کرد	و آن چه خود داشت ز بیگانه تمنا می‌کرد
گوهری کز صدف کُون و مکان بیرون است	طلب از گمشدگان لب دریا می‌کرد
مشکل خویش بر پیر مُغان بردم دوش	کو به تابید نظر حلّ معما می‌کرد
دیدمش خرم و خندان، قدح باده به دست	واندر آن آینه صد گونه تماشا می‌کرد
گفتم این جام جهانبین به تو کی داد حکیم	گفت آن روز که این گنبد مینا می‌کرد
بی دلی در همه احوال خدا با او بود	او نمی‌دیدش و از دور خدایا می‌کرد
این همه شعبده خویش که می‌کرد اینجا	سامری پیش عصا و ید بیضا می‌کرد
گفت آن یار، کز او گشت سر دار بلند،	جرمش این بود که اسرار هویدا می‌کرد
فیض روح القدس ار باز مدد فرماید	دیگران هم بکنند آن چه مسیحا می‌کرد
گفتمش سلسله‌ی زلف بتان از پی چیست	گفت حافظ گله‌ای از دل شیدا می‌کرد ¹⁴

13 We find this kind of prejudices in Iranian literary authors from Firdawsī (d. c.1020) to Ṣādiq Hidāyat (d. 1951) and beyond.

14 Ḥāfiẓ Shirāzi, 1362/ 1984, 109f. For the editions of the *ghazals* of Ḥāfiẓ see De Fouchécour (2006), 1255-1258.

For years my heart inquired of me
 Where Jamshid's sacred cup might be,
 And what was in its own possession
 It asked from strangers, constantly;
 Begging the pearl that's slipped its shell
 From lost souls wandering by the sea.

Last night I took my troubles to
 The Magian sage whose keen eyes see
 A hundred answers in the wine
 Whose cup he, laughing, showed to me.
 I questioned him, "When was this cup
 That shows the world's reality

Handed to you?" He said, "The day
 Heaven's vault of lapis lazuli
 Was raised, and marvelous things took place
 By Intellect's divine decree,
 And Moses' miracles were made
 And Sameri's apostasy."

He added then, "That friend they hanged
 High on the looming gallows tree –
 His sin was that he spoke of things
 Which should be pondered secretly,
 The page of truth his heart enclosed
 Was annotated publicly.

But if the Holy Ghost once more
 Should lend his aid to us we'd see
 Others perform what Jesus did –
 Since in his heartsick anguish he
 Was unaware that God was there
 And called His name out ceaselessly."

I asked him next, "And beauties' curls
 That tumble down so sinuously,
 What is their meaning? Whence do they come?"
 "Hafez", the sage replied to me,
 "It's your distracted, lovelorn heart
 That asks these questions constantly."¹⁵

15 Davis 2013, 42; de Fouchécour 2006, 428 (*ghazal* n. 136); Pagliaro and Bausani 1968, 145-168 (translation and detailed commentary of this *ghazal*). The translation of this *ghazal*, the order and / or number of distichs differ in de Fouchécour 2006 and Pagliaro and Bausani 1968.

In this *ghazal* a number of conventional themes occur. They refer to heretical and blasphemous behavior associated with Mazdaism¹⁶ and Christianity:

1. The cup of Jamshid, who was a mythical king of ancient Iran (جام جم)
2. The Magian sage (پیرِ مُغان), a Zoroastrian priest.
3. The Magian sage with a cup of wine in his hand (قدح باده به دست).
4. The Magian sage joyful and laughing (خرم و خندان) because inebriated.
5. The beloved-one (یار) hanging on the gallows (کز او گشت سر دار بلند).
6. The thaumaturgic figure of Jesus, the “Spirit of God” (روح القدس) whose breath (روح) gives life and accomplishes miracles. His grace (فیض) allows the mystical Saint to accept the ignominious death on the gallows, as Jesus did (آن چه مسیحا می کرد), like a “Ḥallāj avant la lettre”.¹⁷
7. The crazy heart of the poet (دل شیدا), chained by the curl of the beloved-ones (سلسله‌ی زلف بتان), as mads are bound in chains, where “crazy” has the highly negative value of being deprived of reason.
8. The beloved-ones (بتان) is the translation of the word ‘idols’ (*but*), a term with which Islam indicates the pagan idols worshipped by the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era.

We are going to see how these themes are the result of a complex interaction between pre-Islamic and Islamic elements, to which the Sufi *malāmātī* trend gave internal coherence and form.

Remarks on Existing Sources of Sasanian Poetry and Hypothesis of a Sasanian Origin of the New Persian Quatrain and *ghazal*

We know very little about pre-Islamic Middle-Persian poetry, except for few corrupted fragments of verses and the names of some minstrel, like Barbād of Marv who, according to the tradition lived at the court of king Khosrow Parviz (r. 590–628). The earliest fragment of Sasanian poetry that can be dated with certainty are few satirical monoryming hemistiches of seven syllables by Yazīd b. Mufarrigh al-Ḥimyarī (d. 688). These earliest documents are the expression of a partially literary and partially popular poetry.¹⁸ Bausani drew the attention to the fact that the attempts of linguists like Emile Benveniste, Henrick Samuel

16 Cf. page 11.

17 Pagliaro and Bausani 1968, 166.

18 Rypka 1968, 134.

Nyberg and Walter Bruno Henning in reconstructing Sasanian poetry on the basis of Pahlavi texts like the *Bundahshin*, the *Drakht-i Asurik* or *Jamasp Asana's* texts have proved the existence of a Sasanian rhymed and rhythmic “prose”¹⁹ or more precisely of a poetry using a qualitative metric (based on the number of syllables and rhyme), unlike Arab and new-Persian poetry which used a quantitative metric (based on the length of vowels and syllables).²⁰

Comparative studies on the literary traditions of external Iranian and neighboring literatures (e. g. Armenian and Kurdish) have confirmed the persistence until modern times of an oral minstrel's lyric tradition using a qualitative metric based on the number of syllables and rhyme and associated with singing and music.²¹ This association is also mentioned by classical Iranian sources referring to the origin of the *ghazal*. Rūdaqī (d. 940), who is considered by the tradition the “inventor” of the *ghazal*, is said to have composed his poems accompanying himself with a chord instrument.²²

Both Arab and Persian sources believe in an Arab origin of new Persian poetry, which is based like the Arab one on the length of syllables and on rhyme. The first new Persian verses are often attributed to the Sasanian king Bahrām Gūr (d. 438) who, always according to the sources, was brought up at the court of the Arab Lakhmid king of Ḥīra (Syria), where he was said to have learned poetry.²³ There is no Persian word for poetry. New Persian uses the Arab word *shi'r*. In Islamic times the Persians called *shi'r* poetical compositions with a quantitative metric, according to the Arab and new Persian use.

We have seen that despite the scarcity of sources, there are evidences that a Middle-Persian popular and literary poetry did exist, that it used a qualitative metric, that it was associated with singing and music and that it was practiced by professional minstrels (*gōsān*). The question is why so little has survived. The main reasons are probably three. First, poetry was predominantly oral. Secondly, the Iranian pre-Islamic heritage was put into writing in the Islamic era by Zoroastrian priests, who were not interested in secular literature. Thirdly, poetry, together with singing and music was disregarded by the Zoroastrian church.

19 Pagliaro and Bausani 1968, 138-141.

20 Bausani 1971.

21 Boice 1957, 31; Boice 2012.

22 Rypka 1968, 144; Bausani 1971.

23 Pagliaro and Bausani 1968, 182; Rypka 1968, 50f, referring to the Persian *Tadbkirah* (antology) Lubāb al-Albāb by Muḥammad 'Awfī (fl. 13th century).

The latter is the convincing hypothesis advanced by Bausani, as I am going to explain in the following section.

Several scholars supposed a Sasanian origin of the new Persian quatrain and *ghazal*.²⁴ Bausani strengthened this assumption with his comparative analysis of external Chinese sources: the new Chinese poetry of the time of the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–906), and particularly the Chinese octave and quatrain of that period, which presents several affinities in form and content with the Persian quatrain. According to Bausani's hypothesis, there might have been an influence "per stimulus diffusion" of the Sasanian quatrain and other short Iranian compositions ("pre-historic *ghazal*") on the formation of both the Persian *ghazal* of the Islamic era and the Chinese octave and quatrains of the Tang era. Bausani quotes a quatrain of Wang Wei 王維 (d. 750) which presents a striking analogy with a quatrain of 'Omar Khayyām (d. 1131).²⁵ Both the Persian quatrain and the double Chinese quatrain (*jueju* / *chüeh-chü* 絕句) have the same a-a-b-a rhyme structure and the same "triangular" development of their content. Existing sources attest intensive cultural exchanges in the direction Iran to China in the Sasanian and early Islamic era.²⁶ The Chinese "octave" of the Tang era was accompanied by music and sang by professional singers, like the Iranian minstrels of the Sasanian period. "Barbarian' music and 'barbarian' dancers, that is to say Persian, were of great prestige at the imperial Tang palace in the eight century".²⁷ The theme of wine, although already present in Chinese poetry, became then a conventional theme. For further details and arguments in favor of Bausani's hypothesis, the reader shall refer to his quoted "Considerations on the origin of the *ghazal*" (1971). As far as our analysis is concerned, it is sufficient to mention it as a further element in favor of an Iranian pre-Islamic origin of Persian lyric in its "pre-historical" phase.

We are now going to see that an element explaining the genesis of heretical themes in new Persian poetry has to be found in Zoroastrian prejudices against poetry and singing. The latter were associated by the Zoroastrian church with debauchery and immorality.

24 On the origin of the *ghazal* see also Rypka 1968, 126f and Lazard 1964.

25 Bausani 1971, 199f.

26 Bausani 1971, 204.

27 Bausani 1971, 204f.

Zoroastrian Prejudices Against Poetry and Singing

Bausani provides convincing arguments for the hypothesis that one of the causes of the poverty or lack of written Persian pre-Islamic poetical texts could be connected to Zoroastrian prejudices against minstrels' poetry and singing. During the Sasanian period Mazdaism became the state religion of the empire and the Zoroastrian Church occupied a prominent position among the political ruling class. Mazdaism, the ancient Iranian religion revealed by the prophet Zoroaster,²⁸ had already played a fundamental role in the ideological unification under the Achaemenid period (c. 550–330 BCE).

The Pahlavi text *Dēnkart* ("Documents of Religion") warns pious Mazdans against "poetry" (*khunyāghīb*), which meant oral minstrels' poetry, associated with music and singing. The *Dēnkart* is an encyclopaedic text that gathers in a single corpus, the Sasanian religious and cultural heritage: facts on doctrines, moral precepts, historical and literary traditions belonging to the Mazdaistic religion. It was written down in the Islamic period, mostly in the ninth century.²⁹

A Parsi *rivāyat*³⁰ of the sixteenth century that presumably reflects an older tradition refers to the legend of the mythical king Tahmuraf and states that there are two things the devil loves: pederasty and singing.³¹

Another reference to a Zoroastrian prejudices against poetry and singing is attested by the Persian treatise on poetics and prosody by Shams al-Din Muḥammad Ibn Qays al-Razī (known as Shams-i Qays), composed around 1217, called *Lexicon on the rules of Persian poetry* (المعجم في معانيير أشعار العجم). This treatise mentions the Mazdean priests' monitions to the Sasanian king Bahrām Gūr against his practice of poetry. As I have already mentioned, The

28 According to Malandra 2005, "One of the most vexing problems for a history of Zoroastrianism is the location of Zarathustra in time and place. While there is general agreement that he did not live in Western Iran, attempts to locate him in specific regions of Eastern Iran, including Central Asia, remain tentative. Also uncertain, are his dates. Plausible arguments place him anywhere from the 13th century BCE to just before the rise of the Achaemenid empire under Cyrus II the Great in the mid-6th century BCE, with the majority of scholars seeming to favor dates around 1000 BCE".

29 Rypka 1968, 39 f, and Pagliaro and Bausani 1968, 139 referring to Boice 1957, 31.

30 The Arab word *rivāyat* refers to a literary form in use from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, consisting of letters or short treatises on the Zoroastrian religion. Iranian Mages used to send to the Zoroastrian diaspora in India *rivāyats* answering to religious questions. They were written in New Persian. See Vitalone 1996.

31 Spiegel 1856, quoted by Pagliaro and Bausani 1968, 139.

Persian and the Arab Islamic tradition believed that Bahrām Gūr grew up among the Syrian Arabs of Hīra and that he was the initiator of New Persian poetry.

در بعضی کتب فرس دیده ام که علماء عصر بهرام هیچ چیز از اختلاف احوال او مستهجن ندیده اند الا قول شعر... از بهر آن که اساس آن بر کذب و زوراست و بنیاد آن بر مبالغت فاحش و غلو مفرط و از این جهت عظماء فلاسفه و ادیان از آن معرض بوده اند و آن را مذموم داشته و مهاجرات شعرا را اسباب مهالك ملوک سالفه و امم ماضیه شمرده اند و از مقدمات تَلَف اموال و خراب دیار نهاده و عامه زنادقه و منکران نبوت را خیال مجال طعن در کتابها ی منزل و انبیاء مرسل جز به واسطه نظم سخن نیفتاده است و اندیشه معارضه ایشان جز بسبب اعتیاد اسجاع و قوافی روی ننموده... اول آفریده بی که در شعر نخست خود را بستوده و در مفاخرت دیگری اتفاق کرد ابلیس بود علیه اللعنه.³²

I have read in ancient Persian books that the priests of the time of Bahrām had nothing to reproach to his habits and life but the fact that he made poetry [...]. Poetry is based on lies, deceit, and it is based on shameful exaggeration and excessive hyperbole. Therefore, the greatest philosophers of the various religions despised it and considered it reprehensible. They considered poets' mutual satire among the causes of the ruin of kingdoms and dynasties of the past. In addition, all heretics and deniers of the prophecy expressed their vain fancies against the revealed Books and sent Prophets only with versified words, and their thoughts of opposition arose only because they were devoted to rhythms and rhymes [...]. It is said that the first creature who praised himself in verse and prided himself above the others was Satan, God curse him.³³

Shams-i Qays continues saying that thereafter Bahrām Gūr refrained from making poetry and his famous minstrel Barbād composed his panegyrics in prose instead of verses. The fact that poetry was perceived as an instrument of propaganda by the heretics is also related to the fact that anti-Mazdaic heresies of Mani (3rd century) and Mazdak (6th century) expressed their belief with versified hymns (poetry and singing).

Bausani's hypothesis on the role played by a Mazdan prejudice against singing together with other convergent elements (Arab poetry, the Qur'ān, Muslim theology and Sufism) is convincing and allows to explain the peculiarity of new Persian lyric, especially the erotic-mystic Persian *ghazal* that reached its highest perfection with Hāfiz. However, if the *ghazal* is the best example of the systematic use of heretic and blasphemous motifs, they can be found in all Persian poetical genres (lyric, panegyric, quatrain and *mathnavī*).

32 Shams-i Qays 1373/1995, 190f.

33 English translation of the author.

Erotic and Bacchic Themes: Arab Poetry

Among other elements that converged in the development of heretical themes of Persian lyric, one must refer to the erotic and Bacchic themes of the pre-Islamic Arabic *qaṣīda* (panegyric). The literary motifs occurring in the Arab poetry of the *jāhiliyya* (Arab paganism) have a “proto-realistic” character and not a symbolic / allegoric one as it is the case for classical Persian lyric.³⁴ In this respect it is significant, as we have seen, that Islamic Arab and Persian sources refer to an Arab origin of new Persian poetry, often attributing to the Sasanian king Bahrām Gūr the paternity of the first Persian verse and associating poetry with an ethically and religiously reprehended activity. Several Persian *tadbkirah* (literary anthology) authors as well as the geographer Abū al-Qāsim ‘Ubayd Allāh Khurdādhbih (died c. 911) in his *Kitāb al-masālik wa’l-mamālik* (Book of Roads and Kingdoms) quote the first Persian verse as “told” by Bahrām Gūr:

منم آن شیر شله
 منم آن بیر یاله
 منم آن بهرام گور
 منم آن بو جبله

I am that thirsty lion
 I am that ferocious tiger
 I am Bahrām Gūr
 I am he whom men call Abū Jabalah³⁵

Revels and wine, as well as the lights of the lamps of Christian monasteries shining in the desert at night and associated with erotic love were recurrent themes in pre-Islamic *qaṣīdas*. The famous *qaṣīda* of Imrū’l Qays (6th century), known after its first verse as “Stop, oh my friend, let us weep on the memory of my beloved and her camp”.

³⁴ Bausani 1967.

³⁵ Quoted by Pagliaro and Bausani 1968, 82; Rypka 1968, 50, according to whom there are several variants of the text of this poem, among which the one quoted by Ibn Khurdādhbih (ed. de Goeje 1889), and the one quoted by Muḥammad ‘Awfi (1361/1983). I have found it in Shams-i Qays 1373/1995, 190.

بَسِطِ اللَّوَى بَيْنَ الدَّخُولِ فَحَوْمَلِ	قفا نيك من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل
.....
منارة ممسى راهب متبتل	تضيء الظلام بالعشاء كأنها
.....
كلمع اليبدين في حبي مُكَلال	أصاح ترى برقاً أريك وميضه
أمال السليط في الذبال المقتل	يُضيء سنأه أو مصابيحُ راهب
	36.....

1. Oh my friend, let us stop to weep on the memory of my beloved-one and her camp, On the edge of the sandy dunes between Dakhool and Howmal [...].
40. In the night she brightens the darkness like the evening lamp of a lonely monk [...].
70. Oh my friend, do you see a flash? I'll show you its light, like the shimmer of moving hands in garlanded clouds.
71. Its light shines like the lamps of a monk when he fills their twisted wick with oil. [...].³⁷

Although we cannot fully accept the account of the sources on the Arab origin of new Persian lyric, with respect to the subsequent development of heretical themes in Persian poetry it is significant that the latter was “felt” as having originated among the Arabs, whose *qaṣīdas* made a frequent use of erotic and Bacchic themes associated with Christian monasteries. These themes would be further developed by the “Bacchic trend” of Arab poetry (eight–ninth centuries), associating the themes of revels, wine, madness and erotic love with blasphemous rituals taking place in Christian monasteries. The most well-known Bacchic poet is Abu Nuwās (d. 814), but it was the Umayyad caliph al-Walid ibn al-Yazīd (Walid II; r. 743–744) who already in the eight century made a decisive step toward the development of the Bacchic ode.

حيث نسقى شراباً و نغني	حبذا ليلتي بدير بونا
يحسب الجاهلون أنا جُننا	كيف ما دارت الزجاجة دارنا
و غناء و قهرة فنزلنا	ومررنا بنسوة عطرات
س مجوناً و المستشار بحناً	وجعلنا خليفة الله فطرو
نا لصلبان ديرهم فكفرونا	فأخذنا قربانهم ثم كُفرو
ن إذا خبروا بما قد فعلنا ³⁸	واشتهرنا للناس حيث يقولو

36 *Dīwān Imrīʾ-l-Qays* (no date), 29-60.

37 *Imrīʾ-l-Qays* (no date), 29-60. Translation of the author.

38 Al-Walid Ibn Yazīd, *Dīwān* (1937), 56, poem n. 91.

What a beautiful night I spent in the monastery of Bawanna,
 where we mingled wine and sang beautiful songs!
 As the glass was turning we were dancing in a circle
 The unaware ones thought that that we went crazy.
 We passed by perfumed women, and song and wine, and there we stopped.
 We turned Peter into the caliph of God, and John into the court counselor,
 We took their communion and we prostrated before the crosses
 of their convent like unbelievers
 We are now popular because the people spread what we did³⁹

Qur'ān's Prejudices Against Poetry and Singing

Another element that played an important role in the development of debauched and heretical themes in Persian lyric has to be found in prejudices against poetry in the Qur'ān. These prejudices are due to the association between poetry, the magic and the supernatural not only in pre-Islamic Arabia but most probably in all archaic societies.⁴⁰ Poetry was not “literature”, but a practice combined with singing, music, and possibly dancing. In order to better understand Qur'ān's prejudices against poetry one should refer to Plato's (d. c. 348 BCE) condemnation of poetry and Aristotle's (384–322 BCE) subsequent rehabilitation of it. Plato considered that poets should not be allowed in the State (*Politéia*), and this for philosophical and ethical reasons. According to him, from a philosophical point of view, poetry like painting was an imitation of sensual reality, which was in its turn an imitation of the upper world of ideas. Therefore poets, like all imitators, are “thrice removed from the truth”. From an ethical point of view, which in Plato's spirit was not separated from the philosophical one, poetry nourished the irrational element of the soul and generated uncontrollable passions. Plato, who was fascinated by the charm of poetry, ended up allowing hymns to the gods and praises of eminent men as the only kind of poetry admitted in the State.

And the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth”?

That appears to be so [597 c] ...⁴¹

39 Al-Walīd Ibn Yazīd, *Dīwān* (1937). Translation of the author.

40 For this section see the Guido Lanza's introduction to the *Poetics* of Aristotle (1990). See also Lelli 2009.

41 For the Greek text of Plato's *Politéia* I follow Gabrielli 1981, 348f. Quotations refer to Jowett's translation, tenth book.

And now we may fairly take him [the poet] and place him by the side of the painter, for he is like him in two ways: first, inasmuch as his creations have an inferior degree of truth – in this, I say, he is like him; and he is also like him in being concerned with an inferior part of the soul; and therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason. As in a city when the evil are permitted to have authority and the good are put out of the way, so in the soul of man, as we maintain, the imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature which has no discernment of greater and less, but thinks the same thing at one time great and at another small – he is a manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth [605 b-c].

And the same may be said of lust and anger and all the other affections, of desire and pain and pleasure, which are held to be inseparable from every action—in all of them poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue [606 d].

We must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State. For if you go beyond this and allow the honeyed muse to enter, either in epic or lyric verse, not law and the reason of mankind, which by common consent have ever been deemed best, but pleasure and pain will be the rulers in our State [607 a].

Aristotle in the *Poetics* reversed Plato's position. Poetry remains an imitative art, but it loses Plato's negative connotation. Instead it acquires a positive philosophical, cognitive and ethical connotation. Poetry is "more philosophical" than history, because it deals with "the universal" while history deals with "the particular".⁴² Ethically and medically speaking poetry (and particularly tragedy) provokes the purification (*catharsis*) of the soul from immoderate and irrational passions.⁴³ In order to be rehabilitated poetry had to pay a price. It lost its relationship with the supernatural and became "normal literature".⁴⁴

Pre-Islamic Arabia was already part of the Hellenistic world. The ideas of Plato and Aristotle, together with Neo-Platonic ideas, became an integral part of the Islamic civilization through a complex process of circulation of ideas that cannot be limited to textual transmission. At the time of the Qur'anic revelation the prophet Mohammed entered in conflict with the poets, who were so to say his rivals and God's rivals in the verbal field. Poets are liars and go astray, says the Qur'an.

42 For the Greek text of Aristotle's *Peri Poietikês* I follow Lanza 1990, 1451b, 136.

43 Ibid, 1449b, 134.

44 This is Lanza's thesis in the Introduction to *Poetica* (1990).

وَالشُّعْرَاءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ الْغَاوُونَ
 أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي كُلِّ وَادٍ يَهِيمُونَ
 وَأَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ مَا لَا يَفْعَلُونَ

And the Poets,
 It is those straying in Evil
 Who follow them:
 Seest thou not that they
 Wander distracted in every
 Valley?
 And that they say
 What they practice not:⁴⁵

The Qur'an associated poets with the pagan priests (*kāhin*), with false prophets, soothsayers and sorcerers, possessed by the *jinn*. The prophet Mohammed is not one of them, says the Qur'an.

وَعَجِبُوا أَنْ جَاءَهُمْ مُنذِرٌ مِنْهُمْ وَقَالَ الْكُفَرُونَ هَذَا سِحْرٌ كَذَابٌ
 So they wonder
 That a Warner has come
 To them from among themselves!
 And the Unbelievers say,
 "This is a sorcerer
 Telling lies!"⁴⁶

Other Qur'anic verses underline the superiority of the Qur'an on all other books and the impossibility for men to produce something similar to it. The later theological and aesthetic dogma of *Ijāz al-Qur'an* (inimitability of the Qur'an) relies upon these Qur'anic passages.

قُلْ لَئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا
 الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا

If the whole
 Of mankind and Jinns
 Where to gather together
 To produce the like
 Of this Qur'an, they
 Could not produce
 The like thereof, even if
 They backed up each other
 With help and support.⁴⁷

45 Qur'an, The Poets / *al-Shu'arā'*, 26:22-4ff, translations taken from Yusuf Ali 1983.

46 Qur'an *Ṣād*, 38:4.

47 Qur'an, The Night Journey / *al-Isrā'*, 17:88.

The Qur'ān like Plato blames the poets because they falsify the truth, seduce men and nourish the irrational. However the purpose of the Qur'ān is not to forbid poetry but to control it, to limit its field of action and to reserve to God the monopoly of the supernatural. These prejudices not only did not prevent the flourishing of Arab, Persian and Turkish poetry, but they even provided Persian lyric with a fruitful and long-lasting thrust. Through a process that Bausani called a "reversal of values", these prejudices would decisively contribute to the development of typical debauched and heretical themes of Persian lyric. In the Arab world the correspondent of Aristotle's rehabilitation of poetry was the effort made by the jurists and the philologists of the first Islamic generations in order to confine poetry to an instrumental role, to being a technique at the service of the religious sciences. Its main function was to provide a grammatical and lexicographic reference for the correct interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Sunna (deeds and sayings of the Prophet). Poetry underwent a change in leadership. The philologists had to become the legitimate decision makers of its rules, while the poets should become technicians and executors.⁴⁸ If the Arab jurists and philologists were at least partially successful in the Arab world, we may suppose that Persian literature, the language of which was not the language of the Qur'ān, continue to enjoy more freely its special relationship with the supernatural, although mediated by Islamic Neo-Platonism, gnosis and Sufism. Qur'ān's condemnation of poetry because of its association with falsehood, immorality and madness provided the language of Persian lyric with a fertile soil of metaphors, allegories, symbols and references.

Orthodox Islam would remain cautious toward singing, a practice that was associated with lasciviousness and immorality. The Arab historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) reports that Sunni juridical schools were divided on the lawfulness of the psalmody of the Qur'ān (*tajwīd*). And this for two reasons: the first was that psalmody could alter the correct pronunciation of Qur'ān. The second was that the believers who listened to it could take the holy words for pleasant secular singing, and therefore lose their fear of God.

صناعة الغناء مباحنة للقرآن بكل وجه لأن القراءة و الأداء تحتاج إلى مقدار من الصوت لتعنين أداء الحروف لا من حيث اتباع الحركات في مواضعها و مقدار المد عند من يطلقه أو يقصره، و أمثال ذلك. و التلحين أيضاً يتعين له مقدار من الصوت لا تتم إلا به من أجل التناسب الذي قلناه في حقيقة التلحين و اعتبار أحدهما قد يخل بالآخر إذا تعارضا. و تقديم الرواية، متعين فراراً من تغيير الرواية المنقولة في القرآن، فلا يمكن اجتماع التلحين و الأداء المعترف في القرآن بوجه و إنما مرادهم التلحين البسيط الذي يهتدي إليه صاحب اجتماع التلحين و الأداء المعترف في القرآن بوجه و إنما مرادهم التلحين البسيط الذي يهتدي إليه صاحب المضمار بطبعه

كما قدمناه فيردد أصواته ترديداً على نسب يدرکہا العالم بالغناء و غيره و لا ينبغي ذلك بوجه و إنما المراد من اختلافهم التلحين البسيط الذي يهتدي إليه صاحب المضممار بطبعه كما قدمناه ، فيردد أصواته ترديداً على نسب يدرکہا العالم بالغناء و غيره، و لا ينبغي ذلك بوجه كما قاله مالك. هذا هو محل الخلاف. و الظاهر تنزيه القرآن عن هذا كله كما ذهب إليه الإمام رحمة الله تعالى لأن القرآن محل خشوع بذكر الموت و ما بعده و ليس مقام التذاد بإدراك الحسن من الأصوات.⁴⁹

Thus, melodious music can, by no means, be combined with the pronunciation under consideration in connection with the Qur'an. As regards the difference of opinion (among authorities as to the permissibility of melodious music for the recitation of the Qur'an), the thing (the authorities) have in mind is the plain music to which nature guides the person who is musical (*midmar*), as we have stated. Such a person arranges his sounds in certain harmonious cadences, which those who know about singing, as well as others, perceive (as music). This is the point about which the difference of opinion (revolves).

The obvious (fact) is that the Qur'an is (to be) kept free of it, (exactly) as the imam (Malik) thought. The Qur'an is something that causes awe, as it reminds (man) of death and what comes after it. It is not an occasion to give pleasure in the perception of beautiful sounds. It was (in this spirit) that the men around Muhammad recited the Qur'an, as is stated in their biographies.⁵⁰

We find analogous considerations in Augustine's (d. 430) *De Musica*, where he expresses his fear that the beauty of music and songs during the liturgical functions distracts the believers from the deep content of faith and prayers.⁵¹ Significantly, Ibn Khaldūn mentions the practice of singing and dancing as being of Persian and Byzantine origin.

حتى لقد كان لملوك الفرس اهتمام بأهل هذه الصناعة، و لهم مكان في دولتهم، و كانوا يحضرون مشاهدتهم و مجامعهم و يغنون فيها. و هذا شأن العجم لهذا العهد في كل أفق من أفاقهم.⁵²

The Persian rulers felt a great concern for musicians. Musicians had a place in their dynasty and attended their sessions and gatherings and sang for them. The same is (still) the case with the non-Arabs⁵³ at this time in all their regions and provinces.⁵⁴

Instead in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Epistles of the Brethren of Purity), a text probably of the ninth–tenth century originating from an Iranian Ismaili Neo-Platonic and gnostic environment music, the singing of verses and the psalmody of the Qur'an are depicted positively. The same reasons why Plato and some passages of the Qur'an condemned poetry and singing, change of sign in the

49 Ibn Khaldūn, ed. Shaḥāda 2001, 537f.

50 Ibn Khaldūn, transl. Rosenthal 1967, vol. II, 400f

51 Eco 1970, 150.

52 Ibn Khaldūn, ed. Shaḥāda 2001, 538.

53 *ʿAjām*, a word that usually indicates the Persians.

54 Ibn Khaldūn, transl. Rosenthal 1967, vol. II, 401.

Epistles of the Brethren of Purity and become positive elements. According to them music was invented by the Sages (*al-hukamā'*) because it has a beneficial effect (*ta'ibīr*) on the soul (*al-nufūs*). Referring to Pythagoras they say that the harmony of terrestrial melodies reflects the harmony of the celestial ones. This is evident for the psalmody of the Qur'ān and the verses of poetry that encouraged the Muslim warriors in the battle in the way of God. This is why, they say, music is used in the Temples (*al-hayākil*) and places of worship (*buyūt al-'ibāda*).⁵⁵

The Impact of the *malāmātiyya* Sufi Movement on Persian Lyric

The last element I want to refer to in order to explain the systematic use of heretical themes in Persian lyric is the Sufi movement called *Malāmātiyya* (self-blame), which significantly developed in Khorasan (North-Eastern Iran) in the ninth century. The root word of this name is the Arabic word *malāmat* (ملامة) "blame". These mystics believed in the value of self-blame, because being held in good esteem would lead to worldly attachment. They concealed their knowledge and made sure that their faults would be known, because they reminded them of their human imperfection.⁵⁶ *Malāmātī* elements allowed Persian lyric to transform heterogeneous pre-Islamic and Islamic materials into systematic literary allegories and symbols: the lascivious and blasphemous connotation of singing and poetry according to the Zoroastrian religion, pre-Islamic and Islamic themes of Arab poetry, Qur'ān's condemnation of poetry and cautiousness towards singing in orthodox Islam. Generally speaking, the role of Sufism in Persian lyric was to combine all these elements into a coherent whole. The fact of being shameless, lascivious and heretical according to the *malāmātī* logic is the only way for the mystic to express his relationship with God. This relationship is so high and transcendent that on a human level it can only appear as madness and supreme impiety. The *malāmātī* trend had a fundamental impact on all Persian poetry and not only on lyric. An excellent description of the role played by the mystical self-blame can be found in the mystical poem (*mathnavī*) *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* by Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār (d. c. 1230). In

55 Consulted edition: Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, ed. Nur al-Din Ibn al-marhum Jabarkhān (1305/1887), 84ff. Bausani 1978; Shiloah 1964, 1966; Wright 2010. We find Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's considerations on music in different passages of the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn, a fact that strengthens our ideas on Ibn Khaldūn's Neo-Platonic side, which we have discussed with respect to his poetics. See Lelli 2014.

56 Mayer 2008; Pagliaro and Bausani 1968, 155f.

this poem we find the story of Sheikh San‘an, a pious head of a mystical confraternity who travels to the land of the Rūm (Oriental Christians, Byzantines) and falls madly in love with a Christian girl. She asks him to drink wine, brings him to a Zoroastrian temple, and even asks him to throw the Qur‘ān into the fire. San‘an does all the girl asks him to do. At the end San‘an returns to himself, the girl repents, asks him for forgiveness and dies. This story, that actually reflects real rituals accomplished by some extremist mystics, is a perfect example of the “reversal of values” operated by the *malāmātī* movement and its impact on the development of Persian poetry. In the before-quoted Ḥāfiẓ’s *ghazal* we find the same kind of allegories with the same mystical background. The difference between ‘Attār and Ḥāfiẓ is that ‘Attār is a poet of sincere mystical faith while Ḥāfiẓ is more elusive and obscure and it is difficult to ponder the weight of mysticism in his poetics.

The girl replied: “There are four things you must
Perform to show that you deserve my trust:
Burn the Qur‘ān, drink wine, seal up faith’s eye,
Bow down to images” (...)
The abject sheikh had sunk to such a state
That he could not resist his wretched fate;
Now ignorant of shame and unafraid,
He heard the Christian’s wishes and obeyed –
The old wine sidled through the old man’s veins
And like a twisting compass turned his brains;
Old wine, young love, a lover far too old,
Her soft arms welcoming –could he be cold?

Beside himself with love and drink he cried:
“Command me now; whatever you decide
I will perform. I spurned idolatry
When sober, but your beauty is to me
An idol for whose sake I’ll gladly burn
My faith’s Qur‘ān.”⁵⁷

57 Persian edition ‘Attār 1337/1959.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to show the complexity of the question of continuity and rupture in the history of Iran. I dealt with this general historiographical problem focusing on a specific aspect of the literary history of Iran: the origin of debauched and heretical themes in Persian lyric.

I have argued that these themes are the result of the combination of pre-Islamic and Islamic elements reflecting a centuries-long cultural synthesis between pre-Islamic (Iranian, Arab, Hellenistic) and Islamic elements: Sasanian poetical compositions (quatrain and possibly a pre-historic *ghazal*), Zoroastrian prejudices against singing, pre-Islamic and Islamic Bacchic Arab poetry, Qur'ān's condemnation of poetry, Muslim prejudices against singing and, last but not least, Sufism and particularly the *malāmatiyya* movement with its peculiar self-blame attitude. These elements have all contributed to the formation of Persian lyric, one of the highest products of the millenary culture of Iran. They cannot be isolated one from the other as if they were analyzed in a laboratory in order to establish the exact quantitative proportion and weight of each of them. But their multicultural origin clearly shows that purity in the history of great civilizations is neither a virtue nor a reality.

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