

Tazkirah-i Khayr al-bayān: The Earliest Source on the Career and Poetry of Ṣāʿib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676)

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Abstract

In this article, I describe a source which represents by far our earliest documentation of the career and poetry of Ṣāʿib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676), and which has gone largely unaddressed in scholarship. It occurs in a still-unpublished biographical dictionary (tazkirah) of poets entitled Khayr al-bayān, written by Malik Shāh Ḥusayn Sīstānī and known to survive in several manuscripts. The oldest, and possibly the only complete copy, is MS Or. 3397 at the British Library.¹ Shāh Ḥusayn wrote this tazkirah between 1017/1608–9 and 1036/1627; the section containing the notice on Ṣāʿib was added in 1035/1625–6. Significantly, Or. 3397 was copied in 1041/1631 by a scribe named Muḥammad Mīrak b. Khwājah Mīr Farāhī. This means that the text of the passage on Ṣāʿib dates to shortly after his emigration to Kabul (thence to India) in 1034/1624–5, while our manuscript dates to shortly before he left Kashmir to return to Iran in 1042/1632.

The source thus falls entirely within the period of young Ṣāʿib’s seven-year adventure on the Indian Subcontinent, and represents a rare vignette of the beginning of an illustrious career. Since it is important that we treat tazkirahs as valuable and multifaceted works in their own right, this article begins with an overview of the Khayr al-bayān (which has seen little use by researchers thus far) and basic information about its author. I then describe the material on Ṣāʿib in detail, including several important features of the manuscript itself. Finally, I review the implications of the text for Ṣāʿib’s biography, with particular regard to the origin of one of his nicknames, “Mustaʿidd Khān.” The source also has bearing on the study of his work, since eleven of his poems, quoted in the Khayr al-bayān, may now be dated to the earliest part of his career. This all comes at a time of growing academic and popular interest in Ṣāʿib, who is increasingly recognized as one of the preeminent ghazal poets of the classical tradition. To assist the reader in following the more detail-oriented parts of this article, I append photographs of the relevant pages in Or. 3397.²

1. My research at the British Library was generously supported by a grant from the Nicholson Center for British Studies at the University of Chicago. I am further grateful to Profs. Michael Cook and Franklin Lewis, and to my colleagues Mohamad Ballan, Usman Hamid, Samuel Hodgkin, Matthew Keegan, and Christian Mauder for their help and comments. The anonymous reviewers chosen by the journal also provided crucial feedback. Romanization of Persian and Arabic words in this paper follows the Library of Congress standard. Dates are generally provided in both the lunar Islamic (AH) and Gregorian (CE) calendars.

2. A high-resolution color photograph is provided for the most important page, 374a. Due to expense

Both the *Khayr al-bayān*, and MS Or. 3397 in particular, have been known for some time. Charles Rieu wrote a concise description of the codex and its contents for his 1895 *Supplement*.³ Later, C. A. Storey included information on both of the surviving works of Shāh Ḥusayn Sīstānī in the first volume of his bio-bibliographical survey of Persian literature, the publication of which began in 1927.⁴ And Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī provides a further assessment in his reference work on the history of the Persian *tazkīrah*, which first appeared in 1969–71.⁵ How could it be that such a well-recognized text contains a historically significant passage on a poet as famous as Ṣā‘ib Tabrīzī, and yet it has not been attended to in scholarship? This was my question after I stumbled upon the source, while working with Persian manuscripts at the British Library as part of a different project.

My initial review of the published literature on Ṣā‘ib turned up no mention of the *Khayr al-bayān*. I checked the most frequently-cited works: Muḥammad Qahramān’s six-volume edition of Ṣā‘ib’s *dīvān*;⁶ Zabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā’s *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt dar Īrān*;⁷ ‘Azīz Dawlat‘ābādī’s *Sukhanvarān-i Āzarbāyjan*;⁸ Ḥusām al-Dīn Rāshidī’s *Tazkīrah-i shu‘arā‘i-i Kashmīr*;⁹ and Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī’s *Farhang-i ash‘ār-i Ṣā‘ib*.¹⁰ Paul Losensky’s *Encyclopædia Iranica* article on Ṣā‘ib, which is currently the best overview available in English, also gives the impression that the information provided in the *Khayr al-bayān* has not yet been incorporated into the standard narrative of the poet’s life.¹¹ (As we will see below, at least a couple points in his biography ought to be revisited upon consideration of this source.) Having found nothing about the *Khayr al-bayān* in prior scholarship, I began writing a paper to describe the *tazkīrah* and its implications for the study of Ṣā‘ib’s career and works.

Well into the process of revising the article, I discovered that one earlier researcher had remarked, if only briefly, on the relevant passage in the *Khayr al-bayān*: the same Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī. Although he was not aware of the text when *Farhang-i ash‘ār-i Ṣā‘ib* was first published in 1985–6, he must have seen it at some point toward the end of the 1980s. (Or. 3397 was evidently microfilmed at the British Library around this time, and so

constraints, the remaining pages—374b, 375a, and the colophon (467a)—have been scanned from microfilm.

3. Charles Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London, 1895, no. 108, pp. 76–8. There is also a description of Shāh Ḥusayn’s other surviving work, a local history of Sīstān entitled *Iḥyā‘ al-mulūk*, MS Or. 2779. See no. 97, pp. 65–6.

4. C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, London, 1927–, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 364–5. Shāh Ḥusayn’s other work, the *Iḥyā‘ al-mulūk*, is discussed in greater detail below.

5. Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī, *Tārīkh-i tazkīrah’hā-yi Fārsī*, 2 vols., Tehran, 1969–71, vol. 1, pp. 605–9.

6. *Dīvān-i Ṣā‘ib Tabrīzī*, ed. Muḥammad Qahramān, 6 vols., Tehran, 1985–91.

7. Zabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt dar Īrān*, 5 vols. in 8, Tehran, 1956–91. For the section devoted to Ṣā‘ib, see vol. 5, pt. 2, p. 1271ff.

8. ‘Azīz Dawlat‘ābādī, *Sukhanvarān-i Āzarbāyjan: az Qaṭrān tā Shahriyār*, 2 vols., Tabrīz, 1998, vol. 1, pp. 472–84.

9. Ḥusām al-Dīn Rāshidī, *Tazkīrah-i shu‘arā‘i-i Kashmīr*, 4 vols., Karachi, 1967, vol. 2, p. 518ff.

10. Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī, *Farhang-i ash‘ār-i Ṣā‘ib*, first ed., 2 vols., Tehran, 1985–6. (As is explained below, I did not discover the second edition of this book until quite a bit later.)

11. Paul Losensky, “Ṣā‘eb Tabrizi,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

copies would have become available to scholars in Iran and elsewhere.) In one of his last and most influential works, *Kārvān-i Hind*, which appeared in 1990-91, Gulchīn-i Maʿānī surveys over 700 Persian poets who migrated to the courts in India during the Safavid period. He includes a section on Ṣāʿib, which is adapted from the more extensive discussion of the poet in the introduction of *Farhang-i ashʿār*—at points almost verbatim. But here he also mentions the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān*, citing a facsimile (*nuskhah-i ʿaksī*) of a manuscript belonging to the British Museum (though held at the Library), which clearly refers to Or. 3397.¹²

Gulchīn-i Maʿānī does not offer substantial comment on the text. He simply quotes Shāh Ḥusayn’s biographical sketch of Ṣāʿib, and his primary concern is the controversy over one of the poet’s nicknames, “Mustaʿidd Khān” (addressed in detail below). The impression is that Gulchīn-i Maʿānī had not yet worked in depth with the pages in the *Khayr al-bayān* concerning Ṣāʿib. A few years later, in 1994, a little-known second edition of *Farhang-i ashʿār* was published.¹³ (Only three copies are held at research libraries in North America, and scholars have continued to cite the more widely available first edition, perhaps unaware that any other exists.) In this updated version of the standard reference work on Ṣāʿib, Gulchīn-i Maʿānī again includes a couple paragraphs about the *Khayr al-bayān*, quoting Shāh Ḥusayn’s biographical sketch without discussing it in detail.¹⁴ It may be that Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, who was at the end of his career by this point, never had an opportunity to address in earnest the implications of the *Khayr al-bayān* for the study of Ṣāʿib’s life and works. As this article will demonstrate, there are multiple ways in which our sense of the poet’s career might change in light of the new source, which have yet to be appreciated in scholarship. There is also the issue of the verses of poetry by Ṣāʿib which are quoted in the *Khayr al-bayān*, and which most likely represent some of his earliest work. Here, for the first time, those excerpted lines are matched with poems still found in published editions of the *Dīvān*.

We are left, therefore, in a situation in which an important contemporary source on Ṣāʿib Tabrīzī has been commented upon in print, but only fleetingly, and not in the most obvious places. This article is intended both to draw wider attention to the existence of the passage on Ṣāʿib in the *Khayr al-bayān*, and to provide a more thorough treatment of the source and the issues that it raises. It is hoped that this will serve as a modest contribution to the scholarly conversation around Ṣāʿib, which has grown in recent years along with a general expansion of interest in Persian literature of the Safavid-Mughal period.¹⁵

The Tazkirah

The *Khayr al-bayān* is an example of what Gulchīn-i Maʿānī has labeled the “general

12. Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Kārvān-i Hind*, 2 vols., Mashhad, 1990/91, vol. 1, pp. 700–01.

13. Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʿib*, second ed., 2 vols., Tehran, 1994.

14. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 13–14.

15. Currently active researchers in this field include Paul Losensky, Sunil Sharma, Rajeev Kinra, and Prashant Keshavmurthy, to name a few.

tazkirah” of poets (*tazkirah-i ‘umūmī*).¹⁶ That is, it contains biographical notices and selected verses for all kinds of poets, from all eras up to the time of its composition. This places the work solidly in the tradition established by Sadīd al-Dīn ‘Awfī’s *Lubāb al-albāb* (comp. ca. 618/1221) and Dawlatshāh Samarqandī’s *Tazkirat al-shu‘arā*’ (comp. 892/1487).¹⁷ Since the *Khayr al-bayān* has not been edited for publication, and has not received sustained attention from researchers, it is unclear precisely how many biographical notices it contains. I have spent enough time working with the manuscript, however, to know that the number must be at least a few hundred, and that the work covers the entire sweep of the history of Persian poetry up to the early seventeenth century CE. (This is not to suggest that the author managed to discuss every noteworthy poet, but he certainly does not omit many of them, and he includes at minimum a representative sample from every period and region.) The oldest, and perhaps the only complete surviving manuscript of the *Khayr al-bayān*, British Library MS Or. 3397,¹⁸ comprises 467 folia—each with two sides, each side with nineteen lines of text. If an edition is ever published, it will likely run to well over 500 pages, not including any scholarly apparatus. We can thus classify the *Khayr al-bayān* as a *tazkirah* of poets that is comprehensive in scope and, speaking a bit subjectively, above average in length, though not monumental.

To provide a full assessment of the contents of the *tazkirah* and their import would be difficult, given that this manuscript can only be accessed in the reading rooms of the British Library and photography is currently not permitted. (A mediocre black-and-white microfilm is available, but it would be frustrating to use for anything more than the occasional reference.) Going into great depth about the *Khayr al-bayān* would also take us beyond the intended scope of this article. It is a task that probably should be left to whichever scholar eventually prepares a critical edition of the work for publication. However, it may be useful to provide some basic details about the contents of the book, the process of its composition, the background of its author, and how it fits in the historical moment at which it was produced, with particular regard to developments in the *tazkirah* genre. We are fortunate that Rieu has already drawn up a fairly informative description of the *Khayr al-bayān*.¹⁹ Or. 3397 was acquired in 1886 by Sidney J. A. Churchill, who served as “Persian Secretary to Her Majesty’s Legation at Teheran” from 1884 to 1894.²⁰ This is one of the many valuable Persian manuscripts that Churchill purchased, and which remain part of the collections of the British Library.

Two general features of the *Khayr al-bayān* are worth emphasizing. First, there is evidence in the text that the author was making a serious effort to produce a *tazkirah* as

16. This term is used throughout his *Tārīkh-i tazkirah’hā-yi Fārsī*.

17. For the *Lubāb al-albāb*, see the edition of Sa‘īd Nafīsī (Tehran, 1957). For the *Tazkirat al-shu‘arā*’, see the recent edition of Fāṭimah ‘Alāqah (Tehran, 2007).

18. There are at least a few other copies, with varying degrees of deficiency. See Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 605. One of the manuscripts that he mentions, which was then (ca. 1969) held in the private library of Muḥammad Ṣadr Hāshimī, may also be complete. Up to this point, no thorough codicological study of the *Khayr al-bayān* has been carried out.

19. Rieu, *Supplement*, no. 108, pp. 76–8.

20. Rieu, *Supplement*, pp. v–vi.

thorough and comprehensive as possible. Shāh Ḥusayn apparently wrote a complete first draft of the work between 1017/1608–9 and 1019/1610. According to his own account, his friends had often asked him to collect his extensive knowledge of Persian poetry in a *tazkirah*, and he took the occasion of a journey to the Ḥijāz to carry out this task, finishing it upon his return to Harāt. (Although he was originally from Sīstān, Shāh Ḥusayn spent long stretches of his adult life in other areas of Safavid Iran, due in part to political instability. Further information on his biography is provided below.) Some fifteen years later, in 1035/1625–6, Shāh Ḥusayn carried out a round of extensive revisions and additions to the *Khayr al-bayān*. He did this, too, at Harāt, while he was being treated for an illness and was temporarily housebound. It was at this stage that he added the notice on Ṣāʿib, just a year or so after the poet had left for Kabul.

Finally, in 1036/1627, the author inserted a new section of about ten folia, containing selected verses from Indian poets, albeit without biographical sketches. Shāh Ḥusayn claims that he added this material after seeing two anthologies (*jungs*) of poetry by “talented Indians” (*ahl-i istiʿdād-i Hindūstān*), which had been sent to the ruling family of Sīstān—*i.e.*, his own family. Each *jung* is alleged to have contained about 150,000 verses. This section may deserve closer examination by an Indo-Persian specialist. In any event, its inclusion in the *Khayr al-bayān* also speaks to the author’s desire not to leave any category of poets unrepresented. Another example of this fastidiousness is Shāh Ḥusayn’s insertion of a brief addendum to his section concerning early Persian poets, in which he quotes a few verses by individuals whose biographies, he admits, are completely shrouded in mystery—*e.g.*, Kisāʿī and Munjīk (both d. ca. 1000 CE).²¹ The *Khayr al-bayān* comes across as a carefully constructed work of literary biography and anthology, written by a scholar who was also a respected political historian (see below for details on his *Iḥyāʾ al-mulūk*), and it will pay dividends to modern researchers who study it. The clearest value of the *tazkirah* is that it contains unique documentation of the careers of poets who were alive at the time of its composition—including, prominently, Ṣāʿib.

The second feature of the *Khayr al-bayān* that should be highlighted is that it is organized on a loosely chronological basis, and *not* in the order in which its individual parts were written. This is made clear by a brief inventory of the sections of the *tazkirah*, from start to finish. The book begins with a general preface, written in ornate prose, which expresses typical sentiments of praise to God, followed by the author’s discussion of his own biography and the work at hand, for instance, the reasons for its composition, its organization, and so on.

An introduction (*muqaddimah*) follows, starting on fol. 9b, in which Shāh Ḥusayn summarizes the lives of the Prophet Muhammad and the Twelve Imams, and the history of the Safavid Dynasty up to 1033/1623–4.²² (Since this is of little relevance to the main content of the *tazkirah*, it might be worth investigating what purpose such a section is

21. See J. T. P. de Bruijn, “Kesāʿī Marvazi,” and Ehsan Shavarebi, “Monjīk Termedī,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

22. We know, therefore, that the *muqaddimah* was written, or at least expanded, as part of the revisions that Shāh Ḥusayn carried out in 1035/1625–6 and 1036/1627.

intended to serve.) The work then begins in earnest. It is divided into two parts (*faṣls*), with the first reserved for notable poets of the past (*mutaqaddimīn*), and the second for more recent and contemporary figures (*muta'akhhirīn*). Notably, the first *faṣl*, which opens on fol. 41b, provides entries on several early Arabic poets before continuing to Rūdakī (d. ca. 329/941) and the other tenth-century pioneers of New Persian. In this arrangement, Shāh Ḥusayn is clearly following Dawlatshāh's *Tazkirat al-shu'arā'* (comp. 892/1487).²³

The first *faṣl* continues in very approximate chronological order, ending with 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492). This suggests the same classical/post-classical division of the Persian poetic tradition that survived into the modern period and has only recently fallen into disfavor in scholarship. We read at the end of the chapter that it was completed in 1018/1609 (fol. 214a). But there is at least one passage in the middle of the first *faṣl* that was written at a considerably later date: the selections of poetry by "talented Indians," which were added in 1036/1627 and begin on fol. 130a. The manuscript of the *Khayr al-bayān* preserves evidence of a process of composition and emendation that differs considerably from the order in which the material was ultimately arranged. We should expect this to be true of any large-scale project; less often does specific documentation survive.

Matters become more complicated in the second *faṣl*, which opens with a short introductory paragraph (fol. 215b) and is divided into four chronological subsections (*aṣls*). The first *aṣl*, starting on fol. 216a, concerns poets who were active from the end of the reign of the Timurid Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bāyqarā (d. 911/1506) until the end of the reign of Shah Ismā'īl (d. 930/1524). The second *aṣl*, starting on fol. 224b, addresses poets from the first half of the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb, *i.e.*, approximately 1524–50 CE. The third *aṣl*, starting on fol. 236b, continues with poets who flourished from the middle of Ṭahmāsb's reign (ca. 1550 CE) up to the accession of Shah 'Abbās in 995/1587. The fourth *aṣl*, starting on fol. 279b, provides notices on poets who were active during 'Abbās' reign, up to the time of the *tazkirah*'s composition. It is here that Shāh Ḥusayn probably made the most substantial changes during the round of edits and additions that he carried out in 1035/1625–6. He inserts a note in the middle of this section (fol. 304a-b) in which he discusses those revisions.

The fourth *aṣl* is in many ways the centerpiece of the *tazkirah*. About 130 (double-sided) folia are devoted to the biographies and selected verses of poets who worked during a period of just thirty years, whereas almost the entire sixteenth century CE is covered in half as much space. Unsurprisingly, this is also the part of the *Khayr al-bayān* that will be of greatest historical interest. Shāh Ḥusayn documents the work of poets who were his contemporaries, providing, in some cases, unique information. What is likely the earliest reference to Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī occurs here (fol. 374a–375a). We also find an exceptionally early notice on Kalīm Kāshānī (d. 1061/1651) (fol. 400a–b), and a curious entry on the historian Iskandar Bēg Munshī, author of the *'Ālam'arā-yi 'Abbāsī* (comp. 1038/1629), starting on fol. 378b.²⁴ Shāh Ḥusayn and Iskandar Bēg knew each other, having both accompanied

23. *Tazkirat al-shu'arā'*, ed. 'Alāqah, p. 33ff.

24. See Daniela Meneghini, "Kalim Kāshāni," and Roger M. Savory, "Eskandar Beg Torkamān Monši," in

Shah ʿAbbās on campaigns; and our author, presumably writing in 1035/1625–6, claims to have seen a copy of the *ʿĀlamʿārā*, which must then have been in draft form or in an early recension. There may be other notices of special historical interest; we will not know until this source has been exploited more fully by researchers. Shāh Ḥusayn closes the fourth *aṣl* of the second *faṣl*, and, in turn, the main body of the *tazkirah*, with an entry on himself, starting on fol. 407a. His pen name (*takhalluṣ*) is Hādī.

The *Khayr al-bayān* ends with two further sections: a conclusion (*khātimah*), and a “conclusion of the conclusion” (*khatm-i khātimah*), which we might treat as an epilogue. In the *khātimah*, which begins on fol. 410b, Shāh Ḥusayn provides notices on kings and princes who were reputed to have composed poetry, from the Seljuks through the Jalāyirids. The *khatm-i khātimah* starts on fol. 431b and is divided into two subsections, the first of which offers information on a number of prominent scholars who had verses attributed to them but were not primarily considered poets. These include Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĀmilī (d. 1030/1621), who is given the first notice in this chapter, beginning on fol. 431b; and Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), starting on fol. 434b.²⁵ Given that Bahāʾ al-Dīn had only recently died when Shāh Ḥusayn completed his *tazkirah*, and that Mīr Dāmād was still alive, these notices may be worth examining. Finally, on fol. 445b, we reach the true concluding piece of the *Khayr al-bayān*, in which Shāh Ḥusayn quotes a number of *aḥādīth* and pious sayings. The very end comes on foll. 466b and 467a—the latter being the colophon—where the author reports that he completed his work at Harāt on the last day of Ramaḍān in the year 1019 AH (mid-December, 1610 CE). (Of course, this should be understood as the date of the first draft of the second *faṣl*, which would be followed by one or two rounds of emendation.) At the bottom of the colophon we find the signature of the scribe, a certain Muḥammad Mīrak b. Khwājah Mīr Farāhī, who finished his copy on 20 Rabīʿ al-Awwal 1041 (October 16, 1631).

Much more could, and should, be said about the *Khayr al-bayān*. Sadly, historians of Persian literature operate in a field in which even the most famous *tazkirahs* have rarely been subject to detailed analysis, and lesser-known, unpublished works like this may go ignored for long stretches of time.²⁶ The best that can be offered here, in addition to the preceding rough summary of the *Khayr al-bayān*, is brief commentary on how it compares to other *tazkirahs* of poets that were produced around the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries CE.

What we find, upon reviewing the ways in which the genre was transforming at that time, is that there is little on the surface level to distinguish Shāh Ḥusayn’s contribution. It might help to highlight three trends in the development of the *tazkirah* as examples. First, toward the end of the sixteenth century, these works began, if only occasionally, to be produced on a truly monumental scale. The *Khulāṣat al-ashʿār* of Taqī al-Dīn Kāshānī

Encyclopædia Iranica.

25. See E. Kohlberg, “Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĀmeli,” and Andrew J. Newman, “Dāmād, Mir(-e), Sayyed Moḥammad Bāqer,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*. The death year cited in scholarship on Mīr Dāmād varies a bit; Newman provides 1041/1631.

26. Gulchīn-i Maʿānī cites a number of biographical notices from the *Khayr al-bayān* in *Kārvān-i Hind*, but otherwise it has received only passing attention.

(comp. 1016/1607–8) quotes roughly 350,000 verses of poetry—that is, seven times the number of verses contained in Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāmah*—and will run to a least a couple dozen volumes if it is ever published in its entirety.²⁷ The *‘Arafāt al-‘āshiqīn* of Taqī al-Dīn Awḥadī (comp. 1024/1615) provides notices on a staggering number of poets, around 3,500.²⁸ The *Khayr al-bayān* looks rather modest next to these works, although, as was mentioned earlier, it is probably still above average in size when compared to Persian *tazkirahs* in general.

A second trend worth highlighting is the appearance, starting in earnest in the mid-sixteenth century, of what might be called “special interest *tazkirahs*.” These are texts that focus on certain categories of poets, rather than on the entire tradition going back to Rūdakī. Examples include the *Javāhir al-‘ajā’ib* of Fakhri Haravī (comp. 963/1556), which concerns female poets, and the *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī* of the Safavid prince Sām Mirzā (comp. ca. 957/1550), which deals almost exclusively with recent and contemporary figures, leaving the great masters of the past unaddressed.²⁹ Around this time the broader *tazkirah* genre in Persian, which had historically focused on poets and religious figures, also began to be applied to new groups of people. In this vein we might highlight the *Gulistān-i hunar* of Qāzī Aḥmad Qumī (comp. 1006/1597–8), an influential biographical dictionary of calligraphers and painters.³⁰ When Shāh Ḥusayn wrote the *Khayr al-bayān*, there was nothing especially groundbreaking about compiling another “general *tazkirah*” of poets on the model of Dawlatshāh.

Finally, it bears pointing out that all of the major organizational schemes that would be used for *tazkirahs* had already been developed by the early seventeenth century. The idea of categorizing poets based on their social class went back as far as ‘Awfī’s *Lubāb al-albāb* (comp. ca. 618/1221) and had been followed by ‘Alī Shēr Navā’ī in his Turkish *Majālis al-nafā’is* (comp. 896/1491) and Sām Mirzā in his aforementioned *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī*, among others.³¹ A rough chronological organization, as we find throughout much of the *Khayr al-bayān*, had been used by Dawlatshāh as well. Taqī al-Dīn Kāshānī chose to group the poets in the largest section of his *Khulāṣat al-ash‘ār* according to their geographic origin. And Taqī al-Dīn Awḥadī opted for a combination of chronological and alphabetical organization in his *‘Arafāt al-‘āshiqīn*. In short, many approaches had been tested, and it seems unlikely that anything about the format (or even content) of the *Khayr al-bayān* would have leapt out at contemporary readers. It was, if considered superficially, just another *tazkirah* of poets.

27. Several sections have appeared already, including three edited by ‘Abd al-‘Alī Adīb Barūmand and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīrī Kahnāmū’ī and published by Mirās-i Maktūb: *Bakhsh-i Kāshān* (2005), *Bakhsh-i Iṣfahān* (2007), and *Bakhsh-i Khurāsān* (2014). A few other parts that have come out in recent years, under different editors, are listed in the bibliography.

28. Two editions have recently been published: one by a team of four editors (8 vols., Mirās-i Maktūb, 2010), and another by Muḥsin Nāji Naṣr’ābādī (7 vols., Asāṭir, 2009). The former is reputed to be more reliable.

29. See *Tazkirah-i Rawzat al-salāṭīn, va Javāhir al-‘ajā’ib, ma‘a Dīvān-i Fakhri Haravī*, ed. Ḥusām al-Dīn Rāshidī, Hyderabad, 1968; and *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī*, ed. Rukn al-Dīn Humāyūn Farrukh, Tehran, n.d.

30. See the edition of Aḥmad Suhaylī Khwānsārī, Tehran, 1973/74.

31. Ali Şîr Nevaî, *Mecâlisü’n-nefâ’is*, ed. Kemal Eraslan et al., 2 vols., Ankara, 2001.

But this is *not* to suggest that the book may be disregarded. Any text that records details about contemporary individuals and events should be valued by historians; and we would be fortunate indeed if we had even a rudimentary *tazkirah* of poets to represent each generation and region in the pre-modern Persianate world. (Instead, we struggle with confounding gaps in the written record.) Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī has already demonstrated, at least preliminarily, the usefulness of the *Khayr al-bayān* as a source on poets who migrated to Mughal India in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. And it remains an untapped resource in other ways, some of which have been outlined above. The case of the *Khayr al-bayān* stands as a reminder that valuable historical information may be found in unexpected places.

The Author

Malik Shāh Ḥusayn b. Ghiyāš al-Dīn Muḥammad was, as his name reflects, a member of one of the dynasties of Maliks that had ruled Sīstān intermittently since the Mongol period.³² His family claimed descent, which is not possible to verify, from the Saffarids all the way down to ‘Amr b. al-Layth (d. 289/902). Thus they considered themselves the traditional and proper rulers of Sīstān going back several hundred years.³³ By the time of Shāh Ḥusayn’s birth, in 978/1571, he and his family were vassals of the Safavids. He grew up in comfort and received a traditional courtly education, but his life was later upended by political turmoil. First, his relative and protector, Malik ‘Āqibat Maḥmūd, was executed in 998/1590 for alleged anti-Safavid activity. The following year, 999/1591, brought an invasion of Sīstān by the Abū al-Khayrid Uzbeks, which compelled Shāh Ḥusayn and his family to flee to Qandahār. He would later return to his homeland, if only occasionally, after it was reconquered by Shah ‘Abbās toward the end of the 1590s. For the most part, however, Shāh Ḥusayn led a semi-itinerant lifestyle. He took on the role of scholar-courtier and accompanied ‘Abbās on several of his campaigns, including the expeditions into Eastern Georgia that began in late 1022/1613.³⁴

Two of Shāh Ḥusayn’s prose works are extant. There is the *Khayr al-bayān*, a draft of which, as we have seen, was finished at Harāt in 1019/1610. The second work is the *Iḥyā’ al-mulūk*, a local history of Sīstān from the earliest times up to about 1031/1622.³⁵ (Shāh Ḥusayn completed almost all of the work by 1028/1619, at which point he was staying in

32. His name is occasionally recorded as Shāh Ḥusayn b. Ghiyāš al-Dīn Maḥmūd—including once by Rieu (*Supplement*, p. 76), and also in Storey, *Persian Literature*, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 364. (Storey does mention the other possibility for the name in a footnote.) This seems to be a simple error. According to our author’s own works, his full name is Shāh Ḥusayn b. Ghiyāš al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Shāh Maḥmūd, etc.

33. The standard English-language work on the confusing history of this region in the middle periods is C. E. Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz*, Costa Mesa, Calif., 1994. For information on Shāh Ḥusayn’s biography, see especially pp. 27–9.

34. Further details are found in the autobiographical passages of the *Iḥyā’ al-mulūk*. See the edition of Manūchihr Sutūdah (Tehran, 1966), which includes a useful introductory chapter. For those who read Russian, there is also a partial translation, with scholarly commentary, by L. P. Smirnovoi (Moscow, 2000).

35. For more on the dating of this work, see Grigol Beradze and Lydia P. Smirnova, “*Iḥyā’ al-mulūk va tārikh-i ta’lif-i ān*,” *Iran Nameh* 6.3 (1988): 417–34.

Iṣfahān. He appears to have added to it during his travels over the next few years.) It is unclear when and where Shāh Ḥusayn died. In fact, almost everything that we know about the author comes from his own books, both of which contain autobiographical passages. The most that we can say, therefore, is that he was still alive in 1036/1627, when he last added to the *Khayr al-bayān*. It seems likely that he survived through the end of Shah ‘Abbās’ reign, spending these later years mainly in Harāt.

Shāh Ḥusayn produced a body of poetry in addition to his prose works; he quotes a number of his own verses in the *Khayr al-bayān*. He was also recognized as a poet in at least two other *tazkirahs*. Taqī al-Dīn Awḥadī, in his *‘Arafāt*, speaks respectfully of Shāh Ḥusayn, whom he claims to have met personally, and he reports that our author composed an imitation (*tatabbu‘*) of the *Tuḥfat al-‘Irāqayn* of Khāqānī (d. ca. 1199 CE).³⁶ (We should keep in mind that Shāh Ḥusayn was still alive when Awḥadī completed his *tazkirah* in 1024/1615.) A brief but similarly respectful notice is provided in the *Riyāz al-shu‘arā’* of Vālih Dāghistānī (comp. 1161/1748).³⁷ Incidentally, the fact that Vālih, who tends to be quite thorough, does not mention a death date, suggests that this bit of information may have been lost in the sands of time.

It would be something of an exaggeration to say that Malik Shāh Ḥusayn of Sīstān left a major legacy. We have his two substantial works, but not by much: the *Iḥyā’ al-mulūk* apparently survives in just one manuscript. As for the *Khayr al-bayān*, perhaps the highest compliment ever paid to it came from Rizā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, who mentions the work in the preface of his landmark *Majma‘ al-fuṣaḥā’* (comp. 1284/1867–8) as one of the authorities upon which he relied.³⁸ In the final assessment, Shāh Ḥusayn was a notable but not especially famous author, and a member of an increasingly marginal local dynasty in the changing landscape of Safavid Iran during the reign of Shah ‘Abbās. Both his history of Sīstān and his *tazkirah*, however, remain valuable for their documentation of events and individuals not covered in other sources.³⁹

The Manuscript

We turn here to our central concern: the notice on Ṣā’ib Tabrīzī in the *Khayr al-bayān*. One more ancillary issue, however, should first be addressed. The significance of the passage on Ṣā’ib depends in part upon characteristics of MS Or. 3397, in addition to the text itself. It is important for us to consider, then, the circumstances under which this copy was produced, and the presence of substantial marginalia, much of which was added by unidentifiable hands and cannot be dated.

Several of the basic features of the manuscript have been laid out above. It was

36. *‘Arafāt*, ed. Nājī Naṣr’ābādī, vol. 3, p. 1996.

37. See the edition of Muḥsin Nājī Naṣr’ābādī, 5 vols., Tehran, 2005/06, vol. 2, p. 1089.

38. As reported in Rieu, *Supplement*, p. 78. For the original, see Rizā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, *Majma‘ al-fuṣaḥā’*, ed. Maṣāhir Muṣaffā, 2 vols. in 6, Tehran, 1957–61, vol. I/1, p. xi.

39. While this article was under review, an entry on Shāh Ḥusayn was added to *Encyclopædia Iranica*. See Kioumars Ghereghlou, “Sīstānī, Mirzā Ṣāh-Ḥosayn.” Ghereghlou provides further details about the author’s life and works.

copied in 1041/1631, after the work itself had been produced through a lengthy process of intermittent drafting and emendation between 1017/1608–9 and 1036/1627. The authorship of the notice on Ṣāʿib, as we have seen, should most appropriately be dated to 1035/1625–6. Or. 3397 contains a total of 467 double-sided folia, with nineteen lines of text on each side—with some exceptions, as at the beginning or end of a chapter. Rieu gives the dimensions of each folio as 10.75 by 6.5 in., and the length of each line of text as 3.5 in.⁴⁰ The scribe, Muḥammad Mīrak b. Khwājah Mīr Farāhī, wrote in a fairly small, neat *nastaʿlīq*. The main text of the manuscript is in black ink, while headings are in red (a common choice). When we look at the notice on Ṣāʿib, it will be important to remember that the *text* dates to 1035/1625–6, which is after the poet migrated to Kabul in 1034/1624–5; and that our *copy* dates to 1041/1631, which is before Ṣāʿib left India to return to Iran in 1042/1632. We are dealing with a source that was produced entirely during the poet’s formative sojourn in Mughal lands.

This picture is complicated by the large number of marginal comments, additions, and corrections found throughout Or. 3397, including on the folia relating to Ṣāʿib. The marginalia can be divided into two categories. A minority of them, but still a substantial number, appear to have been inserted by the scribe himself, in handwriting indistinguishable from that of the main text. At several points the scribe either added a word or two that must have been omitted by accident, or corrected a small error (e.g., foll. 63a, 163a, 293b, and 330b); or he noted a variant of a given hemistich (*miṣrāʿ*) (e.g., foll. 234b, 246a, and 384a). The scribal marginalia were all penned with care, as befits a clean, professionally-produced copy. Most of the marginal comments in the manuscript, however, fall into our second category. They were left by some number of later owners or readers, nearly all of them unidentifiable, and they cannot be dated securely. This will be among our most important considerations as we examine the notice on Ṣāʿib: there is the original text, whose circumstances are clear; and a correction and copious marginalia, apparently in two different hands, which could have been added at any later juncture.

Most of the non-scribal marginal comments in Or. 3397 consist of additional verses by a given poet, added next to the biographical notice and selected verses already provided for that poet by Shāh Ḥusayn. This occurs, for example, on foll. 106a, 261a, and 302b. The impression is that a later owner would read the notice on a poet, think of other favorite verses by him, and then add those in the margin. One comment that does *not* fit this pattern is found on fol. 223a, next to the entry on Sharīf Tabrīzī (d. 956/1549). The note consists of several lines written in a *shikastah nastaʿlīq* hand which is quite difficult to decipher, but it seems to relate to the well-known controversy over Sharīf’s disrespect of his mentor, Lisānī Shīrāzī (d. ca. 941/1534–5).⁴¹ In any event, this is the only clearly signed marginal note in the entire manuscript. It was left by one ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm Zunūzī.⁴²

The pages concerning Ṣāʿib (374a–b and 375a) have been modified in two different ways,

40. Rieu, *Supplement*, p. 76.

41. For an explanation of this issue, see Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, vol. 5, pt. 2, pp. 639, 671–2.

42. There seems to have been an early-nineteenth-century (CE) scribe who went by this name, though I have not been able to find any solid information on him.

apparently by two different hands. (Here and elsewhere, it will help the reader to refer to the appended images.) First, the heading of the notice (fol. 374a), which reads “Zikr-i Musta‘idd Khān Ṣāyib [*i.e.*, Ṣā‘ib] Tabrīzī” in red ink, has been defaced. Someone has used black ink to strike through “Musta‘idd Khān” and to write above it “Muḥammad ‘Alī,” which we know to have been Ṣā‘ib’s actual given name. This is the only heading in Or. 3397 that has been altered in such a way. The handwriting of “Muḥammad ‘Alī” looks somewhat different from that of the scribe, and the words appear to have been written more quickly, with less care, than we see throughout the body of the manuscript. It is also worth noting that the scribe places his own corrections in the margin, rather than immediately above crossed-out words. The most likely explanation is that a reader, at some later date, saw the notice on Ṣā‘ib and decided to rectify his name. As is explained below, the story that the poet was once known under the title of “Musta‘idd Khān” has been a subject of controversy.

Apart from the modified heading, the notice on Ṣā‘ib features some of the densest marginalia found in the whole manuscript. The main text columns on both sides of fol. 374 are surrounded by numerous selected verses of Ṣā‘ib, added by what appears to be yet another hand (an elegant quasi-*shikastah*).⁴³ This material is easier to interpret, since it is qualitatively similar to the marginal additions that accompany a number of other entries in the *tazkirah*—although few of them are so heavily annotated.

The Notice on Ṣā‘ib and His Excerpted Poetry

The pages relating to Ṣā‘ib consist of four elements: the heading; the short biographical paragraph by Shāh Ḥusayn; the verses that were originally quoted; and the extra verses added in the margins. We have already considered the heading, which, in its unaltered version, refers to the poet as “Musta‘idd Khān Ṣāyib [*i.e.*, Ṣā‘ib] Tabrīzī.”

The following is a translation of the biographical sketch, which immediately follows the heading and continues to the bottom of fol. 374a: “He is originally from Tabrīz, and early in his life, having come from Āzarbāyjān to ‘Irāq, he would spend most of his time in Iṣfahān. There, with the literati of that province, he set himself upon the task of composing poems. One day he was in a gathering of friends, when a dervish named Ḥaqq Allāh came into their presence, and that dervish addressed Mawlānā Ṣā‘ib with the title ‘Musta‘idd Khān.’ He became widely known under this name. Truly, he has a great poetic talent, and hopefully

43. Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī, in his brief commentary on these pages of Or. 3397 in *Kārvān-i Hind* (vol. 1, p. 701) and in the second edition of *Farhang-i ash‘ār* (vol. 1, p. 14), speculates that both the correction to the name and the surrounding marginalia on fol. 374 were left by Ṣā‘ib himself. If this could be proven, then it would be an extraordinary discovery and might justify a separate article. Unfortunately, Gulchīn-i Ma‘ānī does not cite any evidence to support the idea. It may be that he saw the script in the margins of fol. 374 and thought that it appeared similar to attested examples of Ṣā‘ib’s writing. Indeed, if we look at the facsimile publication of Ṣā‘ib’s *Safīnah* (Iṣfahan, 2006/07)—an anthology of choice verses by other poets that he recorded in his own hand—there is a clear resemblance. This issue must be set aside for the time being, but it raises tantalizing questions. Did Ṣā‘ib personally annotate a *tazkirah* notice about himself? If so, then when, and where, and for what purpose? It would be difficult to think of a comparable document in the history of classical Persian poetry.

he will become worthy (*musta'idd*) and well-engaged in the realm of eloquence. In the year 1034, he resolved to move to India. The following several verses, from among his agreeable verses, were recorded by the author of this book..."

In reviewing the excerpted poems of Ṣā'ib, it will be best to go through those that are provided in the main text column before turning to the marginal additions. This is important because any poem quoted by Shāh Ḥusayn can be dated confidently to the earliest part of Ṣā'ib's career. In fact, it is most likely that these selections represent verses that Ṣā'ib composed before he left for India, and certainly *long* before he became famous as the unparalleled master of his day. As for the poetry written in the margins, we can make no such historical claim. Nevertheless, in case it might prove of interest to other researchers, I have identified and matched all of the poems in both groups with their complete versions, as found in Muḥammad Qahramān's edition of the *Dīvān*.⁴⁴

Shāh Ḥusayn excerpts the following poems, in order, on fol. 374b: two verses of *ghazal* no. 1612 (pp. 797–8); three verses of *ghazal* no. 3633 (p. 1752); three verses of *ghazal* no. 3655 (pp. 1761–2); the entirety (two verses) of no. 395 of the *mutafarriqāt* (p. 3519, ll. 3–4);⁴⁵ three verses of *ghazal* no. 1704 (p. 839); three verses of *ghazal* no. 6989 (p. 3407);⁴⁶ the entirety (two verses) of no. 252 of the *mutafarriqāt* (p. 3500, ll. 12–13); three verses of *ghazal* no. 3912 (pp. 1883–4); the entirety (two verses) of no. 509 of the *mutafarriqāt* (p. 3527, ll. 20–21); and the beginning of no. 374 of the *mutafarriqāt*, which continues on to fol. 375a and is quoted in its entirety (two verses).

He excerpts the following poems, again in order, on fol. 375a: the remainder of no. 374 of the *mutafarriqāt* (p. 3511, ll. 5–6); and two verses of *ghazal* no. 4013 (p. 1931).

The poetry snippets added in the margins will be listed page by page, but otherwise *in no particular order*, since they wrap around the main text column and are written at various angles. On fol. 374a, we find the following: one verse of *ghazal* no. 2644 (pp. 1290–91); one verse of *ghazal* no. 5542 (pp. 2675–6); one verse of *ghazal* no. 5107 (pp. 2457–8); two verses of *ghazal* no. 5693 (pp. 2748–9); two verses of *ghazal* no. 3088 (p. 1498); six verses constituting a mixture of *ghazal* nos. 2906 and 2907 (p. 1414), which share the same meter, rhyme, and *radīf* and may not have been known as separate poems by the marginal commentator; and three verses of *ghazal* no. 5759 (p. 2780).

On the margins of fol. 374b, the following poems are excerpted: one verse of *ghazal* no. 837 (pp. 407–8); five verses of *ghazal* no. 1496 (pp. 743–4); three verses of *ghazal* no.

44. To avoid a mess of footnotes, page numbers for all poems in these lists are cited in parentheses. Pagination is continuous across the six volumes of Qahramān's edition.

45. See below for discussion of this category of poems in Ṣā'ib's *dīvān*.

46. This poem is still considered by some to be among the greatest that Ṣā'ib ever composed. It seems to be especially famous for the final line (*maqṭa'*), in which the poet addresses himself: "If you weren't a lover, Ṣā'ib, then what would you do with this lifetime?" The website Ganjoor, which is one of the largest and most widely used online repositories of classical Persian poetry, provides both the full *dīvān* of Ṣā'ib, and a selection of 180 of his best-known *ghazals* (*guzīdah-i ghazaliyāt*). This one is included. It seems remarkable that a poem dating to the earliest part of Ṣā'ib's career, and highlighted by his first biographer, would still stand out from his enormous oeuvre after centuries of critical reception. We might also wonder about a perennial question in the study of *tazkirahs*: what role did these works play in canon formation? In this case, were literati like Shāh Ḥusayn helping to define the "Quintessential Ṣā'ib" even before the poet had fully established his career?

2193 (pp. 1071–2); three verses of *ghazal* no. 3361 (pp. 1625–6); one verse of *ghazal* no. 441 (pp. 219–20); one verse of *ghazal* no. 3585 (p. 1731); and three verses of *ghazal* no. 1612 (pp. 797–8), apparently intended to supplement the two already quoted in the main text column.

In total, we have eleven poems by Ṣāʿib which were, as far as we can tell, highlighted by Shāh Ḥusayn in 1035/1625–6. Even if one were to argue that the poetry selections changed after the initial authorship of this passage, the manuscript itself dates to 1041/1631. It could then be hypothesized that we have early *verses* by Ṣāʿib, whereas the full *ghazals* to which they now belong may have been finalized later in the poet’s career. But this seems far-fetched. Ultimately, there is little way around the conclusion that we can now identify eleven of the earliest poems ever composed by Ṣāʿib. (We should remember that he built an œuvre of more than 7,000 *ghazals* by the end of his career.) The question of whether this discovery has any real significance may be left to researchers who specialize in the analysis of Ṣāʿib’s poetry *per se*.⁴⁷ In addition to the verses excerpted by Shāh Ḥusayn, we have selections from a further fourteen *ghazals* that were subsequently added in the margins (not counting the supplemental lines from no. 1612).

A few more general comments on the poetry extracts are in order. First, it is noteworthy that all of the verses can be traced easily to poems that we still have in published editions of Ṣāʿib’s *dīvān*. He did not die until ca. 1087/1676, and the selections in the *Khayr al-bayān* date to at least fifty years prior, but none of this early work was lost.

Second, beyond the fact that all of these poems can be cross-referenced with the *Dīvān*, it is remarkable that there are almost no differences in word choice between the lines quoted by Shāh Ḥusayn and the versions that have come down to the present day. Only the most trivial discrepancies can be found, such as the use of *mā* vs. *man* in the first hemistich of no. 395 of the *mutafarriqāt*.⁴⁸ The consistency reflected here should strengthen our impression that the work of Ṣāʿib is, in the words of Paul Losensky, “perhaps better preserved than that of any other major poet of the classical tradition.”⁴⁹ There are a few instances in which Shāh Ḥusayn places lines in a different order than we find in current editions, but this is an omnipresent issue in pre-modern Persian poetry and should not be considered significant here. Indeed, as a rule, it is more surprising to find a classical *ghazal* whose manuscript tradition does *not* include some variation in the ordering of its verses.

Third, there is the question of the conflation of *ghazal* nos. 2906 and 2907 by the marginal commentator, who gives the impression of being unaware that he is mixing

47. As Losensky describes in his *Encyclopædia Iranica* article, “Ṣāʿib Tabrizi,” we do have copies of various versions of the poet’s *dīvān* which date to his lifetime, and which were in some cases produced under his supervision or in his own hand. There may even be a manuscript that Ṣāʿib dedicated to his patron in India, Ṣafar Khān, which would imply an early date. Some of Ṣāʿib’s *qaṣīdahs* are also known to have been composed near the beginning of his career. And so it is uncertain how much unique insight might be added by the quotation of seven early *ghazals* and four *mutafarriqāt* in the *Khayr al-bayān*.

48. This poem is found near the top of the main text column of fol. 374b in Or. 3397, and on p. 3519, ll. 3–4 in Qahramān’s edition of the *Dīvān*.

49. Losensky, “Ṣāʿib Tabrizi,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

verses from two different poems.⁵⁰ But should we be surprised to find this type of confusion in the reception of Ṣāʿib's works? Again, he has roughly 7,000 *ghazals*, many of them on similar themes. Even though he drew on an extremely large number of possible meters, rhymes, and *radīfs*, there are plenty of cases in which he used the same combination twice. (One other example is *ghazal* nos. 4627 and 4628,⁵¹ both of whose lines end with *-āb-i digar*.) We might wonder how people's engagement with Ṣāʿib's poetry was affected by the overwhelming number and occasionally repetitive nature of his *ghazals*, especially considering how often his work must have been *heard* and exchanged at literary salons rather than *read* in book form.

Fourth, and finally, we should make some comment on an unusual section in Ṣāʿib's *dīvān*, called the *mutafarriqāt*, or "scattered items." At least a few of these poems are *qiṭʿahs* and would ordinarily be categorized as such. In most cases, however, the *mutafarriqāt* look like the first two or three lines of a *ghazal* that was never finished (the standard minimum number of verses in that form being five). This is not a conventional category in the collected works of Persian poets—which, again, typically contain a section for *qiṭʿahs*—but the *mutafarriqāt* number nearly 700 in Ṣāʿib's *dīvān*.

Qahramān provides further commentary on this grouping of poems in the introduction of his edition.⁵² One of his statements is of particular relevance here. He speculates that the *mutafarriqāt* may comprise snippets of poetry from early in Ṣāʿib's career that he liked well enough to preserve as part of his written oeuvre. Given that four of the eleven poems selected by Shāh Ḥusayn in 1035/1625–6 belong to this category, there may be something to Qahramān's claim. Any further analysis of these excerpted poems may be carried out by specialists. For the purposes of this article, it is enough to catalogue the contents of the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3397, which stands as a uniquely early source on both the biography and the poetry of Ṣāʿib Tabrīzī.

Ṣāʿib's Biography and the Title "Mustaʿidd Khān"

The final issue for us to address is Ṣāʿib's biography as presented in the *Khayr al-bayān*. In order to have a basis for comparison, we should begin by summarizing the standard narrative of the poet's life that has coalesced in modern scholarship. The most concise account in English is provided by Paul Losensky in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.⁵³ We do not know the exact year of Ṣāʿib's birth, but it was probably around the last decade of the sixteenth century CE. What is certain is that he was born into a family of wealthy merchants in Tabrīz, and his given name was Muḥammad ʿAlī. At a relatively young age, he moved with his family to the new Safavid capital city of Iṣfahān, as part of one of Shah ʿAbbās' initiatives to relocate certain economically important groups of people from the northwest, where they were under threat of Ottoman incursions. It is not clear precisely when Ṣāʿib's

50. Of course, we would need a different interpretation if it turned out that the marginalia were added by Ṣāʿib himself. See footnote 43 above.

51. *Dīvān*, ed. Qahramān, p. 2232.

52. *Dīvān*, ed. Qahramān, vol. 1, pp. xi–xii.

53. Losensky, "Ṣāʿib Tabrizi," *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

family went to Iṣfahān, but it must have been in the years following 1012/1603, when ʿAbbās finally reconquered Tabrīz and a new round of intermittent Ottoman-Safavid wars began (to end with the Treaty of Sarāb in 1027/1618).

It was in Iṣfahān that Ṣāʿib received his education and launched his career as a poet. Indeed, with the benefit of the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān*, we can now state with confidence that Ṣāʿib developed a considerable reputation in his young adulthood, before he ever left Iran. In 1034/1624–5, however, he set off to seek wealth and career advancement in Mughal lands. He did not need to go any further than Kabul. There he became confidant and court poet to the local governor, Mīrzā Aḥsan Allāh Ṣafar Khān, with whom he would spend the next several years. Ṣāʿib apparently accompanied Ṣafar Khān on a visit to the Mughal court in 1038/1628, when the latter was summoned to pay his respects to the recently-enthroned Shāh Jahān. This is a point in Ṣāʿib’s biography that would later become muddled. A number of *tazkirah* authors claimed that he in fact attended Shāh Jahān’s coronation, composed a celebratory poem for the occasion, and was rewarded with a lavish payment and the title of “Mustaʿidd Khān.”

Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, whose study of the poet’s biography (in the introduction to *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʿib*) remains by far the most thorough to appear to date, devotes several pages to a detailed explanation of the ways in which the story of the alleged encounter with Shāh Jahān is illogical.⁵⁴ He points out, for example, that we have no record of any panegyric addressed to the ruler in Ṣāʿib’s otherwise well-documented collected works. There is also no mention in Mughal sources of his having been granted the rank of *khān*. Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, followed by other scholars, considers the entire anecdote to be an exaggeration by later biographers, who were writing decades after the fact and recognized Ṣāʿib as a poet of extraordinarily high stature. The title “Mustaʿidd Khān” itself has been deemed an invention of the *tazkirah* tradition—although Gulchīn-i Maʿānī admits that it is perplexing how many sources agree on this detail. (By the time *Kārvān-i Hind* and the second edition of *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʿib* were published, he had seen the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān*, which answers the question.) Of course, this entire issue may be revisited in light of our new source.

After a few more years of travel and adventure in India, Ṣāʿib found an opportunity to move back to Iran in 1042/1632, when Ṣafar Khān was transferred to the governorship of Kashmir. It seems that the poet decided to return to Iṣfahān at least in part because his aging father wanted him at home. From this point, we may as well say that the rest is history, particularly given that the *Khayr al-bayān* has no bearing on it. Ṣāʿib mostly stayed in Iṣfahān for the remainder of his life. His family’s wealth and social position obviated any need for him to cultivate a close relationship with the Safavid House, although he remained on fine terms with the court, composing *qaṣīdahs* in honor of Shah Ṣafī (r. 1038–52/1629–42), Shah ʿAbbās II (r. 1052–77/1642–66), and Shah Sulaymān (r. 1077–1105/1666–94). Ṣāʿib probably died in 1087/1676, although this is another point clouded by uncertainty.⁵⁵

One of the salient features of Ṣāʿib’s biography, as it has typically been constructed in

54. See the section starting on p. xxv of vol. 1 in Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Farhang-i ashʿār*, first ed.

55. See Losensky, “Ṣāʿeb Tabrizi,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

scholarship, is that it is based upon sources written late in the poet's life or in the decades following his death. Gulchīn-i Ma'ānī provides an overview of these *tazkirah* notices in his aforementioned study.⁵⁶ The earliest three are the *Qiṣaṣ al-khāqānī* of Valī Qulī Bēg Shāmlū, written between 1073/1662–3 and 1085/1674–5, with the passage on Ṣā'ib apparently dating to 1076/1665–6; the *Tazkirah-i Naṣr'ābādī* of Muḥammad Ṭāhir Naṣr'ābādī, whose notice on Ṣā'ib, according to Gulchīn-i Ma'ānī, dates to 1083/1672–3; and the *Muzakkir al-aṣḥāb* of Malīḥā of Samarqand, comp. 1093/1682. All of these are valuable sources, but even the *Qiṣaṣ al-khāqānī* postdates the *Khayr al-bayān* by about forty years.

Upon consideration of Shāh Ḥusayn's much earlier notice, our sense of Ṣā'ib's career should change in at least two ways. First, as noted earlier, there is evidence that the poet was far from an obscure neophyte at the point when he decided to seek his fortune in India. He had made enough of an impression in Iṣfahān to merit inclusion in a *tazkirah* that was written hundreds of miles away, in Harāt—although we know that Shāh Ḥusayn traveled throughout Safavid Iran and could have learned about up-and-coming poets in any number of ways. Furthermore, the biographical sketch in the *Khayr al-bayān* expresses high hopes for Ṣā'ib's future success as a poet. This is not an everyday trope in the *tazkirah* tradition. It recalls Sām Mīrzā's discussion of a young Muḥtasham Kāshānī (d. 996/1588) in the *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī* (comp. ca. 957/1550): "Since he is young, hopefully he will develop to his potential."⁵⁷ Only rarely are we afforded a glimpse of the beginning of a great poet's career, when he has demonstrated unusual promise but has yet to rise to fame. Ṣā'ib may now be added to the list of these precocious figures.

Second, we are due for a reinterpretation of the issue of his nickname. In the end, the story that a random dervish wandered into a poetry gathering in Iṣfahān and chose for some reason to address Ṣā'ib as "Musta'idd Khān," after which the name stuck, is hardly more credible than the tale involving Shāh Jahān. We probably will never know just how or why our poet ended up with this title. But we may at least be confident that it was not invented out of whole cloth by later biographers, and that its origin lies early in Ṣā'ib's career, prior to his sojourn in India.

We might also consider a new explanation for the development of the Shāh Jahān story in the biographical tradition: that later commentators sought to rationalize an unusual nickname which looked suspiciously like an official Mughal title.⁵⁸ *Tazkirah* authors working in the late seventeenth century would also have been intimately familiar with the trope of the Iranian poet who travels to the great court in India, recites verses before the emperor, and is rewarded with his weight in gold. This archetype had been firmly established since the time of Akbar (r. 963–1014/1556–1605).⁵⁹ In fact, given that most of

56. This refers to the first edition of *Farhang-i ash'ār-i Ṣā'ib*. As has been explained above, the second edition adds a brief passage about the *Khayr al-bayān*.

57. *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī*, ed. Humāyūn Farrukh, p. 373.

58. Gulchīn-i Ma'ānī, for his part, checked multiple Mughal sources for any indication that Ṣā'ib was given a *khān*-level title. See his *Farhang-i ash'ār*, first ed., vol. 1, pp. xxviii–xxix.

59. The issue of Iranian poets' search for wealth and fame at the Mughal courts has been treated extensively, in works such as Shibli Nu'mānī's *Shī'r al-'ajam* (originally published in Urdu, 5 vols., Aligarh, 1909–21) and Gulchīn-i Ma'ānī's aforementioned *Kārvān-i Hind*.

the key biographical notices on Ṣāʿib date to the reign of Awrangzēb (1068–1118/1658–1707), those authors may have looked back with some nostalgia on the heyday of the Iranian poets' migration to India in preceding generations. The apparent exaggeration of Ṣāʿib's relationship with Shāh Jahān is not difficult to explain, even if the origin of the title "Mustaʿidd Khān" remains a mystery.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this article fall into three categories. First, the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān* enables new insight into aspects of Ṣāʿib's biography, as has just been summarized. Second, we have eleven poems by Ṣāʿib—enumerated and cross-referenced with the published *Dīvān*—which may now be dated to the earliest part of his career.

Third, and most broadly, I would reiterate the appeal that I made, in an earlier article on the biography of Vaḥshī Bāfqī (d. 991/1583), for continued scholarly attention to be paid to the Persian *tazkirahs* of poets, particularly those written in the first half of the Safavid-Mughal period.⁶⁰ Some potentially important representatives of the genre still have not been edited for publication. Quite a few more have been published, but not studied thoroughly by researchers. There is still much to be gained by working with these sources. It is in this spirit that I have provided a comprehensive introduction to the *Khayr al-bayān* and its author, rather than addressing the notice on Ṣāʿib alone. As I indicated above, researchers who are concerned with the poet Kalīm Kāshānī (d. 1061/1651), the historian Iskandar Bēg Munshī (d. after 1038/1629), the theologian Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĀmilī (d. 1030/1621), the philosopher Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), and possibly other important figures of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries CE, might profit from examining this *tazkirah*.

In closing, I would note that the perceived significance of this article's findings may depend in part upon the reader's estimation of Ṣāʿib Tabrīzī himself. Most serious students of classical Persian poetry, at least in the current generation, would probably count him among the greatest practitioners of the art form. Certainly he was one of the most prolific and inventive composers of *ghazals*, and his name belongs on any short list of the key figures who lived after Jāmī (d. 898/1492). This paper has been written with the implicit understanding that Ṣāʿib is such an important poet that we should be delighted to gain any new perspective on his biography. But others may judge for themselves.

60. Theodore S. Beers, "The Biography of Vaḥshī Bāfqī (d. 991/1583) and the *Tazkera* Tradition," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 8 (2015): 219–20.

Appendix: Khayr al-bayān MS Or. 3379

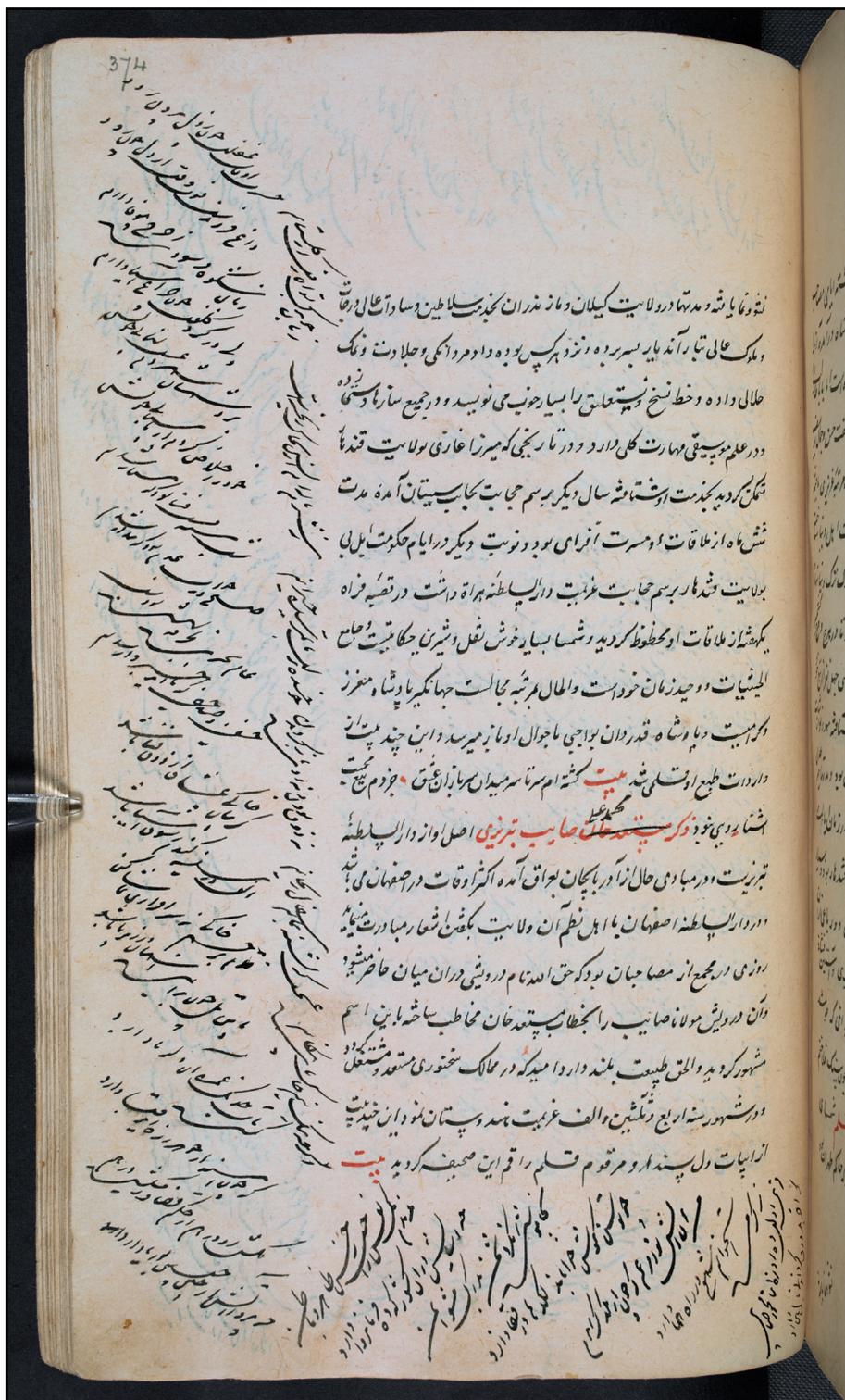


Fig. 1: Page 374a from Khayr al-bayān MS Or. 3379.

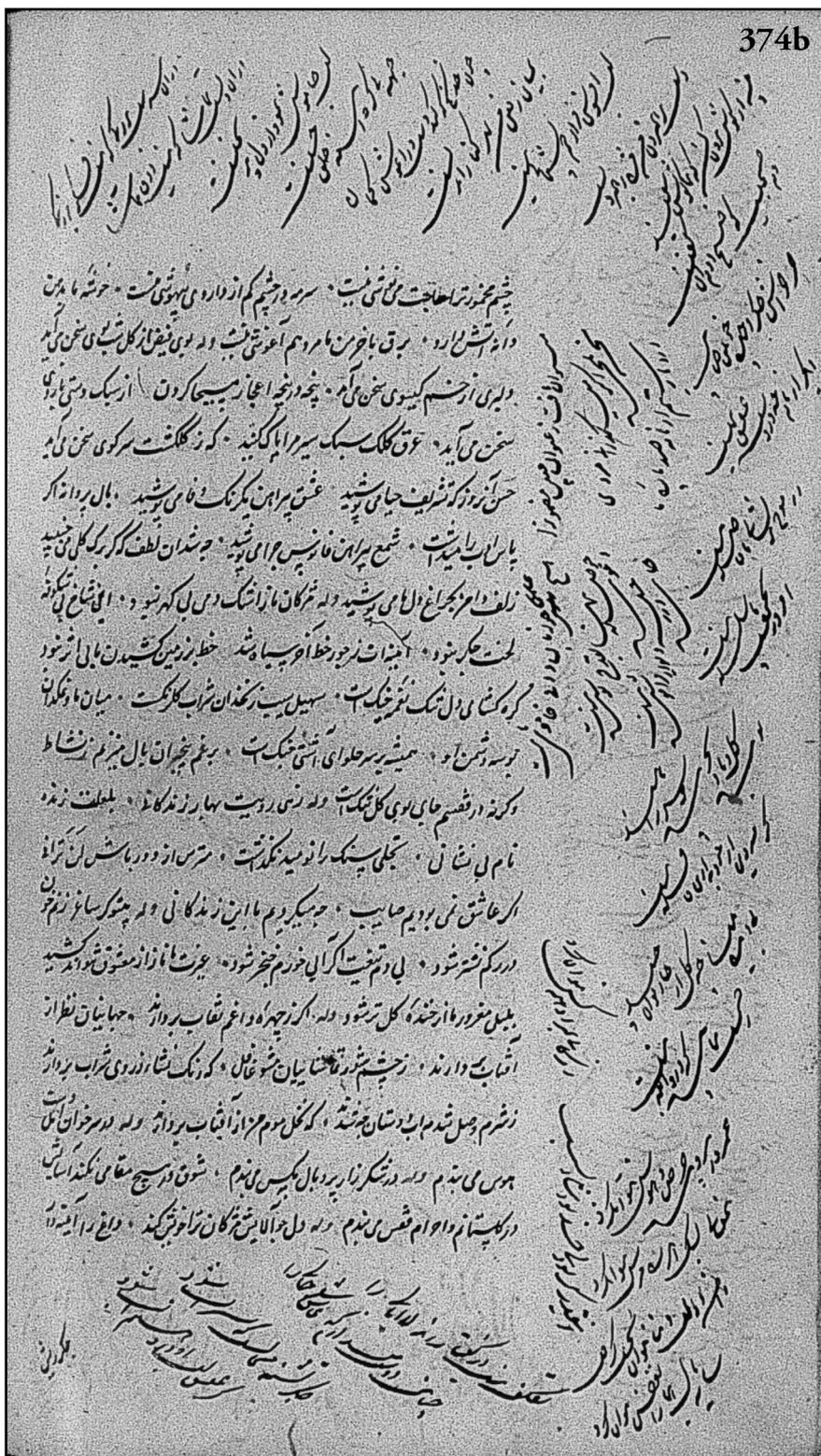
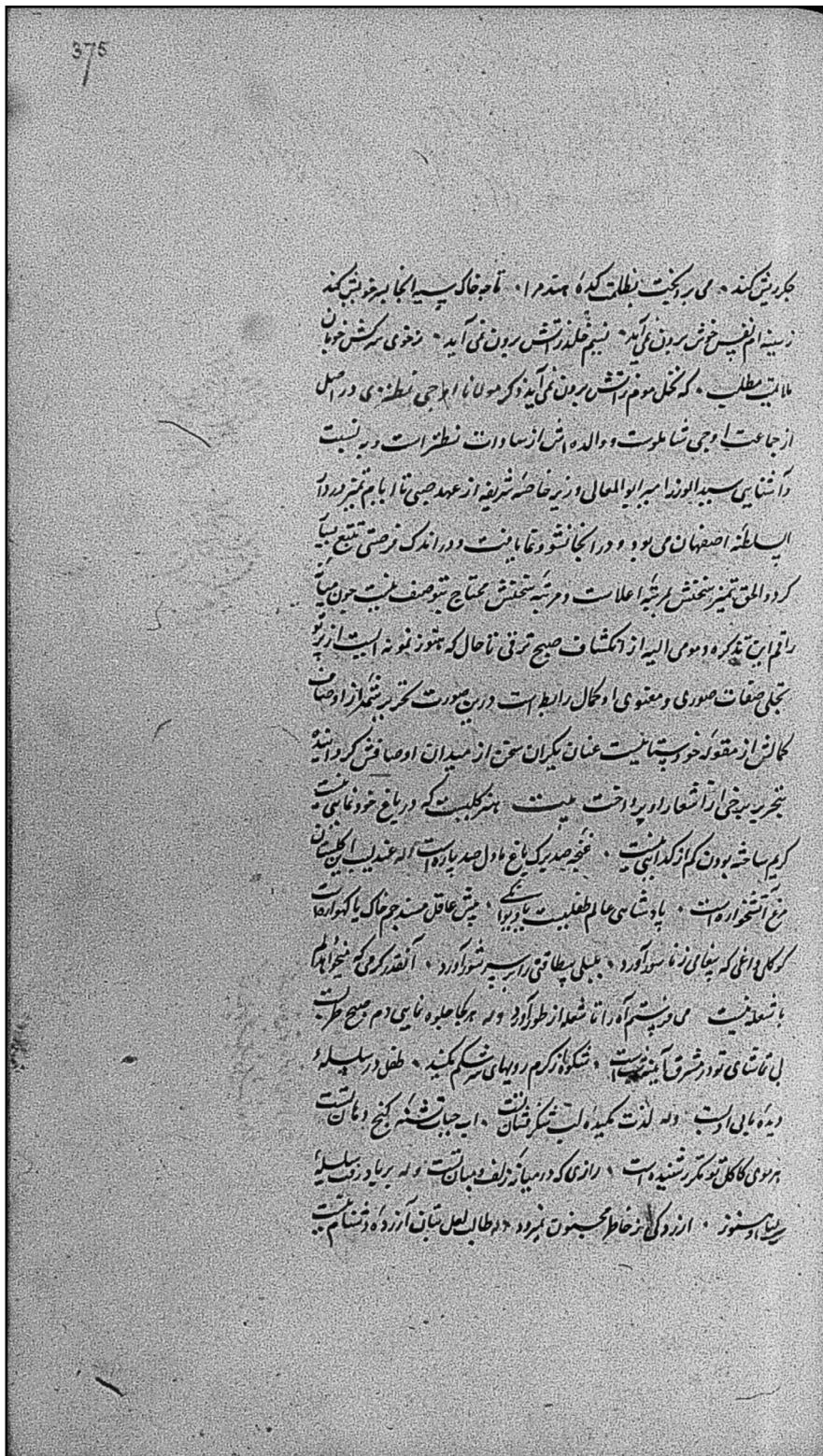


Fig. 2: Page 374b from Khayr al-bayān MS Or. 3379.

Fig. 3: Page 375a from *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3379.

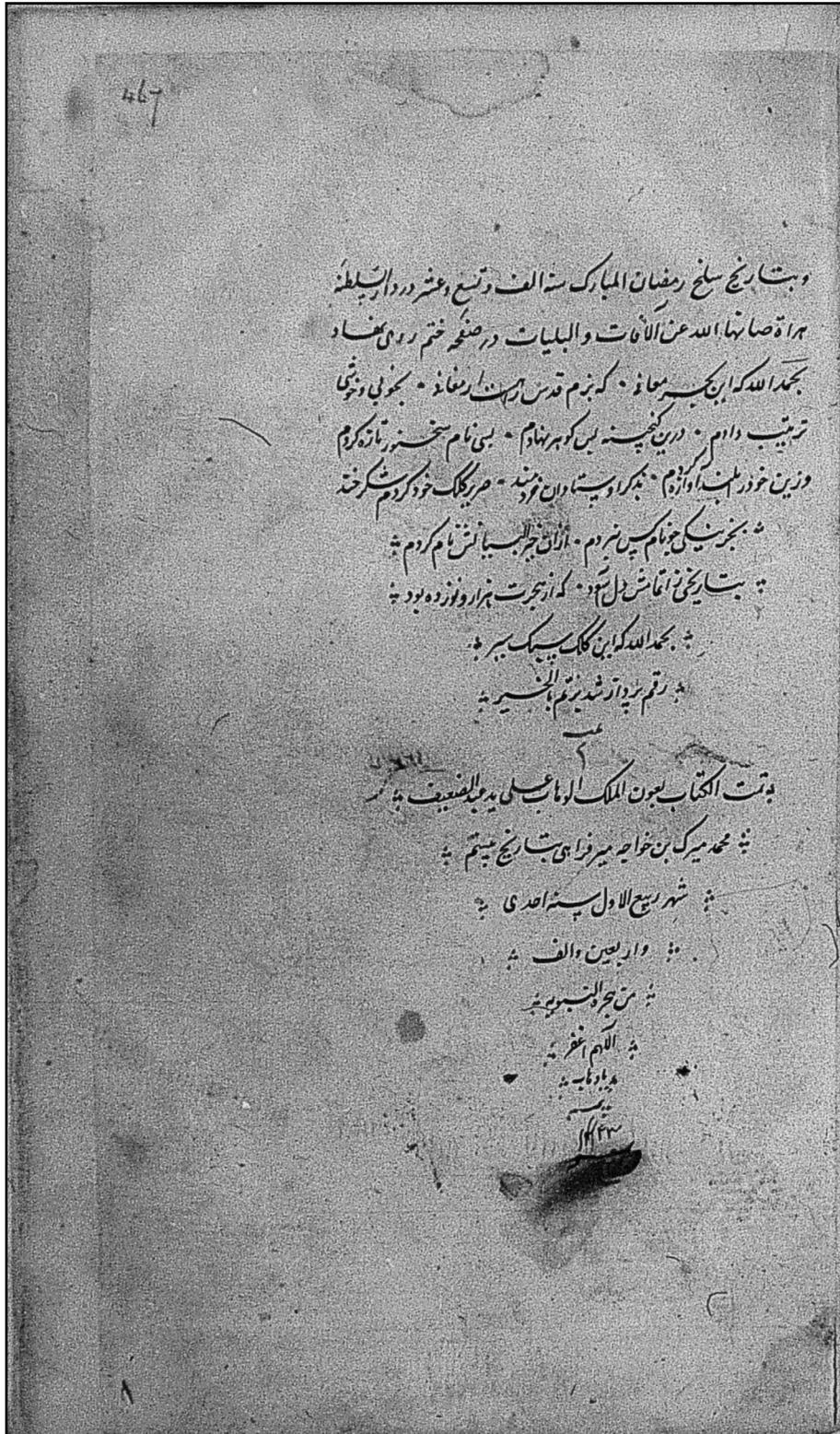


Fig. 4: Page 467a (the colophon) from *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3379.

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