

## INTRODUCTION

FOR A THOUSAND YEARS the classical Persian poetic tradition flourished, continuous and uninterrupted. It began in the great urban centers of Central Asia, Bukhara and Samarkand; and for centuries it dominated the high culture of all of Central Asia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Anatolia, and the whole of the northern part of the Indian subcontinent. It has been composed by saints and roués, kings and beggars. It has been written in gold, poets have had their mouths stuffed with precious gems for an apt line of poetry, and the uncivilized have measured their progress into civilization by their ability to quote Persian poetry.

Classical Persian poetry, so called here to distinguish it from modern free verse, represents a continuous body of poetry that conformed to one set of forms and one metrical system, both of which were rigidly defined from the very outset and recognized by all, practitioner and audience alike.

Most of the great poets of the classical period were professional poets, and as professionals attached to courts they produced poetry much as other fine craftsmen produced items on demand for the ruler. "Poetry is a craft (*sinâ'at*)," says Nizâmî Arûzî of Samarkand at the beginning of the discourse on poets in his *Chahâr maqâla* (Four Discourses, circa A.D. 1155),

by means of which the poet arranges in order premises that produce an image in the mind and knits together arguments that lead to a conclusion in such a way that he makes the meaning of an insignificant thing significant and the meaning of a significant thing insignificant, and he displays a beautiful thing in a hideous robe and an ugly thing in a gorgeous raiment. By means of such ambiguousness he stirs up the irascible and concupiscent faculties so that people experience contractive and expansive moods and thereby cause great affairs in the order of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Even if one did not become a poet in order to effect change in the world, obviously poetry was not a calling to be entered into lightly. It also required a long apprenticeship and years of preparation.

A poet cannot reach such a degree [of effectiveness] unless during his youth he learns twenty thousand lines of the ancients' poetry and passes before his eyes ten thousand lines of the moderns. He must continually peruse the divans of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ahmad ibn 'Umar al-Nizâmî al-'Arûzî al-Samarqandî, *Chahâr maqâla*, ed. Muhammad ibn-i 'Abdu'l-Vahhâb Qazvinî (Berlin: Inanschâhr, 1927), p. 30 (translation mine).

the masters and remember how they get themselves into and out of tight spots in poetry."<sup>2</sup>

Because poets were expected, as Nizâmî Arûzî observes, to have read practically the entire corpus of Persian poetry before they ever composed their first poem, and because refinement of existing conventions was valued, not innovation, the tradition is cumulative and builds upon itself. The stereotypes of lover and beloved—miserable, suffering, unrequited lover, and aloof, unconcerned, and inapproachable beloved—and the *topoi*, the conventional metaphors, that typify these relationships, such as the moth and the candle, the nightingale and the rose, Farhâd and Shîrîn, and so forth, all are immutably fixed in the tradition.

The metaphorical language of poetry also developed within the cumulative tradition. What began initially as a simile, lips as red as rubies, for instance, became so commonplace and hackneyed after thousands of repetitions over the decades and centuries that in the end the simile was scrapped, and ruby lips became simply rubies. So also tears that initially rolled down the cheeks like pearls became, in the end, simply pearls, while tears that glistened like stars became stars. A face as round and lovely as the moon similarly became simply the moon. In the twelfth century Nizâmî could write that Layli's mother *mah-râ zi sitâra tawq barbast* (bound a necklace of stars onto the moon) and know that his audience would immediately understand by this that she covered her daughter's face with tears.

In ghazals, particularly those of the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, when the bizarre comparison and highly intellectualized metaphor were greatly prized, the logic that underlies many an image can be stated as follows: if A shares any attribute with B, and B shares any attribute with C, then A = C. For instance, when the down on the beloved's lip is called *sabz*, it means dark, but the literal meaning of *sabz* is "green"; parrots are green; therefore, the down on the lip becomes a parrot. The lips are as sweet as sugar and become simply sugar. Parrots are spoken of as sweet of speech (the parrot's irritating voice is beside the point—the tradition so named them); therefore, they are *shikarkhâ* (sugar-chewing). The final stage in this series is to have the parrot of the down chewing the sugar of the beloved's lips. On first encountering such an image, the English reader may be puzzled, if not to say repulsed. It should be remembered that English too has many expressions a Persian speaker would find strange and distasteful. It is necessary to go beyond one's own cultural conditioning to appreciate an alien literary tradition, and since English literature and Persian literature, like European and Oriental music, have virtually no common ground or shared cultural tradition, it is all but impos-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

able to appreciate the one in terms of the other. Each must be taken on its own terms.

One of the major difficulties Persian poetry poses to the novice reader lies in the pervasion of poetry by mysticism. Fairly early in the game the mystics found that they could "express the ineffable" in poetry much better than in prose. Usurping the whole of the poetic vocabulary that had been built up by that time, they imbued every word with mystical signification. What had begun as liquid wine with alcoholic content became the "wine of union with the godhead" on which the mystic is "eternally drunk." Beautiful young cupbearers with whom one might like to dally became *shâhids*, "bearers of witness" to the dazzling beauty of that-which-truly-exists. After the mystics had wrought their influence on the tradition, every word of the poetic vocabulary had acquired such "clouds" of associated meaning from lyricism and mysticism that the two strains merged into one. Of course, some poets wrote poetry that is overtly and unmistakably mystical and "Sufi." It is much more difficult to identify poetry that is not mystical. It is useless to ask, for instance, whether Hâfiz's poetry is "Sufi poetry" or not. The fact is that in the fourteenth century it was impossible to write a ghazal that did not reverberate with mystical overtones forced on it by the poetic vocabulary itself. When Hâfiz speaks of *ân turk-i shîrâzî* (that Turk of Shiraz, p. 64), it is irrelevant whether the Turk is male or female, really a Turk or not, or a native or Shiraz or not. The "Turk" is the beloved—any beloved, all beloveds—because, by definition within the ghazal, the beloved is cruel and so are the martial Turks: therefore the beloved is a Turk. Turks are also enchantingly beautiful, just as the beloved is irresistibly seductive. (In this particular line Hâfiz also needed an antithesis to the dark "Hindu mole" on the beloved's cheek, and for that purpose nothing suits better than a light-skinned Shirazi Turk who might hail from Samarkand or Bukhara, the two cities mentioned at the end of the line.)

To return to the craft of poetry, some of its techniques, the rhetorical figures, need to be mentioned. Since this is not the place to go into a detailed study of Persian poetical rhetoric, only a few of the more commonly used figures in which every poet was trained will be given.<sup>3</sup> In addition to those so familiar that they need no discussion, like antithesis, hyperbole, simile, and allusion, the following are frequently encountered. *Husn-i ta'lîl* (etiology) is the assigning of a fanciful cause to a naturally occurring phenomenon, as in a line by Hilâlî (p. 76): "That was not dew in the morning during Layli's time:

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller discussion, see E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persian*, vol. 2 (1906; reprint ed., Cambridge: At the University Press, 1964), pp. 47–76, and E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, vol. 1 (1900; reprint ed., London: Luzac and Company, 1958), pp. 111–24. For a good introduction in Persian, see Vahîd Tabrizî, *Risâla-i jam'-i mukhtasar*, ed. A. E. Bertels (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoy Literatury, 1959).

it was the heaven weeping all night until dawn over Majnun's state." *Îhâm* (ambibology) is the intentional use of an ambiguous word, like Khusraw's use of *nizâm* (both "order" and the first part of Nizâmuddîn Awliyâ's name) and 'ayn (both "eye" and "the thing itself") on page 52. *Laff u nashr* ("folding and spreading") is the naming of objects and the subsequent naming of their respective attributes, often in reverse order. *Raddu'l-'ajuz 'ala's-sadr* (epanadiplosis) is the repetition in the second hemistich of a word or phrase occurring in the first hemistich, the best employment of which is reckoned as the repetition of the last word of the first hemistich as the first word of the second hemistich, like Rumi's repetition of *bâz* in line 3 on page 42. *Murâ'ât-i nazîr* (maintaining the like) refers to the introduction of things that are naturally associated, like moon, sun, and stars, or hand, foot, and head.

*Tajnîs* (homonymy, paronomasia, or the pun), with its several subcategories, was employed by all poets. "Perfect" *tajnîs* occurs when two homophonous sequences give very different meanings, as in Nizâmî's *bargrêzân* (autumn) and *zi barg rêzân* (dripping from the leaves) on page 32, Khâqânî's *bar khwân* (on the table) and *bârkhwân* (recite) in line 26 of the *qasida* on page 30, and Rumi's use of *nîst bād* (it is not the wind) and *nîst bād* (may he not exist) in line 9 of the *Masnavî* on page 43. "Imperfect" *tajnîs* involves two words that are almost the same except for an extra letter in one of the two, like *diyâr* and *yâr* on page 24.

The following figures depend upon the Arabic script. *Tajnîs-i muharraf* refers to words that are written the same but read differently, like *انگشت* *angisht* and *انگشت* *angusht* in Daqîqî's poem on page 3, Khâqânî's *کم ترکو* *kam tarakû* and *کم ترکو* *kam tarakû* on page 30, especially since the *k* and *g* were not differentiated in Khâqânî's time, and Qâ'ânî's *مرغ زار* *murgh-i zâr* and *مرغزار* *marghzâr* on page 99. *Tajnîs-i khattî* refers to words that have identical letter shapes but different dots, like *مست* *mast* and *مشت* *musht*, *باد* *bād* and *یاد* *yād*.

Much has been written on the unity of a Persian ghazal, but in fact those who composed them did not consider them entities with thematic unity so much as exactly what the term for poetry, *nazm*, implies: a string of ordered pearls—not as Sir William Jones said, "Orient pearls at random strung." Each line within a ghazal is a unity unto itself; it need not—indeed, grammatically it should not—depend upon the preceding or following line. The form, meter, and rhyme unify all the lines of a ghazal; and secondarily there may also be a thematic or modal unity. The myriad of variants and different line orders in manuscript copies of *divans* show all too well that European notions of thematic unity and logical progression from one line to the next do not necessarily apply to the ghazal.

## METRICS AND PROSODY

Because of certain inadequacies inherent to the Arabic script, namely the absence of any indication of most occurrences of the *izâfa* and the orthographic similarity of many verbal tenses (e.g., *برد* *burd/barad*, *ماند* *mând/mânad*, *آورد* *âvurd/âvarad*)—and further complicated by the inversion of normal word order in poetry—no Persian poem can be read safely without first establishing the meter. Although the meter will not solve all problems of understanding the poetry, it will eliminate many of the causes for confusion.

§1 Principles of Transcription. Until the student is completely and comfortably conversant with the scansion process, it is recommended that no attempt be made to scan in the Arabic script. Transcribe every line of poetry to be scanned.

(a) Consonants. Digraphs such as *sh*, *ch*, *kh*, *gh*, and *zh* count as one consonant each since they represent only one sound. Doubled (geminate) consonants are necessarily transcribed twice, like *بچه* *bachcha* and *خرم* *khurram*. One of the two consonants in any word ending in a doubled consonant, like *قد* *qadd* and *در* *durr*, may be deleted (*qad* and *dur*).

(b) Vowels. The short vowels are *a*, *i*, and *u*, as in *درد* *dard*, *دل* *dil*, and *گل* *gul*. These are the vowels that are transcribed from modern Persian as *a*, *e*, and *o* (*dard*, *del*, *gol*).

The long vowels are *â*, *î*, *ê*, *ô*, and *û*,<sup>4</sup> as in *جانان* *jânân*, *میبینی* *mî-bînî*, *پیش* *pêsh*, *پوش* *pôsh*, and *پول* *pûl*.

The two diphthongs/glides are *aw* and *ay*, as in *دولت* *dawlat* and *میل* *mayl*, where the *w* and *y* are counted as full consonants.

(c) Ambiguous vowels: non-Arabic elements in the system. The vowels and diphthongs described above are all that exist in Arabic (the Persian vowels *ê* and *ô* do not exist in Arabic, but they were easily incorporated into the system as equivalent to *î* and *û*). When the Arabic system of scansion and prosody was adopted, there were certain elements of Persian that had to be adapted to the system.

The first of these is the word-final short vowel *-a* (the "silent" *h* now pronounced *e* in Iran, as in *خانه* *khâna* and *دیده* *dîda*, modern *khâne* and *dide*). This vowel is reckoned as either long or short depending upon the exigencies of the meter. It is transcribed as *-â*.

Also ambiguous is the word-final vowel *-u* in the words *du* "two," *tu* "you," *chu* (poetic contraction of *chun*) "like, when," and the vowel of the enclitic conjunction *-u* "and." It is transcribed as *-û*.

<sup>4</sup>For the vowels *ê* and *ô*, see W. M. Thackston, *Introduction to Persian* (Iranbooks: Bethesda, Md., 1993), p. 196, §78.

The third ambiguous vowel is the *-i* of the *izāfa*, and the ambiguity of length in the final short vowels is unaffected by the addition of an enclitic, as خانۀ *khānā-yī* and دیدۀ *dīdā-yī*.

Also reckoned as ambiguous is the vowel resulting after the addition of enclitics to words ending in *-ū*, like سوری *sū-yī* and آرزوی *ārzū-yī*.

When vowel-initial enclitics like *-i* and *-u* are added to words ending in *-ī*, like *shādī*, the final *ī* may remain long, as *shādī-ī*, or it may be shortened, as *shādi-yī*.

In all the above ambiguous cases, the meter in use determines which of the possibilities is to be chosen.

§2 Syllabic Shapes. Persian scansion is based on the unit of the syllable, of which there are two types, long and short. A short syllable is defined as one consonant (indicated by "C") followed by one short vowel (indicated by "v̄"). In syllabic division, all syllables begin with one and only one consonant.

|Cv̄| as *د da*

Long syllables are (1) one consonant plus one short vowel plus one consonant:

|Cv̄C| as *بر bar*

or (2) one consonant plus one long vowel:

|Cv̄| as *با bā* and *بی bē*

§3 Anomalous Syllables. The syllables described above (Cv̄, Cv̄, Cv̄C) are the only syllabic shapes admissible in the Arabic system; all syllables not conforming to these three shapes are anomalous and must be resolved by transformation, except in hemistich-final position, where overlong syllables are left unresolved.

The "overlong" syllabic shape |Cv̄CC|, as in *dast*, and its analog |Cv̄C|, as in *dād*, are both quite common in Persian. When the final consonant of such words cannot be joined by liaison to a following initial vowel (see below, §4), the overlong syllable is divided into two syllables by the addition of an anaptyctic vowel, called *nīm-fatha* and represented in transcription by "ə." The *nīm-fatha* is not pronounced, but its effect can be easily detected in the rhythm of poetic recitation and singing. All syllables created by the addition of the *nīm-fatha* are by definition short. Thus,

|Cv̄CC| > Cv̄C|Cə, as *dast* > *das-tə* (˘˘)

|Cv̄C| > Cv̄|Cə, as *dād* > *dā-də* (˘˘)

The final anomalous syllabic shape is |Cv̄CC|, like *dāsht* and *nīst*, and it needs special consideration. When the final consonant can be joined by liai-

son to a following vowel-initial word, the resulting anomalous syllable (|Cv̄C|) is then resolved as described above:

Cv̄CC v... > \*Cv̄C|Cv... > Cv̄|Cə|Cv...  
*dāsht ū* > \**dāsh-tū* > *dā-shə-tū*

When such a syllable is followed by a word beginning with a consonant, in which case liaison is not possible, a *nīm-fatha* is added to the anomalous syllable, thus separating the final consonant from the original syllable. The resulting anomaly of |Cv̄C| is ignored and counted as a simple long syllable, as

|Cv̄CC| > Cv̄C|Cə  
*dāsht* > *dāsh-tə*

In effect then it can be said that any given overlong syllable can be "fixed" once and only once. In the example given immediately above, a *nīm-fatha* was added to fix a doubly overlong syllable. Even though the resulting first syllable is still overlong, it cannot be fixed again.

§4 Elidable glottal stop and liaison. Initial glottal stop (*hamza*) may be retained as a normal, regular consonant (in which case transcribe with an apostrophe and scan as any other consonant, e.g., 'amad). Otherwise, if the preceding word ends in a consonant, the glottal stop may—according to the exigencies of the meter—be elided, in which case the final consonant of the preceding word joins by liaison with the initial vowel to form a syllable, as

مرد آمد *mardə 'amad* (˘˘˘˘) or *mar-dā-mad* (˘˘˘)

درافتادم *dar 'uftādam* (˘˘˘˘) or *da-ruf-tā-dam* (˘˘˘˘).

Intervocalic and word-internal glottal stops cannot be elided; and although the 'ayn is pronounced like a glottal stop, it is never subject to elision.

شع انجمن *sham'ā 'anjuman* (˘˘˘˘˘)

§5 N-deletion. Syllable-final *n* preceded by a long vowel is generally not reckoned in scansion. Formerly this must have resulted in nasalization of the vowel; but it is not done in reciting Persian poetry in Iran today, although the practice is general in the Indian subcontinent. Although *n*-deletion does not necessarily occur, it almost always happens with *-ān*, generally also with *-īn*, but seldom with *-ūn*, although it too is found occasionally.

آنرا *ānārā* (˘˘˘)

§6 Retention of Overlong Syllables. An overlong final syllable of any hemistich remains overlong (i.e., one of the anomalous syllables described in

§3 above) and is left unresolved. An overlong syllable is indicated by the symbol ±.

### §7 Contractions.

(a) The conjunctive *vāv* (normally pronounced *-u*) may be contracted before an initial vowel to *v*. In this case many initial *alifs* are dropped (depending on individual editors), as in the following:

*-u in* > *وین vîn*  
*-u ân* > *وان vân*  
*-u az* > *وز vaz*  
*-u agar* > *وگر vagar*

(b) *Vagar* may be further contracted to *ور var*.

(c) *dîgar* is sometimes contracted to *dîgar* (always indicated in the spelling).

(d) In any verbal stem the first syllable of which is short and contains the vowel *-i-* or *-u-*, this vowel may be contracted:

*bugzarîm* ( ~ ~ ~ ± ) > *bugzarîm* ( - ~ ± )  
*binshast* ( ~ ~ ± ) > *binshast* ( - ± )

(e) The vowel of *ki* may be contracted before any word beginning with a vowel. In the case of a word beginning with *â*, the *kâf* is annexed directly to the initial *alif* and the *madda* may be dropped or not; in cases of other than initial *â* the *alif* may be dropped. Examples:

*ki âsimân* > *کاسمان kâsimân*  
*ki û* > *کو or کاور kû*  
*ki ay* > *کای or کی kay*  
*ki in* > *کین or کاین kîn*  
*ki ân* > *کان or کان kân*  
*ki az* > *کز kaz*  
*ki az û* > *کزؤ kazû*

*Ki* may be contracted to *-k* (this almost always occurs in hemistich-final position):

*az ân-ki* > *زآنک zânk*  
*bîdân-ki* > *بدانک bîdânk*

(f) The enclitic pronouns may be annexed directly to contracted *ki*. This is always indicated by the spelling.

*ki-am* > *کم kam*  
*ki-at* > *کت kat*  
*ki-ash* > *کش kash*

(g) The vowel of the enclitic pronouns *-at* and *-ash* may be contracted to fit a given meter:

*pidar-ash* ( ~ ~ - ) > *pidar'sh* ( ~ ± )  
*jân-at âmad* ( - ~ - - ) > *jân't âmad* ( - - - )

(h) In all forms containing the sequence *-a-a-*, the second *a* may be elided. This is sometimes indicated by a variant spelling, although such practice is by no means universal.

*bûda-ast* ( - ~ ± ) > *bûdâst* ( - ± )  
*surma-am* ( - ~ - ) > *surmâm* ( - - )

(i) All Persian (not Arabic) words ending in *-âh* may be contracted to a short vowel *-ah*. These will always be indicated by a variant spelling; they must not be confused with the resulting homographs:

*châh* > *چه chah* "pit, well"  
*shâh* > *شه shah* "king"  
*kâh* > *که kah* "straw"  
*gâh* > *گه gah* "time"  
*mâh* > *ماه mah* "moon"

§8 Protractions. A few words admit protracting, or lengthening, a normally short *u*. These are always indicated by a variant spelling:

*umêd* ( ~ ± ) > *ûmêd* ( - ± )  
*uftâd* ( - ± ) > *ûftâd* ( - ~ ± )

§9 The Silent *Vāv*. For purposes of scansion, the "silent" *vāv* that occurs after *kh-* is entirely disregarded; thus, *khwâst* ("wanted") and *khâst* ("arose") are scanned, as they are pronounced in Iran, exactly alike. For the purposes of rhyme, however, the silent *vāv* must sometimes be reckoned. Long vowels after it are unaffected: *khwâb* rhymes with *tâb* and *khwêsh* rhymes with *pêsh*. However, where the *vāv* is followed by a short vowel and forms the rhyme, the original form must be taken into consideration. Words such as *خوردن* ("to eat") and *خود* ("self"), now pronounced *khurd* and *khud*, were originally pronounced *khward* and *khwad*, and the consonant cluster *khw* was considered one single consonant (similar to the English "qu-" [kw]). The

original vowel of these words, *-a-*, was retained for purposes of rhyme. The cluster represented by *khw* is counted as one consonant. *Khwad* then rhymes with *bad*, and *khward* rhymes with *kard*.

§10 Sample Scansion. The scansion of Persian poetry, like any other technical skill, requires a great deal of practice to arrive at any degree of proficiency. If you have mastered the principles of scansion set down in the preceding pages, you are ready to attempt to scan a line. Take this famous line from Sa'di's *Gulistān*:

جهان ای برادر نمائد بکس      دل اندر جهان آفرین بند و بس

Like every line of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Urdu poetry, this "line" is divided into two halves. Each half is called a **hemistich** (مصراع *misra'* or مصراع *misra'*); the two halves form one line (*bayt* pl. *abyāt*). The hemistiches of this particular line rhyme in *-as*. In the form of poetry called *masnavi*, of which this is an example, hemistiches rhyme one with another within the line, and all lines are of the same meter. The *masnavi* can obviously be extended indefinitely, as there are no restrictions on repetition of rhyme, although to repeat the same rhyme in close proximity is not considered good style.

To begin scansion, the first two syllables pose no ambiguity whatsoever. It makes no difference whether the *-n* in *jahān* is deleted and the *hamza* in 'ay counted, or whether the *-n* is elided to the vowel of *ay*; the result is the same: *ja-hān-'ay* (˘ ˘ ˘) = *ja-hā-nay* (˘ ˘ ˘). The next word poses no difficulty: *ba-rā-dar* (˘ ˘ ˘).

If you are tempted to read *نمائد* as *namānd*, not an illogical assumption at this point, you will have the following scansion:

|    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     |
|----|----|-----|----|----|-----|----|-----|----|----|-----|
| ˘  | -  | -   | ˘  | -  | -   | ˘  | -   | ˘  | ˘  | -   |
| ja | hā | nay | ba | rā | dar | na | mān | də | ba | kas |
| 1  | 2  | 3   | 4  | 5  | 6   | 7  | 8   | 9  | 10 | 11  |

Now try to match the second hemistich to the first. If you are not certain whether or not to join the *l* of *dil* to *andar*, look at the first syllable of the first hemistich: it is unambiguously short. Therefore, *dil andar* is scanned as *di-lan-dar*.

|    |     |     |
|----|-----|-----|
| ˘  | -   | -   |
| di | lan | dar |

Now, if you do not know that *jahān-āfarīn* is a compound noun and are tempted to put an *izāfa* on *jahān*, syllables 7 and 8 will not match:

|    |     |    |     |
|----|-----|----|-----|
| -  | -   | ˘  | -   |
| rā | dar | na | mān |
| -  | -   | -  | ˘   |
| hā | nā  | 'ā | fa  |

If you hesitate to delete the *-n* in syllable 8, look ahead and see what will happen to syllable 10: the two hemistiches will not have the same number of syllables:

|     |    |     |     |     |
|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|
| -   | ˘  | ˘   | -   |     |
| mān | də | ba  | kas |     |
| -   | ˘  | -   | ˘   | -   |
| rī  | nə | ban | du  | bas |

Now *bas* must rhyme with *kas*, and they must be in the same position. At this point it is often a good idea to begin working backwards from the end to see what could be wrong:

|     |     |    |     |
|-----|-----|----|-----|
| -   | ˘   | ˘  | -   |
| mān | də  | ba | kas |
| -   | -   | ˘  | -   |
| rīn | ban | du | bas |

The ninth syllable of the second hemistich does not match what has been derived for the first hemistich. As there can be no doubt that this syllable is long, as shown by the second hemistich, something must be wrong in the first hemistich. If *نمائد* is read *namānad* instead of *namānd*, it will fit the meter of the second hemistich.

Now line the two hemistiches up syllable by syllable, the second directly beneath the first:

|    |     |     |    |    |     |    |     |     |    |     |
|----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|-----|
| ˘  | -   | -   | ˘  | -  | -   | ˘  | -   | -   | ˘  | -   |
| ja | hā  | nay | ba | rā | dar | na | mā  | nad | ba | kas |
| di | lan | dar | ja | hā | nā  | fa | rīn | ban | du | bas |

It is now obvious that the ambiguity of the tenth syllable of the second hemistich has been resolved by its counterpart in the first hemistich and is to be read short. There were no other ambiguities in these two hemistiches. This sequence can be found in the Table of Meters below, N° 17, *mutaqārib mahzūf*.

The meter of this particular poem can be derived from only two hemistiches. This is, however, not particularly representative, for many poems need far more than two hemistiches scanned before the meter can be derived because multiple ambiguities in the same position or positions mask the meter. With perseverance the ambiguities resolve themselves, and with practice the process becomes easier and easier. Once the meter has been derived, every line of the poem must be checked against the meter to ascertain the correct read-

ing. Of course, ambiguities will remain, but the meter will show where most instances of the *izâfa* go and where they do not belong.

Before the meters are listed, a word is in order on the distinction between metrical theory and practice. Since the theoretical underpinnings of Persian metrics were adopted wholesale from Arabic, the theoretical definition of all meters is couched in terms of the Arabic meters. Arabic metrics, however, are as different in practice from Persian as anything imaginable, and although the Arabic system describes well and gives a name to each of the sequences of long and short syllables that constitute the Persian meters, the division into metrical feet occasionally fails to reflect the reality of Persian. The regular meters (those composed of one foot repeated a given number of times, often with an apocopated final foot, like *mutaqârib* ~-~/~-~/~-~/~-, and *ramal* ~-~/~-~/~-~/~-) are perfectly well described by the Arabic system, but certain others are not. For instance, the meter *hazaj akhrab maqbûz mahzûf* (~-~/~-~/~-~/~-), the meter of Nizâmî's *Laylî u Majnûn*, is divided into three feet as shown above because that is how the Arabic system forces the division. The natural rhythm of the line, however, is ~-~/~-~/~-~/~-, and it is one of the most lilting and melodic of all the Persian meters. In short, it is best to think of the meters, without reference to the foot-divisions, as a set sequence, regular or irregular, of long and short syllables. Only in giving a meter a name are the foot-divisions of great consequence.

#### TABLE OF METERS

The following arrangement gives the foot-divisions within a hemistich and the name of the meter once the sequence of short and long syllables has been determined by scansion. The meters are arranged below without regard to foot-division. In any given position, short syllables precede long, i.e., the sequence ~-~/~-~/~-~/~- precedes ~-~/~-~/~-~/~-, which precedes ~-~/~-~/~-~/~-. The symbol ± indicates an overlong syllable. In practice a long syllable and an overlong syllable in hemistich-final position are equivalent.

Note that in meters where two adjacent short syllables are produced, regardless of foot boundaries, one long syllable may always be used as equivalent to the two shorts. The reverse is not true: two short syllables may not substitute for a long syllable.

Hexameter (*musaddas*) and octameter (*musamman*) meters are measured by the line, not the hemistich. Number one below, with four feet to the hemistich, has eight feet in the line; therefore, it is octameter. Number seven, with three feet to the hemistich, has six feet in the line; therefore, it is hexameter.

- |    |   |                       |
|----|---|-----------------------|
| 1. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~   | Ramal mashkûl         |
| 2. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ | Ramal mashkûl makhbûn |

- |     |  |                                |
|-----|--|--------------------------------|
| 3.  | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~  | Mutadârik makhbûn              |
| 4.  | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~  | Ramal mashkûl sâlim            |
|     | ~ - ~ - ~ (this is the <i>ramal makhbûn</i> foot: it may replace the normal <i>ramal</i> foot, ~-~/~-~/~-~/~-, wherever it occurs) |                                |
| 5.  | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ ±  | Ramal makhbûn maqsûr           |
| 6.  | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Gharîb makhbûn                 |
| 7.  | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ ±  | Khafîf makhbûn maqsûr          |
| 8.  | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Khafîf makhbûn                 |
| 9.  | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Mujtass makhbûn makhbûn mahzûf |
| 10. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Mujtass makhbûn mahzûf         |
| 11. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Mujtass makhbûn                |
| 12. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Mujtass makhbûn aslam          |
| 13. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ ±  | Hazaj maqbûz musabbagh         |
| 14. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Rajaz makhbûn matvî            |
| 15. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Hazaj makfûf mahzûf            |
| 16. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ ±   ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ ±  | Muzâri' makfûf maqsûr          |
| 17. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Mutaqârib mahzûf               |
| 18. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Mutaqârib sâlim                |
| 19. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Hazaj sâlim mahzûf             |
| 20. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Hazaj sâlim (murabba')         |
| 21. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Hazaj mahzûf                   |
| 22. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Hazaj sâlim (musaddas)         |
| 23. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Hazaj sâlim (musamman)         |
| 24. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Qarîb sâlim                    |
| 25. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Muzâri' sâlim                  |
| 26. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Rajaz matvî makhbûn            |
| 27. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Rajaz matvî                    |
| 28. | ~ - ~ - ~   ~ - ~ - ~ -   ~ - ~ - ~ -  | Sarî' matvî makshûf            |

29. - √ √ - | - √ √ - | - √ √ - | -      Mujtass matvî makfûf majhûf  
 30. - √ √ - | - √ √ - | - √ √ - | -      Munsarih matvî makshûf  
 31. - √ √ - | - √ ± | - √ √ - | - √ ±      Munsarih matvî mawqûf  
 32. - √ √ - | - √ √ - | - √ √ - | ±      Munsarih matvî mawqûf majdûf  
 33. - √ √ - | √ - - - | - √ √ ±      Mushâkil makfûf maqsûr  
 34. - √ √ - | - √ √ -      Muqtazab matvî  
 35. - √ √ - | - √ √ - | - √ √ - | - √ √ -      Muqtazab matvî (musamman)  
 36. - √ - | √ - - | - √ - | -      Hazaj ashtar mahzûf  
 37. - √ - | √ - - - | - √ - | -      Hazaj ashtar sâlim  
 - √ - - (the *ramal* foot, wherever it occurs, may be reduced to √ - - -, ad libitum)  
 38. - √ - - | √ - - - | - √ - - - | -      Ramal sâlim makhbûn mahzûf  
 39. - √ - - | √ - - - | - √ - - - | -      Ramal sâlim makhbûn majhûf  
 40. - √ - - | √ - - - | - √ - -      Khafîf sâlim makhbûn  
 41. - √ - - | √ - - - | - ±      Khafîf sâlim makhbûn aslam musabbagh  
 42. - √ - - | - √ - - - | - √ - - -      Mutadârik sâlim  
 43. - √ - - | - √ - - - | -      Mushâkil mahzûf  
 44. - √ - - | - √ - - - | -      Mushâkil sâlim  
 45. - √ - - - | -      Ramal sâlim (murabba')  
 46. - √ - - - | - √ - - - | -      Madîd sâlim  
 47. - √ - - - | - √ - - - | -      Ramal mahzûf (musaddas)  
 48. - √ - - - | - √ - - - | -      Ramal sâlim (musaddas)  
 49. - √ - - - | - √ - - - | - √ - - -      Ramal mahzûf (musamman)  
 50. - √ - - - | - √ - - - | - √ - - -      Ramal sâlim (musamman)  
 51. - √ - - - | - √ - - - | -      Gharîb sâlim  
 52. - √ - - - | - √ - - - | - √ - - -      Khafîf sâlim  
 53. - √ - √ - √ - √ - | -      Hazaj akhrab maqbûz mahzûf  
 54. - √ - √ - √ - √ - | - √ - - - | ±      Hazaj akhrab maqbûz sâlim azall

55. - - - √ - - - √ - - - | -      Hazaj akhrab makfûf mahzûf  
 56. - - - √ - - - √ - - -      Qarîb akhrab makfûf sâlim  
 57. - - - √ - - - - | - √ - - -      Hazaj akhrab sâlim  
 58. - - - - | √ - - - - | √ - - - - | √ - - -      Mujtass sâlim makhbûn makhbûn maqsûr  
 59. - - - | - √ - - - √ - - - - | -      Muzâri' akhrab makfûf mahzûf  
 60. - - - | - √ - - - √ - - -      Muzâri' akhrab makfûf sâlim  
 61. - - - | - √ - - - - | - √ - - -      Muzâri' akhrab sâlim makfûf sâlim  
 62. - - - | - √ - - - - | - √ - - -      Muzâri' akhrab sâlim  
 63. - - - - | - √ - - - - | -      Basît sâlim  
 64. - - - - | - √ - - - - | - √ - - -      Mujtass sâlim  
 65. - - - - | - √ ±      Rajaz muzâl (murabba')  
 66. - - - - | - √ - - - - | -      Rajaz sâlim (musaddas)  
 67. - - - - | - √ - - - - | - √ - - -      Rajaz sâlim (musamman)  
 68. - - - - | - √ - - - -      Sarî' sâlim  
 69. - - - | - √ - - - -      Mutaqârib aslam sâlim  
 70. - - - - | - √ - - - - | - √ - - -      Munsarih sâlim

## THE METER OF THE RUBÂ'Î

The meters of the *rubâ'î* are all variants of *hazaj*; however, unlike all other poetic forms, where, with the sole exception of the *ramal* foot (√ - - - - → √ - - - - ad libitum), internal changes of the established meter are not allowed, in the *rubâ'î*, once either *akhrab* or *akhrab* is established, any variant may be used in any of the four hemistiches of the *rubâ'î*.

|                |         |         |         |       |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| <i>Akhrab:</i> | - - -   | - - -   | - - √   | √ - - |
|                | - - -   | - - -   | - - -   | -     |
|                | - - √   | - - √   | √ - - - | -     |
|                | - - √   | - - √   | √ - - √ | √ - - |
|                | - - -   | - - -   | √ - - - | -     |
| <i>Akhrab:</i> | - - √   | √ - - - | - - √   | √ - - |
|                | √ - - - | - - -   | - - -   | -     |



|         |         |     |
|---------|---------|-----|
| ~ - - ~ | ~ - - - | -   |
| ~ - - ~ | ~ - - ~ | ~ - |
| ~ - - - | ~ - - - | -   |
| ~ - - - | ~ - - ~ | ~ - |

## SYNOPSIS OF POETICAL FORMS AND RHYME

## Definitions

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| بيت <i>bayt</i>       | stich, verse, line   |
| فرد <i>fard</i>       | one detached hemistich   |
| مصراع <i>misra'</i>   | hemistich, half-verse, half-line                                   |
| مطلع <i>matla'</i>    | first stich of a <i>qasida</i> or <i>ghazal</i>                    |
| مقطع <i>maqta'</i>    | last stich of a <i>qasida</i> or <i>ghazal</i>                     |
| تخلص <i>takhallus</i> | pen name (often included in the <i>maqta'</i> of a <i>ghazal</i> ) |

## Multiple-rhyme Form:

|                |               |           |                            |
|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| <i>Masnavi</i> | Rhyme scheme: | ...a/...a | Length: unrestricted;      |
| مشوی           |               | ...b/...b | topic: unrestricted,       |
|                |               | ...c/...c | narrative                  |
|                |               | ...n/...n | ("n" indicates any length) |

## Monorhyme Forms:

|               |               |           |   |
|---------------|---------------|-----------|---|
| <i>Qasida</i> | Rhyme scheme: | ...a/...a | Length: 10 to 100+  |
| قصیده         |               | ...x/...a | lines; topic: encomiastic, eulogistic, elegiac ( <i>marsiya</i> ) |
|               |               | ...n/...a |   |
| <i>Ghazal</i> | Rhyme scheme: | ...a/...a | Length: 2-15 lines;   |
| غزل           |               | ...x/...a | topic: erotic, lyric  |
|               |               | ...n/...a |   |
| <i>Qit'a</i>  | Rhyme scheme: | ...x/...a | Length: 2-15 lines;   |
| قطعه          |               | ...x/...a | topic: unrestricted   |
| <i>Rubā'i</i> | Rhyme scheme: | ...a/...a | Length: 2 lines;  |
| رباعی         |               | ...x/...a | topic: unrestricted   |

Strophic forms are *ghazals*, which form stanzas, separated one from another by two rhyming hemistiches. In a *tarkib-band* the rhyming hemistiches are different between every two stanzas; in a *tarji'-band* the rhyming hemistiches are a refrain repeated between every two stanzas.

|                     |           |                     |           |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
| <i>Tarkib-band:</i> | ...a/...a | <i>Tarji'-band:</i> | ...a/...a |
|                     | ...x/...a |                     | ...x/...a |
|                     | ...n/...a |                     | ...n/...a |
|                     | ...b/...b |                     | ...b/...b |
|                     | ...c/...c |                     | ...c/...c |
|                     | ...x/...c |                     | ...x/...c |
|                     | ...n/...c |                     | ...n/...c |
|                     | ...d/...d |                     | ...b/...b |

The *mukhammas* consists of five hemistiches per strophe, the fifth hemistich serving as a refrain. It has the following rhyme scheme:

...a/...a  
 ...a/...a  
 ...a  
 ...b/...b  
 ...b/...b  
 ...a

Rhyme (*qāfiya*) technically consists of one vowel, long or short, plus one or more consonants. Rhyme may be masculine or feminine. An example of masculine rhyme is the rhyme in the second selection on page 1, *darāz* and *bāz*. An example of feminine rhyme is the rhyme in the first line of the first selection on page 1, *sazāvāri* and *bāri*, where the rhyme is *-ār*. Anything extra that follows the rhyme itself is loosely termed *radif*, like the final *i* in the last example. The *radif* can be extended indefinitely, and a good example is the *ghazal* by Ghālib on page 98, in which the rhyme is *-ar*. The *radif*, necessarily repeated whenever the rhyme comes, is *natavān guft*.

✱

In the texts of the poems, grammatical points of early New Persian that differ from modern Persian are noted, and references are keyed to my *Introduction to Persian* (Bethesda, Md.: Iranbooks, 1993). Allusions deemed unfamiliar to American students are also explained in the notes. The vocabulary in the back is intended to be a vocabulary for this book, not a dictionary. In a few instances the basic meaning of a word never occurred in the poetry, so the meanings given all reflect secondary or extended meanings. On the other hand, since the

poetic lexicon of Persian is fairly small, this vocabulary probably represents most of the words one is likely to encounter in poetry at large.

One of the most notable features of classical Persian is its conservatism, not only in terms of the literary tradition, but also linguistically. With only one major grammatical change (the function of *-râ*, for which see *Introduction to Persian*, p. 197, §82), the language of the poetry, even of a thousand years ago, is so close to today's living language that it can be easily read and understood by any educated speaker of Persian. In contrast, the English contemporary with Rûdakî is more alien to us than German or Dutch and has to be learned like any other foreign language. The earliest poem the editors of *The Oxford Book of English Verse* could find that bears any resemblance to the language we speak dates from the thirteenth century, but the first pages of the *Oxford Book* can be read only with many more glosses and annotations than are necessary for the non-native learner to read Persian poetry from the tenth century.

The flow of classical Persian, particularly poetry, does not readily lend itself to European-style punctuation. Traditionally, of course, Persian had no punctuation of any sort—no question marks, commas, periods, or quotation marks. A certain amount of punctuation, however, is helpful, particularly question and quotation marks, and these have been introduced into the text here. It should be noted that the punctuation does not affect the scansion in any way, i.e., liaison occurs across any and all marks of punctuation.

This book is intended as a learner's introduction to Persian poetry. It is not intended as an anthology, although I hope it may serve both functions. I have chosen poems that seem representative of each poet, and usually they are also coincidentally among each poet's best. Excluded on principle, however, are poems that contain lines too difficult or obscure for the learner. By and large I have tried to resist the temptation to include poems that contain one or two "great lines" everybody knows, the rest falling into the so-so category. It is no coincidence, however, that the first lines of many poems are obviously superior to the rest, for, in accordance with the rhetorical principle of *husn-i matla'*, the first line should be catchy and memorable. Many of the poems included here have been taken from Dr. Zabihullâh Safâ's anthology, *Ganj-i sukhan: Shâ'irân-i buzurg-i pârsîgûyū muntakhab-i âsâr-i ânân*, 3 volumes (4th revised ed., Tehran: Ibn-i Sînâ, 1969). Other good anthologies are Mazâhir Musaffâ, *Qand-i Pârsî: Nimûnahâ-yi shî'r-i darî* (Tehran: Safî Alî Shâh, 1348/1970), and 'Abdul-Rafî' Haqîqat, *Nigîn-i sukhan*, 6 vols. (Tehran: Âftâb-i Haqîqat, 1363–67).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many students with whom I have read Persian poetry over the last twenty years at Harvard. Their comments and questions have formed the basis of this book.