

The Concepts of “Al-aqdamo asahh” and “Yaqin-e sābeq,”

and the Problem of Semi-fakes

In his introductory essay to the text of the *Nasihāt al-moluk* attributed to Mohammad-e Ghazzāli, the editor J. Homāi, enumerates a series of discrepancies between the second part of the text and other works by Ghazzāli, but subsequently berates his own reasoning as speculative and too weak to invalidate the *yaqin-e sābeq*, (i.e. the long accepted attribution to Ghazzāli).¹ Other editors use another time-related concept, the criteria of *al-aqdamo asahh* (the older is more correct), in comparing the merits of two different manuscripts of the same text. While these are certainly valid concepts, their indiscriminate application may be problematic. To illustrate this concern, a few examples are produced here below. All are “semi-fakes,” i.e. documents that were produced close to the time of the originals they purport to represent, but forgeries nonetheless. Sadly, all of them bear the authentication stamp of modern scholarship.

Outright forgery

The so called letter of Teymur to Charles VI of France

In the course of May 1403, unexpectedly arrived in Paris a foreign clergyman claiming that he carried a letter from Teymur (r. 1370-1405) for Charles VI of France (r.1380-1422).² This self-proclaimed ambassador was the Dominican archbishop of Soltāniyyé, a certain Monsignor John. The letter he delivered to Charles VI (Archives Nationales, Paris, AE/III/204, see **PI**. 1) along with a contemporary translation into Latin, as well as a copy of the king of France’s reply to Teymur were all preserved in the French royal archives. Sylvestre de Sacy first published them in 1822.³ A century later, the eminent Iranian scholar Mohammad-e Ghazvini, writing from Paris for the journal *Kāvé*, and in deference to de Sacy, apologetically stated that “whatever had to be said

¹ Homāi, J., Preface to *Nasifat al-moluk*, Tehran 1367/1988

² Kehren, L., *La route de Samarkand au temps de Tamerlan*, Paris 1990, p. 50

³ De Sacy, S., “Mémoire sur une correspondance inédite de Tamerlan avec Charles VI,” in *Mémoires de l’Institut Royal de France, Académie des Belles-Lettres*, tome VI, Paris, 1822.

in this respect was already said” and that the only purpose of his article was to reproduce the letter - which was not technically possible at the time of de Sacy - and to provide Kāvé’s Persian readers an updated reading of the letter along with an illustration.⁴ Ghazvini then presented his own version of the text with eighteen footnotes that were meant to explain the content of an incongruous document full of mistakes. The problematic reading of each word or sentence was given an alternative meaning, or construed as a mistake due to the scribe’s inadvertence (*sahv-e kāteb*), but not once did he mention, or insinuate, that the document was a forgery. By way of explanation, he blamed the numerous errors and the mediocre physical aspect of the letter to the “lack of prestige of the king of France at the court of Teymur!”⁵

Contrary to Ghazvini’s contention, form and appearance was of prime importance to Teymur. As a conqueror ruling in the name of Changizid puppets, he strove to outshine his predecessors, and compensated lack of legitimacy with grandiose projects, dazzling camp quarters and ambassadorial pomp. Thus if the Il-Khāns or Jalāyerids had commissioned Qorāns, Teymur’s Qorān had to be monumental and the largest ever made.⁶ By this argument, it is highly unlikely that Teymur’s chancery would have used a diminutive piece of paper measuring 16 x 17.3 cm, when Il-Khānid diplomatic correspondence was previously drafted on substantially larger papers:⁷

Letters of	Date	Dimensions
Arghun to Pope Nicholas IV	1290	88.1 x 42 cm
Ghāzān to Pope Boniface VIII	1302	110.2 x 26.4 cm
Oljāyту to Philippe Le Bel of France	1305	302 x 50 cm

Small size notwithstanding, the physical appearance of the letter is far from royal. A royal scribe would have never used such a poor calligraphy, awkward layout, inconsistent lines, and watered down ink, even if as suggested recently, the scribe was

⁴ Ghazvini, M., “Nāmé-ye Amir Teymur bé Charles sheshom pādshāh-e farānsé” in *Bist Maqālé-ye Ghazvini*, ed. Eqbāl, A., and Purdāvud, E., Tehran, 1332/1353, pp. 50-62.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶ Soudavar, A., *Art of the Persian courts*, New York, 1992, pp. 59-62.

⁷ Mostaert, A. and Cleaves, F. W., “Trois Documents Mongols des Archives Secrètes Vaticanes,” *HJAS*, vol. 15, 1992, p. 424.

an Uyghur writing in Persian.⁸ Whether, a correspondence was in Persian or in Uyghur, important or routine, addressed to a foreign head of state or to a local administrator, the ink, as primary tool of the chancery scribe was consistently black. Furthermore, an unprofessional look in diplomatic correspondence reflected poorly on the sender, and not on the recipient as Ghazvini wished to imply.

As to France's supposed low prestige with Teymur, it is simply baseless and unsubstantiated. Once Teymur defeated the Ottomans, his attention shifted eastward as he began to nurture the idea of a campaign against China. Still, it is unlikely that he would unnecessarily belittle the French and leave a potential enemy at his backdoor. Judging from the honorable treatment of the two Castilian ambassadors who were in the Ottoman camp at the battle of Ankara, the release and return of Christian woman prisoners captured by the Ottomans, and the honors he bestowed on another Castilian ambassador, the famous Clavijo (d. 1412), Teymur was conscious about his image in foreign lands and made an effort to impress foreign powers.⁹ Moreover, since the time of the Mongols, the *Jāme` al-tavārikh* embodied Turco-Persian perception of western powers. Accordingly, Afranj or the Land of the Franks (i.e. France) was the paramount western power, once ruled by such great emperors as Augustus and Carolus Magnus!¹⁰ Within this frame of thought, France's prestige couldn't be less than Castille's.

The only possible explanation for the poor physical appearance, and numerous - orthographic and compositional - errors is that it was a forgery made by a person with a poor knowledge of the Persian language, and unfamiliar with chancery practices, who composed this letter by combining haphazard elements of inappropriate documents. The most revealing error in this respect is the opening sentence (see **PI. 1**) which reads:

امیر کبیر تمر کوران زید عمره

The Great Amir, Temor Kurān, may God prolong his life.

Two words are misspelled in this sentence. The first is the word Teymur spelled "Temor" without the "yā" and the "vāv." Although Ghazvini explains at great length its

⁸ Kehren, *La route*, p. 324

⁹ Kehren, *La route*, p.45

¹⁰ Evidently "Afranj" referred to the European nation as a whole, much the way Persians refer nowadays to Europe as "Farang." For a reproduction of this section of the *Jāme` al-tavārikh*, see Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, p. 65.

etymology, and tries to justify its novel spelling as one reflecting the Turkish pronunciation of the word 'iron' (*tOmŌr*),¹¹ the fact is that because Il-Khānid princes and rulers had previously used the same name, “تيمور” had become a standard spelling in chancery writings.¹² A standard spelling already used in correspondence, as well as coinage and edicts, was not subject to change.¹³ The second mistake is the word Gurkān (*gŌragŌn*), misspelled as Kurān. Gurkān was an honorific epithet applicable to Turco-Mongols who married a Changizid princess. It was a long established title held by many Mongol dignitaries and one that Teymur proudly exploited after marrying a Changizid princess. Ghazvini simply declared it a “scribal mistake”; but no scribe dared to mutilate Teymur's sole claim to nobility.

Besides misspelled words in this opening sentence, the inclusion of the word *kabir* (great) and the well wishing sentence at the end are inappropriately used in reference to a ruler who is the *sender* of the letter. Even more surprising is the fact that, in the Latin translation that the archbishop provided for the heading, “*zida `omrohu*” is not translated. Instead, Teymur's name and epithet is followed by the non-translated word “*Sosumus*” which corresponds to the Turkish word *sozumiz*, a derivative of *sozi*; both meaning “has said.”¹⁴

Following an Il-Khānid practice, *farmāns* of Teymur began with the formula: “Soyurghātmish Khān *yarlighindin* (has spoken), Teymur Gurkān *sozumiz* (has said),” in which Soyurghātmish was the name of the puppet Changizid *khān* whom Teymur had elevated to the throne.¹⁵ During the last years of Teymur's reign, the name of the *khān* was dropped and the *farmāns* began with the heading: “Teymur Gurkān *sozumiz*”.

¹¹ Doerfer, G., *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, vol. II, Wiesbaden, 1965, p. 666.

¹² Amongst the last Il-Khānid puppet rulers were Toghā-Teymur (r. 1438-1455) in Khorāsān and Shāh-Jahān Teymur (r. 1441-42) in Baghdad.

¹³ For an exceptional change in the spelling of a Mongol word see Soudavar, A., “Do nokté dar tārikh-e moghol,” *Iranshenasi*, vol. VIII, 1996, Washington, pp. 86-88.

¹⁴ The Latin translation begins with the sentence: “Themur Kurancan Sosumus,...”; Kehren, *La Route*, p. 295.

¹⁵ Soyurghātmish was later on replaced by his infant son Mahmud. It is interesting to note that, Teymur's rebellious son, Mirānshāh, who wished to establish an independent rule in Tabriz, deleted the name of his father from his *farmāns* but maintained the name of Teymur's puppet khān: *Soltān Mafmud Khān yarlighindin*, *Mirānshāh Gurkān sozumiz*; see Fekete, L., *Einführung in die Persische Paleographie*, Budapest 1977, plate 1.

It is the latter formula that the writer of the “Teymur Letter” must have heard or seen, without having an actual example. What he had on hand was probably a copy of a petition submitted to Teymur, addressing him as “Amir-e Kabir” followed by the wish for long life. He copied its heading, thinking that *zida `omrohu*, was actually representing *sozumiz*. The rest of the letter is a similar pastiche of incongruent sentences and formulae.

Who was the culprit? The most likely candidate is the one who benefited most from this forgery: the archbishop of Soltāniyyé who gained fame and fortune by bluffing his way into the French court.¹⁶ As a Christian clergyman, he inspired confidence, and as the writer of the Persian letter, its translator and the sole interpreter of the events, he could describe the facts as he wished.¹⁷ The Europeans were eager to hear about the ruler who had defeated the Ottoman Bāyazid I (r.1389-1402). Bāyazid’s inroads into Europe and Byzantine territories, as well as his defeat of the Christian coalition forces in 1398 at Nicopolis, had made him the archenemy of Europe and Christianity. Thus, the supposed ambassador from the mysterious oriental conqueror Teymur, who had – temporarily - eliminated the Ottoman threat, and had freed Christian prisoners, was to be well received in Paris and other European capitals. From Paris he went to England, Venice, Hungary, and Constantinople, at each stage accumulating letters of recommendations and ambassadorial missions for his next visit. He was meant to carry the reply of Charles VI to Teymur, but never went back to Soltāniyyé, fearing the wrath of Teymur and the consequences of his misrepresentations.¹⁸

Validated by Ghazvini’s seal of approval, “Teymur’s letter” is regularly referred to, and studied as an authentic historical document by both Persian and Western scholars. Most recently, a French specialist of the Teymurid era, L. Kehren devoted a considerable section of his book on Clavijo, to “Teymur’s letter” and its consequences.

¹⁶ Monsignor John had been transferred from Nakhjavān to Soltāniyyé in the year 1398; Kehren, *La route*, p. 51. While the previous bishops were French, and judging by the Hispano-Italian naming of the king of France in the letter as “Malek Rey de Francia” (see Pl. 1), Monsignor John was probably of Italian origin. A contemporary chronicle (idem) seems to corroborate this assumption.

¹⁷ He even dated his letter within three days after Teymur's victory, perhaps claiming that he was in the retinue of Teymur at the battle of Ankara. Teymur’s victory was on July 28, 1402, and the letter is supposedly dated in the Latin translation (First of Moharram 805) August 1, 1402, Kehren, *La route*, pp. 295-96.

¹⁸ He died in 1412 in Ukraine; *ibid.*, p. 52.

For added precaution, he enlisted the help of a Persian scholar, the late M. Mahjoub, for the correct translation of the famous letter.¹⁹ Unwilling to contradict the authority of the renowned Ghazvini, Mahjoub gave a slightly modified reading without evoking forgery, thus perpetuating the six-century old embassy myth of the archbishop.

Modified or added Colophons

An early copy of Nasiroddin-e Tusi's hall-e Moshkelāt al-Eshārāt

In 1994, Sotheby's of London offered for sale an early copy of Nasir al-din Tusi's commentary on Ebn-e Sinā's *Al-Eshārāt va al-Tanbihāt* with a colophon (PI. 2a) that referred to Nasir al-din's original draft (completed in the month of Safar of the year 644/1246), and stated the completion date of the manuscript in the following terms:

.. 18th of Jamādā al-Okhrā of the year 678 (1279) at the Library of Neḥāmīyya Madrasa, may God bless the soul of its founder, at Madinat al-salām (Baghdad)....²⁰

In consideration of the colophon date, Sotheby's consultant, Y.H. Safadi, a scholar of Arabic calligraphy and manuscripts, claimed that this was the earliest known copy of Nasir al-din Tusi's commentary.²¹ However, the calligraphy style and the general "look" of the manuscript pointed to a later production date, and further investigation was necessary to reject, or ascertain, this claim.

On first inspection, the ink, the handwriting and the paper was the same throughout the manuscript (including the colophon page). A seal-mark on the left of the colophon had been erased and an inscription on the right was smeared. It was not an uncommon problem; many manuscripts bear traces of wiping and smearing of seal-marks or librarian attestations. In addition to the smeared parts, the central portion of the whole colophon page was curiously damaged, as if a liquid had spilled accidentally and was then wiped out. What distinguished the damage here from elsewhere was that the wiping had affected preceding pages: the spilled liquid was so strong that vapors

¹⁹ Kehren, *La route*, p. 294.

²⁰ Sotheby's, London, catalog of April 27th, 1994, lot 55, p. 44..

²¹ The relevant section of the entry stated: "This is one of the earliest, possibly the earliest known copy of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's commentary on Ibn Sina's *Al-Isharat wa 'l-Tanbihat*. As far as it is possible to determine the next earliest copies A.H. 692/A.D. 1291 (a manuscript copied at al-Madrasah al-Sharifa al-Mustansiriya, Baghdad, sold in these rooms 26th April 1982, lot 136), A.H. 724/A.D. 1353 (in the Parliamentary Library in Tehran) and A.H.754/A.D.1353 (in the Reza Library in Mashhad);" idem.

from the colophon page had stained several pages. The stained areas decreased in size as one moved further away from the colophon page. Furthermore, a concentrated drop on the bottom part of the colophon had created a hole in that page, and - in decreasing sizes - in previous pages. The penetrating damages, stains as well as holes, suggested that the liquid used to wipe out the ink was a diluted acid, even though ink is soluble in water and no acid was necessary to wipe out seal-marks.²²

A closer look revealed that the name of the scriptorium, which appeared within the partially wiped center part of the colophon, had been scratched and replaced with “*madrasa al-Nezāmiyya*.” Although the Nezāmiyya was a very prestigious institution, the changing of the scriptorium name alone didn’t substantially add to the value of the manuscript. The most important feature of the manuscript was the early date of its colophon, which seemed authentic when inspected with a 3X magnifying glass. The giveaway was the double dot on the “tā” of ستمائه : while the original scribe used two separated dots in a slanting position, the forger used two connected dots in an almost horizontal position. Upon verification with a 10X magnifying glass it was clear that he had masterfully transformed سبعمائنه into ستمائه . The dating was thus changed from 778 to 678. As a result, the lengthy scriptorium name had to be changed as well, because the original scriptorium was probably a Baghdad institution that did not exist in 678/1279 but was running in the year 778/1377. One such institution was the Marjān Madrasa, edified in Baghdad in 758/1357 by Marjān, a general of the Jalāyerid Soltān Ovays (r. 1356-74).²³

The wiping and smearing was in reality a smoke screen to camouflage the alterations brought to the date and the scriptorium name.

The Bodleian sovar al-kavākeb al-thābeta

The Bodleian *sovar al-kavākeb* (March 144) is a famous manuscript, regularly cited as the earliest illustrated Arabic manuscript and a quasi original copy of an important astronomical work, produced in the year 400/1009-10. Its fame rests on this

²² The edges of the holes were subsequently cut and squared, perhaps to suppress the acid-corroded look of the hole contours.

²³ Duri, A., *Baghdad*, EI2, vol. I, 903b.

accepted dating, and the belief that it was copied by Hosayn, the son of its author, `Abd al-Rahmān b. `Omar al-Sufi (903-986) within two decades after his father's death. The fact that `Abd al-Rahmān had dedicated his work to the celebrated Buyid ruler, `Azod al-dowla (r.949-83) adds to the mystic of such a manuscript.

Unfortunately, all these assumptions are derived from a two-line addition below the original colophon (see **PI. 2b**):

كتبه و صوره الحسين بن عبدالرحمن بن عمر بن محمد، في سنة اربع مائه

“Has written it and drawn it, al-Hosayn b. `Abd al-Rahmān b.`Omar b. Mohammad, in the year four hundred (1009-10).”

The comparison of these lines with the original colophon,²⁴ immediately reveals the following discrepancies between the two sections:

1. The ink is different; it is black-brown in the original section and red in the added colophon. A recent study by Barbara Brend, tries to justify the red ink, as one linked to the “plotting” of the red dotted stars within the constellation figures, while the original black and brown ink is associated with the rest of drawings.²⁵ Unfortunately, the proposed division of labor between two artists, one to draw the constellations and the other, solely to position the stars in celestial figures, is without precedence and highly unlikely. Furthermore, such theory does not account for the use of the word *savvara-ho* (has drawn it) by the supposed painter-scribe, which in no way insinuates a *partial* responsibility for the drawing.
2. Each of the two lines of the first section of the colophon end with three circles in a triangular composition. Such symbols were usually added to prevent additions to the colophon. The second part has no such symbol.




²⁴ Wellesz, E., “An Early Al-Sufi Manuscript in the Bodleian Library in Oxford: A Study in Islamic Constellation Images,” in *Ars Orientalis*, vol. III, 1959, pl.15, fig.35. The original colophon reads:

تم الكتاب و الحمد لله رب العالمين و صلى الله على نبيه محمد و آله و سلم تسليماً

[This] book has been completed, and praised be Allāh, the God of the Two Worlds, and God bless the Prophet Mofammad and his Family, and grant them full salvation.

²⁵ Brend, B., “A Reconsideration of the Book of Constellations of 400/1009-10 in the Bodleian Library,” in *The Art of the Saljuqs in Iran and Anatolia*, ed. R. Hillenbrand, Costa Mesa, CA, 1994, p. 90.

3. The present colophon page displays only a fraction of the original one. Nevertheless, what is left of the original page is sufficient to indicate a difference between the handwriting of the last two lines and that of the earlier sections. The most visible difference is in the treatment of the *sarkesh* (the slanted upper line) of the *kāf* letter, which extends beyond its vertical ascendant in the text area and the initial colophon, but stops at the ascendant in the added colophon (see below):

Text within table area	The initial colophon	The added colophon
		

The high quality of this manuscript implies that it could not be an isolated work, and works of similar or lesser quality existed and paved the way for such composition. Yet no illustrated manuscript appear before the twelfth century. As we are suggesting forgery, the question is how did the forger come up with the name of `Abd al-Rahmān's son? The answer is simple: the author's *konya* was Abol-Hosayn, literally meaning the father of Hosayn. The name of the author's son as scribe and painter was the safest to justify an early date.

More importantly, the signature of a painter on such early work is unprecedented. In the climate of orthodoxy that prevailed in the Persian lands prior to the Mongol invasions, painting was not encouraged and no painter dared to inscribe his name. Signatures for manuscript painting only began to appear in the fifteenth century and gained currency towards the end of the sixteenth century. In a comprehensive article by E. Wellesz who unfortunately accepts the added colophon at face value, this manuscript is compared to a number of twelfth and thirteenth century copies of the same work with comparable qualities.²⁶ Based on stylistic similarities, this manuscript must be dated to the same period.²⁷

²⁶ Wellesz, *An Early Al-Sufi*, pp. 1-26.

²⁷ Brend also concludes that most of the drawings of the manuscript are from the Saljuq period; Brend, *A Reconsideration*, p. 91-92.

What has hitherto prevented the outright dismissal of the added colophon, is perhaps the fact that the colophon page incorporates Latin inscriptions written in Constantinople in 1644 by one Christianus Ravius who boasts to have copied the missing parts from a more recent copy of the work.²⁸ The added colophon was there in 1644 and therefore judged as authentic in recent studies. But forgery is not a modern invention; from times immemorial colophons have been “improved” and dates have been altered.

Added dedicatory notations and embellishments

Manuscript of Akhlāq-e Mohseni

In the 1530's, a Tabrizi painting-atelier which occasionally produced high quality manuscripts, systematically added commercial grade illuminations and miniatures to a cache of non-illustrated manuscripts that it had found.²⁹ The cache of manuscripts seems to have come from the Herāt library-atelier of one of Teymurid princes who had fled the Sheybāni occupation of Khorāsān.³⁰ The atelier targeted two groups of potential unsophisticated buyers: one Safavid and one Ottoman. As it switched production from one target to the other, it modified the headgear in the paintings, from the Safavid *tāj-e heydari* with its distinctive Qezelbāsh red baton, to what was supposed to be a Khorāsānian one (see for instance **Pls. 3a, b**). In reality, the latter looked more Ozbak than Khorāsānian: the central cap within the turban was pointed and conical in the Ozbak fashion, and the fur-trimmed hat of Soltān-Hosayn Bāyqarā (r.1470-1506) imitated a high status Ozbak headgear.³¹ But it did not matter. It was intended for

²⁸ Wellesz, *An Early Al-Sufi*, pp. 1-2.

²⁹ See Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, pp. 118-19. Two recently published works from the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, should be added to list of this Tabrizi atelier works: a *Divān of Soltān-Hosayn* (B-284) with high quality “Safavid” paintings, and another Turkish *divān*, the collected poems of Shaykhzādē `Atāi (B-2456), with commercial grade paintings featuring the conical headgear; Petrosyan, Y.A., et al. *Pages of Perfection*, Lugano, 1995, pp. 208-17.

³⁰ Manuscripts that seem to indicate a provenance from the Teymurid Herāt libraries are the *Divān of Soltān-Hosayn* (Topkapu Saray Library, H.1636), and the triple text manuscript from the same library discussed here below (note 36 infra).

³¹ For the conical Ozbak headgear see Petrosyan, et al. *Pages*, pp. 210-14, 236, 294. For the fur trimmed hat of the Ozbak ruler see Soudavar, *Art of*, p. 181, and folios 40-41 from the *Makhzan al-asrār* manuscript of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Supp. Persan 985), reproduced in *Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, ed. Gray., B., London, 1979, pp. 254-55, and in Richard, F., *Splendeur Persanes*, Paris, 1997, p. 145.

Ottomans who disliked the *tāj-e heydari*, the symbol of Safavid militancy, but wished to acquire illustrated manuscripts from Teymurid Herāt which rivaled in reputation those from the royal Safavid atelier of Tabriz.³² Forged inscriptions were added when the connection to Herāt was weak or non-existent.

A recently published manuscript, displays yet another example of additions and alterations by this Tabrizi atelier. It was recognized as the “earliest copy of the *Akhlāq-e Mohseni*” dated in the same year as the original work was supposedly written by its author Kāshefi for Abol-Mohsen Mirzā son of Soltān-Hosayn Bāyqarā.³³ The manuscript was genuine and perhaps copied in the 1520’s. But the forgers had subsequently split the first folio and inserted a double-page illustration in between the *shamsé* page and the opening text page.³⁴ The lack of Safavid headgear and the Teymurid affiliation of the work suggest that the manuscript was destined for the Ottoman market. To further enhance the value, the following sentence was inscribed into the original *shamsé* (PI. 3c):

برسم پیشکش و کتابخانه پادشاهزاده اعظم شاه ابوالمحسن گورکان اتمام پذیرفت سنه ۹۰۰

Was completed as a present for the library of the exalted prince Shāh Abol-Mohsen Gurkān; the year 900 (1494).

The giveaway is the use of the epithet “Gurkān” for Abol-Mohsen Mirzā: he was not married to a Changizid princess and therefore not entitled to this honorific epithet.³⁵ A similar mistake can be detected in alterations brought to a recently published Mozaffarid manuscript (Topkapu Saray Library H.1510).³⁶ Illustrations in the usual style

³² Most of the manuscripts for the Ottoman markets were copies of works by Soltān Hosayn Bāyqarā and Amir `Ali Shir Navāi, the two best-known literary figures and art patrons of Herāt, Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, p. 181.

³³ Sotheby’s, London, catalog of Apr. 23, 1997, pp. 85-86.

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ Among the sons of Soltān Hosayn, only Mozaffar-Hosayn Mirzā was a Gurkān; Khādamir, *Habib al-siyar*, ed. Dabir-Siyāqi, M., Tehran, vol. III, 1353/1974, pp. 245, 256-57

³⁶ The manuscript combines three different texts: the *Shāhnāmé* of Ferdowsi, the *Loghat al-Fors* of Asadi and the *Khamsé* of Nezāmi; Soucek, P. and Cagman, F., “A Royal Manuscript and Its Transformation: The Life History of a Book,” *The Book in the Islamic World*, ed. Atiyyeh, G., New York, 1995, pp. 179-208.

of the above mentioned Tabrizi atelier as well as complicated colophons and *shamsés* had been inserted.³⁷

An added inscription names the patron as “Abol-mozaffar al-Soltān Hosayn-e Gurkāni.”³⁸ The forger was obviously not familiar with Teymurid protocol. Firstly, “Abol-mozaffar” was the *konya* used for Safavid rulers and not Teymurids.³⁹ Secondly Soltān-Hosayn’s *konya* was “Abol-ghāzi.” Thirdly, for the Turco-Mongols, *gurkān* was an individual’s epithet that could not be extended to a whole dynasty. Thus, Soltān-Hosayn was not a *gurkān* and the Herāt Teymurids were never addressed by their subjects as “Gurkāni.” Fourthly, “Soltān” was an integral part of Soltān-Hosayn’s name as in Soltān-Mohammad and Soltān-`Ali, or as “Shāh” in Shāh-Mahmud; these were honorific epithets used in conjunction with the names of the Prophet and the Imams. Therefore, the article “al” was never combined with “Soltān-Hosayn” in official Teymurid documents for if it did, it would brake the name in two and reduce the ruler’s name to Hosayn.

Since the Tabrizi atelier was active in the 1530s, this manuscript of the *Akhlāq-e Mohseni* was copied within thirty or forty years of the original text by Kāshefi. It is certainly a valuable text but may still distort the efforts of an editor who accepts the added inscription as genuine.

Mistaken authors

Nasihāt al-moluk

Homāi rejected his own observations concerning the stylistic and ideological discrepancies between the second part of the *Nasihāt al-moluk* and Ghazzāli’s other writings, based on the fact that a copy of this work was translated into Arabic less than a century after the death of Ghazzāli and recognized as authentic by the translator and thirteenth century authors such as Ebn-e Khallekān (d. 1282).⁴⁰ Today, more and more

³⁷ The authors recognize the addition of illustrations and their similarities with some 1520 and 1530 manuscripts but maintain that such style existed in late fifteen century, *ibid.*, p. 196.

³⁸ Soucek and Cagman, *A Royal Manuscript*, p. 189

³⁹ See Soudavar, A., “Towte`é-ye `ozmā va Abol-mozaffar Shāh Tahmāsb-e Safavi,” in *Iranshenasi*, vol. IX, no.1, Washington, D.C., 1997, p. 60.

⁴⁰ Homāi, *Preface*, pp. (50-51).

studies reject this attribution,⁴¹ but non offer more evidence than the problems raised by Homāi himself. These were so compelling that Homāi felt obliged to counter his arguments with the explanation that the discrepancies “were due to impressions left on Ghazzāli by the study of works such as *Siyāsatnāmé* and books of the mirror for princes tradition.”⁴² If the archconservative Ghazzāli was such an impressible man, Islamic orthodoxy wouldn't be where it is today! Homāi's explanation is implausible and weak, somehow recalling Ghazvini's excuses for the problems encountered in “Teymur's letter.”

At the time of the translation into Arabic, unorthodox legitimacy theories and references to ancient Iranian beliefs were severely persecuted. Contemporaneously, the philosopher Sohravardi (1154-91) was declared heretic and executed for pronouncing similar ideas. In such political climate, it is most probable that the author of the second part of the *Nasihāt al-muluk*, chose to protect his work by attributing it to Ghazzāli. References to ancient Iranian mythological rulers and their Divine Glory (*Farré-ye Izadi*) may suggest the influence of Sohravardi, but in tone and in content the second part seems to be the work of a *dabir* or vizier, rather than a philosopher or theologian. One with knowledge of Ghazzāli's works, and in an administrative position vulnerable to accusations of unorthodoxy. It's a profile that perhaps fits the translator, Abol-Hasan `Ali b. Mobārak, a twelfth century literary figure who was also in charge of state finances (*mostowfi*).⁴³ If he was not the author, chances are that he knew his identity and worked in tandem with him. The translation into Arabic was probably a clever ploy to hide the origins of the text.⁴⁴

⁴¹ See for instance Crone, P. , “Did Al-Ghazāli write a Mirror for Princes? On the authorship of the *Nasifat al-muluk*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10, 1987, pp. 167-91; Hillenbrand, C., “Islamic Orthodoxy or Realpolitik? Al-Ghazāli's Views on Government,” *IRAN*, vol. XXVI, 1988, pp. 91-92.

⁴² Homāi, *Preface*, pp. (83-84).

⁴³ The brother of Abol-Hasan `Ali was also a *mostowfi* and father of Abol-barakāt Mobārak b. Ahmad b. Mobārak, know as Ebn-e Mostowfi-ye Erbeli (564-637/1168-1239) who had authored a history on Erbil.

⁴⁴ Another consideration is the geographical residence of Ebn-e Mostowfi. He was from an area that had bred the likes of `Ayn al-qozāt, Sohravardi and Shahrazuri who were all keen on ancient Iranian history and mythology.

Yazdān shenākht

The text of *Yazdān shenākht* has been published by H. Corbin and H. Nasr as part of a compendium volume of Sohravardi's Persian works.⁴⁵ They recognize the fact that it had been previously attributed to both Sohravardi and `Ayn al-qozāt Hamedāni (1098-1131), but argue that the attribution to the former is more appropriate. Hence its publication in said volume. Corbin cited the authority of Shahrazuri (d. 1288 or later) who has supposedly listed this text amongst the works by Sohravardi, and brushed aside the attribution to `Aynol-qozāt for two reasons.⁴⁶ First, he considered its content to be purely philosophical and not mystico-philosophical as works by `Ayn al-qozāt tend to be. Second, a few verses by Sanāi (d. 1131), who was a contemporary of `Ayn al-qozāt, are cited in the text. Corbin believed that it was unlikely of `Ayn al-qozāt to quote a contemporary poet that he may or may not have known, even though the possibility existed.⁴⁷

Reliance on Shahrazuri's account is an argument similar to the *yaqin-e sābeq* invoked by Homāi. However, the mere fact that Corbin and Nasr felt compelled to argue against the attribution to `Ayn al-qozāt demonstrates that they did not consider the Shahrazuri account as sacrosanct. What is questionable though is the logic that presupposes the author to be one of the two named only, and then chooses Sohravardi as the *likeliest* of the two.

Once the authorship is in doubt, a more thorough investigation is in order. Two quick observations cast serious doubt on the authorship of Sohravardi as well. The first is one of stylistics. Sohravardi's writings emanate from an exceptionally sharp and clear mind; as a result, his sentences are concise and structured with a minimum amount of words. Same is not true for *Yazdān shenākht*. A point in case is the systematic use of the expression *bedān ké* (know that) by Sohravardi at the beginning of each new topic. By contrast, the *Yazdān shenākht* mixes *bedān ké* (8 times) with the heavier

⁴⁵ *Shihaboddin Yahaya Sohravardi, Oeuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques (Oeuvres en Persan)*, ed. Nasr, H. with an introduction by Corbin, H., Teheran, 1977.

⁴⁶ Corbin's discussion of the attribution to Sohravardi is more explicit than Nasr's, *Shihaboddin*, pp. 117-18.

⁴⁷ Nasr cites an example of contemporary quotation advanced by M. Minovi, and refers to other Persian scholars' rejection of the `Ayn al-qozāt attribution; *Shihaboddin*, pp. (73) and (57-58).

composition *be-bāyad dānestan ké* (it must be known that)- 9 times. Not once does the latter expression appear in any other work of Sohravardi.

The second consideration, is an odd warning couched in a lengthy declaration at the end of the text. The author says that: “since the time of the Greeks” no thinker or philosopher had ever openly discussed the secrets that he had just presented, that the Prophet Mohammad “had forbidden them to reveal Divine secrets,” that Aristotle had said that philosophers have insisted that Knowledge of the Divinely (*hekmat-e elāhi*) should not be written but transmitted from person to person provided he is worthy of it,” and that active philosophers have refrained to expose the “unworthy and the wicked” to such secrets; but since his patron - the unidentified Mohammad b. Mahmud ad-Dāri - had the aptitude to understand these discourses, “it was incumbent upon the author to present him with such edition.” Nevertheless, the author asks his patron not to give it to the unworthy or wicked, and “should he find a worthy one, he should in turn ask him to hide it from the wicked and unworthy.”⁴⁸

The above passage is most uncharacteristic of Sohravardi. He is usually unapologetic, bold, assertive and never fearful of divulging his theories.⁴⁹ Had he feared the “wicked and the unworthy,” he would have placed warnings in his more provocative texts such as the *Partownāmé*, where he declares that Scholarly Men (*mohaqqeqān*) and Men of Science (*‘olamā*) can be more knowledgeable than prophets,⁵⁰ and that “the philosopher who shall persist in the recognition of the Light of Lights” shall rule the world!⁵¹ These were statements that could be branded (and perhaps were) as blasphemous and heretical, but no safeguards were envisaged in this instance.

⁴⁸ *Shihaboddin*, pp. 457-58.

⁴⁹ In his Arabic treatises such as *Hekmat al-Eshrāq*, and following a formulaic tradition in the writing of esoteric texts in Arabic that may go back to early Esmā'ili writings, Sohravardi emphasizes that his arguments are for the seekers of esoteric truth (see for instance Shams al-Din Mofammad Shahrāzuri, *Sharf-e Hekmat al-Eshrāq*, ed. Ziai, H., Tehran 1372, pp. 12-13) and entrusts his readers with guardianship of his book and “its defense against those who are not interested in it” (ibid. p. 590). Such formula is never used in his Persian texts. Also, his Arabic formula is a far cry from the hysterical warnings of the author of *Yazdān shenākht*, especially in the way the non-initiated is referred to: as “those not interested” (*ghayr-e ahlehi*) by Sohravardi and as “wicked and unworthy” by the author of *Yazdān shenākht*.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 76.

⁵¹ This statement was the most politically dangerous conclusion of Sohravardi, for in essence, it opened the way for a commoner to supplant the Caliph. It was in direct opposition to Ghazzālī’s elaborate reasoning that the Caliph could only be of Qorayshi descent.

Conversely, no major controversial issue were raised in the *Yazdān shenākht*, and yet its author insisted on secrecy. In all probability, he is neither Sohravardi nor `Ayn al-qo³āt but a third person yet to be determined.

Conclusion

As we can see from the above examples, the authenticity of ancient documents is fraught with danger. More often than not, dates were modified, texts mis-attributed and provenance of manuscripts altered. Each can affect the dating of the text and the value of the document. Thus, when logical observations are negated by some ancient document, scholars are well advised to double-check its authenticity and dating before rejecting their own arguments. The *yaqin-e sābeq* may not be as reliable as it seems and the *aqdam* may not be as old as it looks.