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Gambling in Taverns : Reflections on the Notion of Play in Persian Culture

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ABSTRACT: This article treats the notion of “play” in various cultural domains, ranging from exegesis of the Quran, to “mirror for princes” and medieval mystical poetry. The article emphasizes the importance of play for medieval court culture and how a distinction was made between mind games such as chess and backgammon and physical games such as polo. The intriguing aspect of such treatments of games is that they are connected to pleasure and pastimes where a strong fear of gambling exists. The article also briefly deals with the tensions between theological views on play and the popularity of various sorts of play at Persian courts such as chess, backgammon, literary riddles, and polo. While these are actual games in Persia, their poetic and aesthetic aspects are also discussed. For instance, many references are made to polo in an allegorical sense in which the polo ball becomes a metaphor for the head of the lover and the polo stick the hair of the beloved. The article concludes with an analysis of the notion of play in Islamic mysticism, especially in the works of the twelfth-century poet Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. 1220).

KEYWORDS: Play, game, poetry, Sufism, Quran exegesis

*This abode of dust is the place of play and pleasure
in the pure world you should gamble everything. (Sanā'ī, d. 1131)*

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In his seminal book *Homo Ludens* (Man the player), Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) offers an alternative to *Homo Sapiens* or *Homo Faber* (Man the maker), underscoring the importance of play in culture. In his first sentence he rightly emphasizes that “Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing.”¹ While he analyzes the notion of play in various aspects of culture, he stresses that he is examining “how far culture itself bears the character of play” to distinguish his topic from the place of play in culture. In doing so, he examines play as a cultural phenomenon, distinguishing it from a biological phenomenon. Huizinga observes that the meanings of “play” differ considerably in the Germanic languages. The words *spel*, *spiel* and *play* have different connotations.² Huizinga seeks to pinpoint what the original *spel* means, and why such distinctions are essential when we examine the notions of game and play in other languages. This is certainly relevant when we consider the languages spoken in the Islamic world and how the notion of play has been affected by Islamic ethics, philosophy, and theology.

The Persian language was a lingua franca for several centuries across a vast region from the Balkans to Bengal. Persian literature provided cultural prestige, transmitted secular and religious ethics, and was a church language for diverse communities.³ There is a sharp distinction between the Persian word for *play* and the Arabic terminology. The common Persian word used for play is *bāzī* (*bāz* is the present tense verb, nominalized by the suffix *ī*), which derives from the Old Iranian verb *waz* (to move, to fly). The root has changed little in over two thousand years. In Middle Persian or Pahlavi, it became *wāzīdan* (to move, to play). In New Persian, (from the ninth century until today), it is *bāzī kardan* (to play). The noun *bāzī* appears in endless compounds denoting various games such as *shamshīr-bāzī* (sword play, or fencing), *chowgān-bāzī* (polo play).⁴ It is also used to denote practices and rituals such as *‘ishq-bāzī* (love play), which refers to falling in love and everything related to love and courtship. In contemporary use, the compound means *to make love*. The stem *bāz* is also the root for the infinitive verb *bākhtan*, which in classical usage means *to play* or *to gamble* but in contemporary usage has come to

mean to *lose*, although the classical connotation emerges from time to time, depending on context. It is employed in the context of losing a game, from which come metaphors such as *to lose one's life* (*zindigī rā bākhtan*), which includes a disenchantment with life. The phrase *khudash rā bākht* (he lost himself or herself; Persian pronouns are not gender specific) means *to betray oneself* or *to lose countenance or confidence*.⁵ In a literary setting, *pāk bākhtan* is a recurrent compound meaning *losing or gambling everything*, while *‘ishq bākhtan* is *exercising love*. The word *bāzī* is also combined with a noun to indicate the attributes or behavior of the noun in question. The compound *rūbāh-bāzī* (fox-play), for example, means cunning behavior. *Bāzī* is also used in opposition to seriousness. An example is the following couplet by the poet Nizāmī in his *Khusrow and Shirīn*. The Persian king Khusrow I (r. 531–79 CE) asks a wise man for advice on diverse topics. When the king asks about the Prophet Muhammad, the wise man gives a lofty description of the Prophet, stating that his place is above the stars and that his religion derives from the Truth and that the king should not take this religion as a game.

مکن بازی شها با دین تازی

که دین حق است و با حق نیست بازی

O king! Do not play with the Arab religion
For this religion is the truth and one should not play with
the truth.⁶

Considering the subsequent invasion of Persia by the Arab Muslims, this is a warning to the Persian king to take the matter seriously and to respect the Prophet and his religion. There are marked antitheses between *bāzī*, religion (*dīn*), and truth (*ḥaqq*)—the last of which can also mean God—and between *ast* and *nīst* (is and is not).

In this introductory article, I would like to analyze a number of usages of play in various cultural domains in the Persian literary tradition. Classical Persian literature is a repository for ethics, reflections, and emotions for the peoples in contemporary Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and other Central Asian countries, who still

use this literature in everyday life, so studies in many fields will be illuminated by knowing how play is represented in this literature. As secondary literature on the notion of play in Persian culture is meager, I have chosen to deal with a number of key domains, starting with the Quran and the Persian exegetical texts, didactic texts such as the mirror for princes genre, and Persian poetry.⁷ While the Quran is a central text, the other two domains have been part of educational material for secondary schools. I must emphasize that this study is a preliminary exercise to examine the notion of play in Persian culture.

Quran, Traditions, and the Notion of Play

Rosenthal characterizes the position of play in Islam “as a particularly insidious expression of human unconcern with man’s true task in this world, which is working toward salvation in the other world.”⁸ The Arabic term *laʿib* or *laʿb* (play) is commonly paired with *lahw* (amusement), which, according to Muslim authorities, creates “excitement” (*tarab*), distracting an individual from focusing on serious issues in this world. The paired words *lahw* and *laʿib* appear eight times in the Quran (6:32, 29:64, 47:36, 57:20), alluding to the instability of the material life compared to the spiritual life. These terms also appear in other Surahs in the context of frivolous, frolicsome, and nonserious activities (7:98, 9:65, 21:2, 44:9).⁹ The only neutral allusion to playing appears in Surah 12:12, in which Yūsuf is playing with his brother.

Several prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) are devoted to play. I know of no published study on this peculiar topic, so I will simply give a few examples in which the Prophet Moḥammad played games during his childhood. He used to play *ʿazm waḍḍāḥ* or “searching in the dark for a white bone tossed far away, with the finder being allowed to ride upon his playmates.”¹⁰ This is a game referred to in a few sources. We also know that the Prophet’s most famous and controversial wife, ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr (d. 678), was playing seesaw when the Prophet saw her for the first time. Other sources link the first meeting with ʿĀʾisha with her playing with dolls, alluding to ʿĀʾisha’s young age, “six or seven years of age.”¹¹ As Rosenthal indicates, as the Prophet’s life is exemplary for Muslims, there were many discussions on the “permissibility of dolls,” their “educational value for training girls to

become good mothers,” the ban on “realistic representations of living beings,” etc., which made dolls a subject of debate in legal literature.¹²

Searching for *play* in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* does not yield any results, although a cross-reference under *play* points to the entries *humor* and *laughter*.¹³ The entry for *humor* has no reference to play, while the lemma *laughter* has only one relevant reference relating laughter to play and amusement, which are condemned by the Quran (6:32).¹⁴ The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* gives some attention to play, but is based mainly on religious texts, all in Arabic, without references to the other cultures and languages of the Islamic world, which played a central role in conceptualizing Islam and its culture. The index of the terminology treated in the *Encyclopaedia* gives only a short definition: “play(ing), which came in Islam to be considered the exclusive prerogative of children, bracketed at times with women also in this respect.”¹⁵ The lack of studies of play in the Quran creates an undesirable gap in our understanding of such essential notions in Muslim lives throughout history. While this is a desideratum, it certainly goes beyond the scope of this article. Here I will focus on one important Persian exegesis, which has inspired generations of people in the Persian-speaking world.

Persian Quran Commentaries, Maybudī’s *Kashf al-asrār*

The *Kashf al-asrār wa ‘uddat al-abrār* (Unveiling of mysteries and provision of the righteous) is a monumental twelfth-century Persian commentary by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī.¹⁶ It is based on the sermons of the great mystic from Herat, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Anṣārī Haravī (1005–89). The author gives a literal Persian translation of the Quranic verses followed by a long explanation of the words and phrases within the mystical context, often illustrating the interpretations with anecdotes and poetry to support the author’s arguments.

Maybudī comments on several of the Quranic passages on play, emphasizing that this world is not the place for play and entertainment.¹⁷ On one occasion, he states that Satan makes this world appear good in their eyes, when in fact it is nothing but amusement and play.¹⁸ In another place, the author says, “whoever’s face is directed to this world, his back is towards God. Having one’s back

towards God means that s/he always goes to sleep with the thought of the world and wakes up with the thought of the world.” He then refers to play as the chief reason for this diversion. Maybudī then says, “man is a traveller in a boat and the world is his provision. If he has too much provisions, the boat will be overwhelmed leading to the traveller’s perdition.”¹⁹ The moral of this interpretation is that play may lead the believer astray from God.

To give one example of how Maybudī interprets such passages, I cite the following:

قوله تعالى: كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ اى خداوندی که بندگان همه فانی‌اند و تو باقی! اى خداوندی که رهگانت همه برسیدنی‌اند و تو بودنی! بودی تو و کس نبود! بمانی تو و کس نماند! همه مقهوراند و تو قهار! همه مأمورانند و تو جبار! همه مصنوع‌اند تو کردگار! همه مردنی‌اند و تو زنده پابنده! همه رفتنی‌اند و تو خداوندی گمارنده، و با همه تاونده.
ای قوم ازین سرای حوادث گذر کنید خیزید و سوی عالم علوی سفر کنید

معاصر المسلمین! این سرای فانی منزل‌گاه است و گذرگاه! نگرید تا دل در آن ننندید، و آرام‌گاه نسازید، برید مرگ را بجان و دل استقبال کنید، و حیات آن جهانی و نعیم جاودانی طلب کنید، و ما هذه الحیاة الدنیا اِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَ لَعِبٌ و اِنَّ الدَّارَ الْاٰخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْخَيْرَانِ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُوْنَ. تو امروز بچشم بیداری در کار و حال خود ننگری! و ساز رفتن بدست نیاری تا آن ساعت که آب حسرت و دریغ گرد دیدت در آید! و غبار مرگ بر عذار مشکینت نشیند! و آن روی ارغوانی زعفرانی شود!

سر زلف عروسان را چو برگ نسترن رخ گلبرگ شاهان را چو شاخ زعفران
بیابی بینی²⁰

God said: “every soul will taste death (3:185). O Lord whose servants are all perishable while you remain! O Lord, whose travellers all long to arrive while you are Existence! You existed when no one existed. You will remain when no one remains. All are powerless, while you are powerful! All are your servants, while you are the one who decrees! All are [your] handiwork, while you are the creator! All are mortal, while you are the eternal living! All are in motion, while you are the Lord who protects and guides:

O people, depart from this house of change and chance
Rise and travel toward the world on high.

O fellow Muslims! This ephemeral home is just a station on the path, a passage way! Look carefully, that you may not attach your

heart to it, or build a resting place [in it]. Welcome the messenger of death with heart and soul; seek the life of the next world and the eternal bounty. *This life of the world is nothing but a sport and a play; and as for the next abode, that most surely is the life – did they but know!* (29:64) Today, open your eyes, awake, look at your doings and your condition. Why don't you take up the preparations for your journey before the moment when the tears of regret and penitence gather in your eyes, and the dust of death settles on your musky cheek, turning that flushed cheek the colour of saffron?

You will find the tips of the sweethearts' curls like the petals of a wild rose;
You will see the face of kings' petals [cheeks] like threads of saffron.

This excerpt shows the author's elegant Persian style and his devotion to God. He sees everything outside the transcendent world as a distraction from the chief purpose of mankind, namely praising God and sowing seeds to be harvested in the next world. In this passage and in many other passages in which the words *play* or *game* appear, the author strictly condemns the world, which, through its beauties, may sidetrack the believers. Maybudī's interpretation leans to an ascetic worldview in which the world is usually depicted as a crone who appears in the most comely fashion with magical powers to seduce believers, who then find out that she is malicious and sinister.²¹ Plays and games are part of this seduction and distraction, which should be avoided at any cost. Explaining the notion of play in the context of idleness—or, as Maybudī says, *nā-kārī* (no-work)—creates a broad space to include anything that falls outside religious practice as play.

It is in this broad space that Maybudī condemns pigeon keeping, for instance, as a sin. Keeping pigeons, both racing and enduring high-flier varieties, is an ancient practice in Persia, not only for entertainment but also for the dung, which is processed into fertilizer in agriculture. There are still architectural masterworks, called *burj-i kabūtar* (lit. tower for pigeons) or dovecotes, designed to collect dung for architectural purposes.²² In commenting on verse 128

of Surah 26, Maybudī condemns pigeon keeping as a form of play (*kabūtar-bāzī*, lit. pigeon play). The verse reads, “Do you build on every height a monument? Vain is it that you do.”²³ Maybudī says that there is no agreement among the *‘ulamā* as to what type of high buildings this verse refers to. One group says that they were indulging themselves in those high and sumptuous palaces, while others say that they were showing pride. Yet others believe that these buildings were made to be safe. Others say that these buildings were pigeon houses (*kabūtar-khāna*) where people kept pigeons, while some say this is a game for children.

Once again, in this example, we see that anything outside the cadre of worshipping God is related to play. It is astonishing to see how such an elusive verse is interpreted in the context of pigeon fancying, especially as the dovecotes were made for serious agricultural purposes.

Plays and Games in the Genre of Mirror for Princes

The notion of play frequently appears in the genre of mirrors for princes, written to depict the ideal conduct of a prince in a wide range of contexts. Play and games were essential parts of the education of a courtier in pre-Islamic Persia. Descriptions of games such as chess and backgammon, as well as polo, are included in this genre with explanations of why proficiency in such games is among the qualifications of a prince. We have references to a wide range of games and play in pre-Islamic times, which can be divided into board games and physical games. Several Middle Persian treatises list games that are no longer known.²⁴ In the ninth-century treatise *Khusrow Kawādān ud rēdag* (Khusrow, son of Kawād and the page), a dialogue between King Khusrow and a page, the page lists a large number of games, and claims superiority in three: chess, backgammon, and eight-footed (*hasht-pāy*).²⁵ The page is applying for a court position, and his knowledge of such games is evidence for the king that he is the right person.

In the *Qābūs-nāma*, the author Kay Kāvūs (c. 1021–98) devotes chapter 13 to backgammon and chess and chapter 19 to polo to emphasize that a ruler must be superior in both intellectual and physical games.²⁶ The Ziārid (c. 931–1090), ruler of a territory on

the Caspian Sea, Kay Kāvūs wrote the book *Qābūs-nāma* for his son Gilānshāh. The playing of backgammon and chess is contextualized in jesting (*mazāh*), which might be interpreted as entertainment or even as pastimes in this particular context. In the opening sentence he warns his son by linking jesting to mischief: “Understand, my son, that there is an Arabic saying that jesting is the forerunner of mischief . . . Be ashamed of unpleasant jests and of obscenity, whether you are drunk or sober, particularly when you are playing backgammon or chess, for when engaged in these two games a man becomes very impatient and has little tolerance of jesting.”²⁷ Afterward, he advises his son not to play these games frequently, especially not for silver or gold. He states, “playing without money is training for the mind, but playing for gold or silver is gambling” (*girow*) because gambling is *bī* (without, outside of) *adabī*. The heavily loaded term *adab* (education, culture, good behavior, politeness, proper demeanor) is closely related to ethics.²⁸ It is the “equivalent of the Middle Persian *frahang* and New Persian *farhang*,” which encapsulates anything related to culture and learning.²⁹ The compound *bī-adabī* means improper conduct and a lack of refinement, which a king had to avoid at all cost.

As a father seeking to protect his son from immorality and a bad name, Kay Kāvūs emphasizes that he should avoid being associated with gamblers. He says, “However well you may play, do not play with a man notorious as a gambler, for you also will become known as one.”³⁰ Afterward, he advises his son to avoid playing with army personnel (*turkān*), getting into drunken quarrels, fraternizing with servants, women, children, and morose people so that he can avoid disputes. In his opinion, these games create a context for jesting and “the origin of all evil and quarrels lies in jesting.”³¹ Afterward Kay Kāvūs relates jesting to wine drinking and love, which he sees as activities of the young. He devotes separate chapters to wine and love, elaborating on how his son should drink wine and exercise love.

In his chapter on “The Game of Polo,” Kay Kāvūs starts by warning his son not to play polo, or play it only twice a year: “My son, if your recreation is playing polo, do not be constantly indulging in it, for misfortune has overtaken many a man through so doing.”³² He tells the cautionary tale of Amr ibn Layth Saffār, the founder of the Coppersmith dynasty (868–903) and one of the Persian warriors who

claimed independence from the Caliphate in Baghdad. This warrior was blind in one eye. Kay Kāvūs narrates how one day Amr went to the field to play polo, but one of his army commanders seized him, saying, “I will not allow you to play polo.” When Amr asked why, the commander said, “We all can play because we have two eyes and if we are blinded in one eye, one eye will remain, but if you lose one, you will be totally blind.”³³

There are other places in the *Qābūs-nāma* in which Kay Kāvūs warns his son to avoid playing as much as he can, and what is essential, one should be professional in whatever role one is acting. For instance, in chapter 36, “On Being a Musician,” Kay Kāvūs advises the young prince, “When you have been engaged as a minstrel, [and] you find two people playing at backgammon, even if you are yourself a player of the game, do not waste your minstrelsy. Do not sit down to teach backgammon nor take a hand yourself at backgammon or chess; you have been called upon for minstrelsy, not to gamble.”³⁴ This short passage tells us that musical skill is one of the traits of a prince, but it also shows how play is easily associated with gambling, which is strictly criticized. The prince is expected to perform what he is asked to do and not to engage in board plays, which may end with betting.

The poetry of this period has numerous references to gatherings involving music, wine, and dance. The poet Manūchihri (d. c. 1040) refers to a “gathering of gentlemen” (*Majlis-i ahrār*) and contrasts it to other gatherings in which backgammon was played.³⁵ Organizing Islamic and national festivities was a widespread activity of the rulers and aristocracy, but it is not clear whether such festivities involved them in playing the banned games associated with gambling. The poetry of the period shows that the national festivities included the pre-Islamic Persian spring equinox festival marking the New Year, and the popular autumnal feast celebrating the wine harvest. Pre-Islamic Persian games were part of the celebrations, although the theologians frowned on them (see later in this article). J. T. P. de Bruijn contrasts the *Majlis-i ahrār* to the disreputable *kharābāt-i kharāb*, where those who frequent an inn indulge in backgammon.³⁶ While the Persian elite who organized festivities were Muslims, they followed the pre-Islamic Persian tradition in which music, drinking, a banquet, and a play constituted a festivity.

It is not clear why Kay Kāvūs has included chess and backgammon in the category of jesting. Perhaps he thinks the fun of these games is connected to the mirth of verbal exchanges between the players. Lack of terminology for what we would call *fun* may be a factor. Huizinga discusses the concept of *fun* and says that the fun element “characterizes the essence of play.”³⁷ These games are accepted by Kay Kāvūs as intellectual exercises because if money and pleasure come to play a role, he warns his son to eschew them. Moreover, Kay Kāvūs may be deferring to Islamic rulings against play and entertainment. Medieval Persian culture was divided on the permissibility of certain games and entertainment. Sport, dance, and music are allowed and encouraged in Zoroastrianism, while Islam disapproved of them. As an heir to pre-Islamic Persian culture, Kay Kāvūs is maneuvering between two traditions, while leaning heavily on pre-Islamic Persian courtly tradition. Islam frowned upon play, which might distract the devout Muslim from preparing for the eternal world. A good Muslim resists all worldly enticements and concentrates on prayer and religious activities. In such a context, there is no space for play or amusement. We know from early Islamic sources that the notion of play appears in association with ritual games during pre-Islamic Persian festivals such as Now Rūz (the celebration of the New Year around March 21).³⁸ Islamic authors such as the polymath Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazālī (1058–1111) are critical of games performed for such celebrations, characterizing these celebrations as remnants of pagan heritage, and play as a sign of apostasy. The Islam of that time generally treats play as aberration, ignorance, and being heedless to God’s call for salvation.

Various Mental and Physical Games and Playing in Early Persian Poetry

The subjects Kay Kāvūs uses to show ideal princely behavior are reflected in the poetry of the period. There are a wide range of references to games in Persian poetry written between the ninth and twelfth century. While some allusions are metaphoric, referring to the state of the world or the conditions of human beings, several are descriptions of actual play. As the poetry of this period

is mostly courtly poetry, the poets present exaggerated depictions of what they have witnessed in a court. The following poem by the Ghaznavid court poet Farrukhī Sīstānī (d. 1037–38), entitled “On the Quality of Sulṭān Maḥmūd’s Play at Polo and His Reception at the House of One of His Sons,” depicts a game of polo and connects it to the qualities of the Sulṭān:

You play cheerfully at polo with your servants,
it suits you to play at polo among all the people of the
world.

The star is praising your polo-ball
saying: “You possess dignity, esteem and rank.”
I wished I could rush to the playing-field like you
because there is the place of distinction, glory and
grandeur.

Were I to choose, the playing-field would be my place
[but] it is not in our hands to be present at that site.
O Emir, your polo-ball goes higher than the stars,
the ball transcends the star; Who else possesses such a
ball?

The status and elevation of your polo-ball has been
achieved through you;
you know that this servant is telling the truth.
It is clear to what height the value of your polo-ball can
reach,
it is clear how far the price of your polo-ball can reach.
A ball reaches such an eminence at your service,
becoming eloquent and famous in the sky.
Concerning dignity and standing, it is right if we,
who are your servants, rise to the sky.
O king, he who becomes your servant, is not a servant
O king, he who becomes your servant, is a king.³⁹

Information about actual polo play is limited. We learn from this poem that the king plays polo with his courtly servants and that polo is a game befitting the king. The poet expresses his wish to be on the playing field, but he cannot for unexplained reasons. The rest of the description praises the king’s play and how dexterous he is

with the polo ball. The poet then connects the play with eloquence and dignity, emphasizing that anyone who is associated with the king will also profit from his praiseworthy qualities, as even being a servant for the king means to be a king. It is certainly a pity that such descriptions do not impart information about the actual play as court poets were often at the king's side, describing the actual events taking place.

There are also numerous metaphors based on the game of polo. The following are three examples of how the game has inspired poets to depict a homoerotic love relationship:

His amber-perfumed lock is like a crooked polo-stick,
my poor heart is a ball at the curve of his polo-stick.⁴⁰

Sometimes you play with my heart like a ball in the
playing-field of love,

Having turned my heart into a ball, you yourself become a
polo-stick.⁴¹

Ethical and Theological Perspectives on Play

Play, entertainment, and gaming are treated by leading medieval religious scholars whose works are still used by Muslims worldwide. The influential Muḥammad Ghazālī refers to several activities such as pigeon keeping (*al-laʿb bi'l-tuyūr*), chess (*shaṭranj*), and backgammon (*nard*) as addictive and hard to stop.⁴² Elsewhere he considers the purchase of wooden toy swords and shields to be against Islamic law.⁴³ A search in Islamic ethical and religious text shows that Islamic theologians were against games and plays. Vahman refers to theologian Muḥammad-Bāqir Majlisī (1628–89), perhaps the best-known collector of the Shiite *ḥadīth*, who cites the following tradition condemning “everything by which a Muslim amuses himself as worthless frivolity, except the shooting of arrows, the training of horses, and sex play with his woman folk.”⁴⁴ Later on he warns, “Do not play polo, because Satan goes with you and the angels hate you.”⁴⁵ Many such sources emphasize the prohibition of popular pre-Islamic Persian games to convince Muslims to avoid them, while games such as backgammon, chess, and polo are connected to Prophetic traditions. Reading these sources, one wonders why there is

such a frequent insistence on banning pre-Islamic Persian games. Is it really to do with distracting an individual from God and religious affairs, or are these games and plays banned due to their popularity among those Persians who continued to order their daily lives based on Zoroastrian culture? It seems likely that both motives played a role. Looking back to medieval times, it is beyond doubt that Persians created a unique Persian Islamic culture, distinguishing themselves from other Muslims by the annual celebration of pre-Islamic festivals, including many of its rites and rituals. Fereyduṅ Vahman says that despite such “negative attitudes, the games played in Iran centuries before Islam survived in the Islamic period and continued to be important parts of Iranian cultural life.”⁴⁶ Is there also a contrast between the Persian and Arab cultures? Despite Islam’s ban on play, it is cultivated in Arab lands and across the Islamic world, showing that it is an intrinsic human instinct.

The Notion of Play in Persian Poetry

I will attempt here to give only a rudimentary treatment of play and games in Persian poetry down the centuries. I will not refer to the poetry composed specifically for individual games, such as poems by Ahlī Shīrāzī (1444–1535) for the popular card game Ganjafa. Ahlī, a poet in the court of the Safavid Shah Esmā‘īl I (1487–1524), wrote a quatrain for each of the ninety-six richly illustrated cards.⁴⁷ Writing poetry for games, leisure, and sport activities became a tradition, although it has been neglected in the literature.

The word *play* (*bāzī*) appears in compounds and metaphors in Persian poetry from the outset of Persian poetry in the ninth century. In the following quatrain, Rūdakī (c. 880–941) refers to life in this world as a game of magic, enticing people to its kind and good things, which will prove to be a myth:

مهر مڤگن برین سرای سېنج
 کین جهان پاک بازی نیرنج
 نیک او را فسانه واری شو
 بد او را کمرت سخت بتنج

Do not throw love on this transient world;
 This world is entirely a magic game.
 Treat its kindness as a myth,
 Its hardship tightly ties your belt.⁴⁸

The majority of references to the word *play* in early Persian poetry are of this kind. In what follows, I have limited myself to the ghazals of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (c. 1145–1220) and how he has deployed the word *bāzī* and its compounds in a wide range of contexts. The reason for choosing ‘Aṭṭār is that the type of his allusions to play is what we find in later Persian ghazals. He employs the term in compounds to refer to mystical love, depictions of natural sceneries, philosophical reflections, and a varied range of human behavior. While the suffix *bāzī* in combination with the word *‘ishq* often refers to an aspect of love and eroticism, it also appears in compounds related to a habit, or to the terrestrial world, which is always negative. For instance, the compound *daghal-bāzī* (lit. deceit play) is used in the following couplet to advise the reader to avoid treachery in this world. The world is depicted as a “six-gated vanity,” which alludes to the six directions. In the panegyric from which this couplet is taken, ‘Aṭṭār advises the human soul to fly heavenward, releasing itself from this trap full of afflictions. He then says that God sent many prophets to speak about the futility of this world:

این جمله گفتگو نه از آن بود تا تو خوش

در ششدر غرور، دغل بازی ودغا

The intent of all this talk was not that you should take
 delight
 In the six-gated vanity (i.e., the world), in treachery and
 false pretence.⁴⁹

The word *bāzī* often appears in the context of cosmogony, linking play to heavenly bodies and how forcefully they play with the destinies of human beings, affecting daily earthly events. This reflects a common medieval belief that the movements of the planets affect all earthly events. Astronomy and astrology were one: astronomy

measured the movements and alignments of the planets, while astrology gauged their effects on human life and decisions. Heaven is presented as a rotating Wheel, which may raise one up, but ultimately crushes all.

چرخ مردم خواراگر روزی دومردم پرورست
 نیست از شفقت، مگر پرواری او لاغرست
 زان فلک هنگامه می‌سازد بیبازی خیال
 کاختران چون لعبتاند و فلک چون چادرست
 عاقبت هنگامه او سردخواهد شد از آنک
 مرگ این هنگامه را چون وامخواهی بر درست

The man-devouring Wheel, if it nurtures a person for one
 or two days,
 This is not out of compassion, for its nurturing is meagre.
 Sometimes the Sphere creates a tumult through plays of
 illusion
 For the stars are like sweethearts while the Sphere is their
 veils.
 Finally, its tumult will turn cold because
 Death stands at the door for this tumult, like a creditor.⁵⁰

Bāzī also occurs in animating depictions of gardens and natural imagery. Persian poets depict the garden systematically, beginning with lower plants, followed by trees, and then the birds. While such depictions may be purely descriptive, they often elaborate on the relationships between the elements. In the following piece, the cloud is weeping and the drops of tears are pearls. Thanks to this rain, the blossoms grow. The opening blossoms are compared to shields held ready in defence. The growth of the new jasmine is compared to playing among the other plants, shooting roots to survive. The Judas tree, which bears fiery red blossoms in spring, catches dew every dawn, using it as a remedy for the Zephyr:

ابر گرینده بیک گریه گهر می‌ریزد
 غنچه بر شاخ ز بس خنده سپر می‌آرد
 سمن تازه که از لطف بیازیست گروه
 بر سر پای همی عمر بسر می‌آرد
 ارغوان هر سحری شبنم نوروزی را
 بهر تسکین صبا همچو شرر می‌آرد

The weeping cloud throws pearls by bursting into tears
 The blossoms on the branch create shields by smiling
 The fresh jasmine plays in a group graciously,
 While upon her feet, life comes to an end.
 Like sparks, the Judas tree brings the dew of the New Year
 every dawn to comfort the Eastern wind.⁵¹

Another context in which ‘Aṭṭār uses the word *bāzī* is philosophy. He connects the compound *rasan-bāzī* (lit. rope play, or rope dancers, or the trapeze) to the rational faculty of a man striving hazardously to know himself. Mystics believe that the intellect is unable to fathom the mystery of the universe, and the more one tries to understand the world through intellect, the more perplexed he or she will become. ‘Aṭṭār sternly criticizes philosophers who attempt to know the universe and God through reasoning. One example of such condemnation is an anecdote in his didactic poem *Ilāhī-nāma* (The book of the divine) in which he criticizes the philosopher ‘Umar Khayyām (1048–1131) by alluding to his fate in the hereafter. In this anecdote, a clairvoyant is at Khayyām’s grave, reporting that Khayyām is perspiring heavily out of shame, emphasizing that all his rational reasoning could not help him. He is embarrassed that his intellectual learning is of no use in the hereafter.⁵²

In the following passage, ‘Aṭṭār uses *fikrat*, which in his mystical epic *Muṣibat-nāma* (The book of suffering) is a metaphor for the traveling soul (*sālik-i fikrat*) in search of deliverance and perfection. The traveler is confused and visits forty terrestrial and celestial beings for advice, but each time he soon discovers that these beings are also trapped until he encounters the Universal Soul, which advises the

traveler that the answer he is looking for—that is, deliverance—can be found only in himself: “He must cast himself into the ocean of the soul and utterly efface himself.”⁵³ The number forty stands for forty stations, corresponding to the forty days of withdrawal (*chilla*) practiced by mystics to meditate. In the following lines, *fikrat* is depicted as thoughts or imagination as vehicles to search for oneself.

گرچه بسیاری رسن بازی فکرت کرده‌ام
 بیش ازین خود را نمی‌دانم که سر در چنبرم
 گر بگویم من ز اندیشه، که بر جان منست
 همچو من حیران بمانی، تا بداری باورم
 گر بسی زیر و زبر آیم، بنگشاید گره
 کی گشاید این گره تا من بدنیا اندرم؟

Although I have played much on the ropes in my mind
 All I know of myself, is that I have my head in a loop.
 If I spoke the thoughts that are in my soul,
 You would remain as perplexed as I am, how could you
 believe me?
 If I move high or low, it will not unknot my knot
 How can this knot be loosed, as long as I am in this world!⁵⁴

Playing with Veils

Another term ‘*Aṭṭār* uses frequently in combination with *play* is *parda*, which means *curtain*, *veil*, *respect*, or *musical note*. In the following piece, ‘*Aṭṭār* uses the compound *parda-yi pindār* (lit. the veil of thought) to point to the limitations of the intellectual faculty and discursive reasoning. Reason creates firm argumentations and systematic threads of thoughts to understand the world, but in love mysticism, reason fails entirely to understand the nature and intricacies of love. In Islamic mysticism, God has entrusted man with his love, which is a means to bring man back to the original abode. When God created humankind, he breathed the soul into humans from his own breath. Humankind were expelled from the spiritual

world and descended to Earth. This is interpreted by mystic as a descending curve, during which the soul carries God's most precious gift to humankind—that is, love—to Earth. The more distant this love becomes from its original home, the less powerful it is. On Earth this love, which was originally likened to an eagle, becomes a domesticated bird and cannot fly higher than the roofs.⁵⁵ The only way to return to the celestial plane is by way of ascetic discipline. In the ascending curve, when the soul is released from the body's prison, it is love that carries the soul to the highest planes.

Reason is condemned as it can never even enter the realm of love. Angels stand for reason. For example, Gabriel accompanies Muhammad during the Prophet's heavenly ascension, but when they reach the last stage to the pure spiritual realm, Gabriel can go no further, saying, "If I take one step, my wings will be burned."⁵⁶ In Islamic mysticism, Gabriel is a symbol of the intellect. In his theoretical treatise of love, Aḥmad Ghazālī says that the realm of reason is the land, whereas the realm of love is the depth of the ocean. In the following piece, 'Aṭṭār compares the veil of imagination to the iron rampart that Alexander of Macedon built to block out Gog and Magog.⁵⁷ The mystic's sighs burn the veil, which is as robust as the iron rampart. In the second couplet, the poet says that new veils of imagination emerge every day, but each is again burned down. In 'Aṭṭār's view, which is also expressed in his other works, human beings can use only the imagination to perceive the Beloved and the mystic secret, but this imagination also fails as human beings are trapped in a finite world while trying to understand the Infinite:

پرده پندار، کان چون سد اسکندر قویست
 آه خون آلود من هر شب بیک یا رب بسوخت
 روز دیگر پرده دیگر برون آمد ز زیر
 پرده دیگر به بازیهای دیگر شب بسوخت

The curtain of thoughts, as strong as the [iron] wall of
 Alexander
 My blood-soaked sigh burns it every night through one "O Lord!"

Another day, another curtain, emerging from below,
This curtain also burns through the plays of another
night.⁵⁸

In the following excerpt, we see the common image of the sun and motes of dust: without the sun, the motes are invisible, but in the sun's rays, they start to dance. Here 'Aṭṭār says that the appearance of the Beloved is superior to the sun, whose light disappears before his light. Continuing this imagery, 'Aṭṭār uses the comparison of the motes and the sun. As the existence of the motes depends entirely on the sun, so the existence of the entire universe depends on God as the Beloved:

گر رخ او ذره‌ای جمال نماید
طلعت خورشید را زوال نماید
ور ز رخس لحظه‌ای نقاب برافتند
هر دو جهان بازی خیال نماید
ذره سرگشته در برابر خورشید
نیست عجب گر ضعیف حال نماید

If His face were to reveal a particle of his beauty
It would destroy the shining of the sun.
If the *niqāb* veil was removed from his face for a moment
The two worlds would be shown to be the play of illusion.⁵⁹
The bewildered mote before the sun:
It's no wonder if it's feeling weak.⁶⁰

Play and Games in the Antinomian Genre

Play appears in the popular genre of *qalandariyyāt*, antinomian poems in which vagabond mystics are shown flouting the holiest tenets of Islam to protect their piety from hypocrisy. Although there are earlier references to these mystics, they become an essential part of Persian mystic poetry from the twelfth century. Ḥakīm Sanā'ī (d.

1131) is the poet who used a large pallet of *qalandarī* themes and motifs, setting the model for many other poets in the subsequent centuries. The *qalandarī* phenomenon started in the greater province of Khurāsān but soon spread to Anatolia, Egypt, and the Indian Subcontinent. *Qalandarī* mystics believed that any show of religiosity leads to hypocrisy. Therefore, they would drink wine and engage in homosexual excesses, and also gambled and played backgammon and chess to provoke criticism from the religious jurists.⁶¹ They used this criticism as a shield for their true piety. Outwardly pious behavior would generate public respect, which would then lead to hypocrisy. True piety could be gained through sinful behavior, and God would know the reasons for it.

Poets such as Sanāʿī and ʿAṭṭār accorded an elevated position to these qalandars, which had an enormous impact on the conceptualization of piety, and opened a polemic field with religious jurists. The *qalandarī* theme became so widespread that it affected Quran exegesis. In one passage, Maybudī uses the example of qalandars as champions of religiosity, who courageously gamble everything to achieve their goals. He states,

Arrow-shuffling is gambling. When someone plays everything and loses all in a gambling house, he is considered great and recognized as a preceptor. This is an allusion to the path of the chevaliers: They throw themselves down on the highway of predetermination so as to become abased before every piece of straw and to come out from the bonds of every color, counting themselves as nothing. As long as you stay in bond to color, nature, the spheres, and the stars, how can you be allowed to say, “Speak like a Qalandar”?⁶²

Due to their extreme behavior, they came to be identified with particular attitudes and actions. One popular character trait attached to them is *pāk-bāz*, a term that developed diverse connotations. The word *pāk* has various shades of meanings in Persian, such as *pure, chaste, innocent, clean, neat, perfect, full, and complete*. In combination with *bāz*, it was usually used in the context of gambling,

meaning playing for high stakes. The compound became ambiguous as it was used not only in an actual gambling context but also as an amatory metaphor. Poets described love as a game, and the beloved as a paradoxical necessary adversary with whom the lover played the dangerous game of love. To show intense longing and pure intentions, the lover would openly state that he would sacrifice his possessions and interests, and even his life, to be united with the beloved. According to Steingass's dictionary, compound came to mean "having a fortunate aspect, a fine countenance; sporting harmlessly; an honourable lover; a fair dealer; a saint; one who loses all in gambling."⁶³

The compound *pāk-bāz* became a favorite metaphor in Persian mystic poetry, creating an ambiguous space. The predominant meaning is to put everything at stake for the sake of the beloved. In this amatory context, a person worthy of love has to show that he or she is ready to offer everything, including reputation, to be called a lover. Love is seen as a game of gambling as it requires the lover to offer everything to the beloved without thinking of any reward. Even worse, the beloved in Persian literary tradition is haughty, indifferent, and unyielding, and the lover is expected to gamble even his life.⁶⁴ As Persian pronouns—and most nouns—make no distinction of gender, the beloved's sex is undefined: it can refer to both male and female and also to God. In the spiritual sense, the compound *pāk-bāz* refers to the mystic's annihilation of the ego, required to achieve the highest stage in the mystical path—that is, union with the beloved. Playing for one's life means to barter it for eternal life in union with the immaterial beloved. As poetry plays a central role in Iran, such concepts and ideologies could be utilized in modern times in a political context. The *pāk-bāz* and *jān-bāz* (soul/life gambling) concepts were used in Persian poetry of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88) to convince soldiers to offer their lives. The compound is now used to refer to the war disabled, a completely new definition that removes the compound from its poetic context.

‘Attār has numerous references to *pāk-bāz*, all in a mystical context, advising the mystic traveler to sacrifice his life for the beloved, as in the following example:

در میکده، عور پاکبازیم
در مصطبه رند درد خواریم

In the wine-house, I am naked, gambling all (*pāk-bāz*)
In the tavern, I am a *rind* who drinks dregs.⁶⁵

These references are to mystics who frequent taverns and provoke religious scholars by their behavior. The word *‘ūr* has several meanings among which are *one-eyed* and *naked*. The former could refer to mystics who close one eye to the world and open the other to the divine, or who have no eye to abide by Shari’a rules. The *naked* may refer to the qalandars who appeared naked, or almost naked, in public. The word *miṣṭaba* in the second line may also refer to the qalandar’s appearance in public, for it means a bench in a public setting as well as a tavern, travelers’ hospice, or inn.

In addition to the concept of *pāk-bāz*, the qalandar genre has many references to gambling, and to games such as chess and backgammon, which have been criticized and even banned in Islam, but were popular memories of pre-Islamic Persia. While outward piety is critiqued, the lifestyle of the transgressive tramp who scorns religious and social rules by publicly drinking wine, shaving facial hair, and indulging in homoerotic love was praised. In the following excerpt, Sanā’ī uses chess imagery to provoke the religious scholars:

چه خواهی کرد قرآنی و طامات
تماشا کرد خواهی در خرابات
زمانی با غریبان نرد بازم
زمانی کرد سازم با لباسات
گهی شه رخ نهم بر نطع شطرنج
گهی شه پیل خواهم گاه شهمات

What do you hope to do by reciting the Qur’ān and
throwing words around?

Go and look your fill in the tavern (ruins)!
 Sometimes I play backgammon with strangers,
 Sometimes my equipment includes some clothes and
 sometimes not.⁶⁶
 Sometimes I put my rook (*rukḥ*) on the chess board
 Sometimes I want the knight (*shah-pīl*), sometimes I seek
 checkmate.⁶⁷

In many such references, the qalandar is depicted as a *kam-zan* or “a low thrower at dice,” but it also came to mean *unfortunate* or a person who bets everything on one throw, and it refers to being checkmated (*shāhmāt*).⁶⁸ While such references to forbidden games were used to provoke religious scholars, they also convey the devotion of the qalandar as an ideal lover. This combination of illicitness and amorosness has made these poems so dynamic and vivacious that they have been used for about a millennium.

‘Aṭṭār employs chess imagery to depict various aspects of man’s relationship with God.⁶⁹ He dwells on the theme of God’s infinity and man’s finite intellect, employing various metaphors to depict man’s relationship with God. In one couplet of the following ghazal, he repeats the word *māt* three times to underscore the intellect’s inability to penetrate the strategies of the Beloved’s love games. The word *māt* in Persian means *to be killed*, but also *to be perplexed*, *to be struck dumb*, and *to be checkmated*. ‘Aṭṭār emphasizes that the intellectual faculty is *māt* after a single move in the game of love:

بس عقل که شد مات بیک بازی عشقش

وز عقل درین مات بشهمات گرفتیم⁷⁰

چون عقل شد از دست ز مستی می عشق

با دلشدگان راه مناجات گرفتیم

True, intellect was checkmated (*māt*) at one play of his love,
 And in this perplexity (*māt*), we were checkmated
 (*shah-māt*) by the intellect.
 As intellect, drunk with the wine of love, was lost,

We joined with those lost to love on the road of invoking
God.⁷¹

These are two couplets of a ghazal that consist of seven couplets, in which the poet narrates how he bade farewell to formal religion and has chosen the monastery of the Zoroastrian Elder, drinking wine. In such imagery, the Zoroastrian Elder stands for the guide on the mystical path, whom the traveler is expected to obey, even if his advice is deeply blasphemous and offends against formal religion. The Elder commonly invites the mystic to drink wine: in the famous line in Ḥāfiẓ's first ghazal, the Elder asks the mystic lover to wash the prayer mat with wine. In these lines, ʿAṭṭār emphasizes that while man is sober, the intellect contrives new reasons to understand the Creator who is beyond intellect. Wine helps to transcend the limits of intellect, to become selfless in order to be absorbed in the beloved.

A similar idea is expressed in an anecdote in ghazal no. 17. ʿAṭṭār says that he went to a *kharābāt* (a tavern) at dawn with the intention of converting the *rindān* (libertines) to the right path.⁷² A *kharābātī* (a person who frequents a tavern) asks the Shaykh what he is doing there so early in the morning. He answers that he wants to convince them to repent and to come to the right path. The *kharābātī* says, "Go! O dry ascetic, for you will contact the moisture of wine dregs in this *kharābātī*. If I were to pour one drop of the dregs on you, you could not go to the mosque to pray [because you would be ritually unclean]. Go, and do not sell asceticism and self-conceit (*khud-namāʿī*), for no one will buy your asceticism and invitations to repent." The *kharābātī* then gives the Shaykh a taste of dregs, which immediately annuls his reason, and the Shaykh "finds himself above the two worlds," and feels "a sun rising to shine in his being, elevating his inwardness beyond the heavens." When the Shaykh regains consciousness and asks how to find the essence of God, the *kharābātī* reminds him that his wish is futile as no one can attain this. The Shaykh has switched roles with the *kharābātī*—now it is the ascetic Shaykh who begs for advice:

بدو گفتم که ای داننده راز
 بگو تا کی رسم در قرب آن ذات
 مرا گفتا که ای مغرور غافل
 کسی هرگز رسد؟ هیهات! هیهات!
 بسی بازی ببینی از پس و پیش
 ولی آخر فرومانی بشهمات
 در آن موضع که تابد نور خورشید
 نه موجود و نه معدوم و نه ذرات

I said to him: "O knower of the secrets!
 Tell me, when I can attain to nearness to the Essence?"
 He replied: "O you, so heedless and presumptuous,
 Does anyone ever attain this? Never! Never!
 You will see many games at play before you and behind,
 But in the end: helpless checkmate (*shāhmāt*).
 At the spot where the sun's rays shine,
 There is neither existence nor non-existence, not even
 motes of dust."⁷³

‘Aṭṭār uses other metaphors of play to demonstrate why the finite human intellect cannot comprehend Infinity. In one metaphor, he depicts the created world as froth moving on the surface of the sea. This world is a shadow play, compared to a *parī* (fairy) in a bottle, "which should not deceive an adult as it would deceive a child."⁷⁴ As long as one is trapped in the world, enticed by its deceptions, one cannot free oneself from materiality. This is also why the world is useless. ‘Aṭṭār sometimes compares the world to a chessboard. In *Ilāhī-nāma*, a fool compares the world to such a board on which one occupies a square for some time, only to be driven away and replaced by someone else. Here the ephemerality of the world is depicted through chess imagery.⁷⁵

The story of the mystic's answer regarding worldly affairs

حکایت جواب آن شوریده حال در کار جهان

یکی پرسید آن شوریده جان را
 که چون می‌بینی این کار جهان را
 چنین گفت این جهان پُر غم و رنج
 بعینه آیدم چون نطع شطرنج
 گهی آرایش ببند بصف در
 گهی بر هم زندهش چون دو صفدر
 یکی را می‌برند از خانه خویش
 دگر را می‌نهند آن خانه در پیش
 گهی بر شه درآیند از حوالی
 بصد زاری کنندش خانه خالی
 چنین پیوسته تا آنکه که دانند
 که این نطع مزخرف برفشانند
 چنان لهو و لعب کردست مغرور
 شدی مشغول مال و ملک و منشور
 تو شه بازی، گشاده کن پر و بال
 پیر زین دامگاه لعب اطفال⁷⁶

Someone asked a frenzied lover:

“How do you see the affairs of this world?”

He said: “This world, full of sorrow and pain,

In my eyes, is like a chess board.

Sometimes, one sees a neat arrangement in ranks;

At times, the arrangement is in disarray like two

champions [meeting on the battlefield,]

One is removed from his own place,

The other is put in the foregoing place.

Sometimes, they come close to the king,

With a hundred wails, they make the house empty.

This goes continuously until they realise
 That they are scattering deceits on this board.
 Play and pleasure have made you so proud
 That you have occupied yourself with money, possessions
 and titles.
 O Falcon-King, spread your wings,
 Fly from this snare, this playground for children.

The Concept of Play in Sufi Rituals

Dance and music became indispensable in the rituals of Sufism, and there were Sufi polemics against theologians. Islamic theologians' attitude toward games has been predominantly negative, even to-day.⁷⁷ Their criticism of play is related to becoming absorbed in an activity, which is a great sin. A much-debated example is dance: Islamic theologians were against any form of dancing while Islamic mystics saw dancing as part of absorption in the thought of God, as a way of losing oneself to be absorbed in the immaterial Beloved. While theologians believe that mystics use the argument of union with God as a pretext to indulge in pleasure, and even homoerotic love, mystics have defended themselves by arguing that dance and listening to music is a way to disentangle their souls from the shackles of the material world. Bākharzī uses the metaphor of rain and the soil: the thirsty soul longs for music just as arid soil longs for rain.

In the Sufi *samāʿ* (mystical audition), mystics listen to recitations from the Quran, prayers, or erotic poetry to be reminded of the soul's oneness with the Creator. Certain rituals in the *samāʿ*, such as *khirqā-bāzī* (robe play), are connected to play. The word *khirqā* refers to the "tattered cloak, robe, or overshirt traditionally worn by the Sufis as a symbol of wayfaring on the mystical path."⁷⁸ The compound refers to the ecstatic joy and fervor the mystic experiences during the musical performance and how the mystics dance in their elegant long mantles. In such a state of selflessness, they would even tear apart the dress of a mystic who is overwhelmed by rapture and bliss, taking pieces from it as a blessing. Bākharzī devotes a chapter to this ritual in his manual *Owrād al-aḥbāb*. The compound *khirqā-bāzī* is used in mystical poetry to refer to rapturous ecstasy as in the following

lines from a ghazal by ‘Aṭṭār. There is an antinomian context: *zunnār* (the belt of disbelief) refers to a belt that Christians and Zoroastrians were required to wear to indicate their religion in the Muslim community. Qalandars used this in a very positive context, making it a symbol of supreme piety in contrast to the outward devotion of the religious scholars. In the following ghazal, ‘Aṭṭār starts by saying that he accepts all he receives from the beloved, whether these derive from his Grace (*lutf*) or Wrath (*qahr*). At the end of the ghazal he emphasizes the motif of ecstatic dance at encountering the beloved:

در ده می عشق تا زمانی

از سر بنهیم سر فرازی

ز نار هزار برکشیدیم

در حلقه کنیم خرقه بازی

عطار خموش و غصه می خور

قصه چه کنی بدین درازی

Give us the wine of love so that, for a moment,
We may banish pride from our head
A thousand [times] we have put on the belt of disbelief,
Dancing in rapture (*khirqā-bāzī*) in the circle.
‘Aṭṭār! Silence! Be sorrowful;
Why are you telling such a long story.⁷⁹

The romantic poet Nizāmī uses the term in his *Khusrow and Shīrīn* where the pre-Islamic Persian king Khusrow dreams of the Prophet Muhammad. Here the poet is apparently alluding to the Prophet’s nocturnal journey through the spheres to meet God beyond time and place. In this case, *khirqā-bāzī* refers to the Prophet’s movement, full of joy and fervor, to encounter the Creator:

گهی می کرد مه را خرقه سازی

گهی می کرد با مه خرقه بازی⁸⁰

Sometimes he made a dress for the moon
Sometimes he was in ecstatic dance with the moon

Ḥāfīz uses the concept in his *Cupbearer's Book* (*Sāghī-nāma*) in which he recollects the tradition of pre-Islamic kings:

مغنی کجایی به آواز رود
به یاد آرزان خسروانی سرود
که تا وجد را کارسازی کنم
به رقص آیم و خرقه‌بازی کنم

Where are you, minstrel, with the melody of the lute?
Evoke the song of the ancient Persian kings
So that we can prepare ourselves for rapturous ecstasy,
Moving in dance and doing *khirqa-bāzi*.⁸¹

While the wine and music references are antinomian, they also connect ancient Persian times with a spiritual experience of religion, in which music, dance, and ecstasy have a place.

Plays of the Heart versus Plays of Intellect

Another popular motif in Persian poetry is the heart, which has its own will. Often the lover complains of his own heart, as he has no control over it. Sometimes the heart goes to the “bazaar of heart-sellers” (*bāzār-i dil-furūshān*) in search of a sweetheart, leaving the lover alone. In the following excerpt, ‘Aṭṭār complains about his heart as it has gambled the Faith for the sake of the beloved. The poet then portrays the heart as a drunk who is always present in the taverns on the periphery of an Islamic town, drinking the leftovers of Zoroastrian wine. Not only has the heart become drunk, the intellect has been checkmated on the board of love’s play, and cannot play anymore. The poet uses the imagery of play to refer to our utter inability to comprehend the Beloved:

دل من صاف دین در راه او باخت
که این دل مست دردی مغانه ست
چو عظم مات شد بر نطع عشقش
چه بازم چون نه بازی و نه خانه است؟

My heart gambled the Faith in his path, and lost all,
 For this heart has become drunk through the dregs of Magi
 wine.
 Now my intellect is checkmated on the board of his love:
 How can I play when there is neither a move nor a
 square!⁸²

Other Combinations of Play

In his *Dīvān*, ‘Aṭṭār combines the word *bāzī* with other nouns to create new compounds. In the following couplet the poet combines fox with play, advising us not to behave like a fox. The fox is a symbol of craftiness, shrewdness, deceit but also of cowardice in Persian literature. According to the science of physiognomy (*‘ilm-i firāsāt*), people who look like a fox are evil and deceitful. When a man dreams of playing with a fox, it means that a woman is in love with him or that “he will soon find a lovely mistress, while he who dreams of a fox jumping in his shoes should expect that someone will seduce his wife in the near future.”⁸³ Considering these negative characteristics of the fox, ‘Aṭṭār asks the mystic, who possesses the qualities of a lion, not to “play” like a fox but rather to devote himself to silence. In his *Asrār-nāma* he uses a story of a wolf and a fox to indicate how the soul should rise and free itself from the body through cunning.⁸⁴ But here the behavior of the fox is condemned:⁸⁵

مکن روباه بازی شیر مردا
 خموشی پیشه کن کین ره عیانست
 برو از پوست بیرون آی کین کار
 نه کار تست کار مغز جانست

O lion man! Do not play the fox,
 Take silence as your manner, for this is the evident road.
 Go, get out of that skin, because this is not your task,
 It is the task of the soul’s pride.⁸⁶

Silence is a quality of Islamic mysticism, which is elaborated upon in several mystical manuals such as Kalābādhi’s *Sharḥ-i ta‘rūf*. As a

student of ʿAṭṭār, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī chose the pen name Khāmūsh or “The Silent.”⁸⁷

Love as a Game

Allusions to love in connection to *bāzī* are common in Persian poetry, and ʿAṭṭār is no exception. Love, like play, requires exertion, risk, pain, and endurance. Love can make the player exhausted or ill, even leading to premature death. Philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā describe love as an illness for which they suggest specific treatments.⁸⁸ While profane sensual love is praised and functions as a bridge to the highest form of love, it is an easy love. In profane love, the lover’s risk is limited, but progress on the path of mystical love requires risking not only reputation but also earthly possessions and interests.

Another reason for combining love with *bāzī* is the relationship between the lover and the beloved as players in the game of love. Love requires players; there are losers and winners. The lover must gamble everything, even his precious life, to attain the object of his love. The unequal relationship between the lover and the beloved requires the lover to acquiesce to any of the beloved’s wishes. In Persian theoretical treatises, such as Aḥmad Ghazālī’s *Savānih*, the superior position of the beloved is repeatedly emphasized. “The essence of friendship lies in equality of rank, but it is impossible for the lover and the beloved to be of the same rank, for the lover is altogether the earth of lowness and the beloved is altogether the sky of loftiness and eminence.”⁸⁹ The rules of the game are to lose oneself in the play to find one’s true self in the beloved. The lover must abnegate himself, annihilate ego and all possessions and interests, to be absorbed in the beloved’s identity and annihilate duality. Union requires from the lover much exertion. Love relates to a sensual instinct, but in his mystical poetry, ʿAṭṭār concentrates on a higher form of love that requires the lover’s annihilation in the beloved. He tells several stories in which the lover desires to die for the beloved, or to be killed at the hand of the beloved. One story is about an ordinary woman who has fallen in love with a prince. The prince is irritated and asks his father the king to remove the woman. The

king sentences the woman to death. At the moment of execution, she begs them to tie her hair to the feet of the prince's horse so that she may be dragged by the horse and be killed by him. She wants to be killed by the beloved. This death is the highest degree of love. The king is moved. He forgives the woman, sending her to the prince's palace.⁹⁰ As Ritter rightly says, "To be killed by the hand of the beloved is, in the realm of love, a title to glory. Moreover, death often offers the only possibility of coming into contact with the beloved or his sphere."⁹¹

In Persian poetry, the verb *to love* is also combined with exercise and sport. The verb *'ishq varzidan* (to exercise love) requires an active attitude from the lover. The modern Persian word *varzish* (sport) is derived from the same root. To love is to enter an arena of struggle and sacrifice. Many Persian idioms relating to love are related to physical and mental sports such as polo, chess, and backgammon.

Conclusion

This introductory study on the notion of play suggests several conclusions. The theological sources, including the Quran and exegesis, interpret plays and games as activities that divert the believer from the serious tasks of a good Muslim. This world is transient; it is a field to plant seeds to be harvested in the hereafter. Play can distract people from the sole purpose of life—that is, salvation—and lead to gambling, which is strictly forbidden in Islam.⁹² In these sources, play is associated with children and women, and is forbidden beyond adolescence. However, in practice, as we saw from the examples in the mirror for princes genre, adolescents engaged in play.

In theological sources, certain games such as chess and backgammon are associated with pre-Islamic Persia, and are frowned upon as remnants of a pagan past. We know from early Islamic sources that play was associated with ritual games during pre-Islamic Persian festivals such as Now Rūz, the celebration of the New Year at the spring equinox. Islamic authors such as Ghazālī are critical of games performed for such celebrations, characterizing the celebrations as remnants of a pagan heritage, and play as a sign of apostasy. Islam

considers play as deviance, ignorance (with the connotation of pre-Islamic), and being heedless of God's call for salvation. This created paradoxes as mental and physical games remained part of the education of a prince. It is also interesting as the Arabic terms for *play*, *lahw* and *la'ib*, preserve their theological strength when used in Persian literature, whereas the Persian equivalent, *bāzī*, is productive in a wide range of compounds related to various activities and behavior. The Arabic terms have a pejorative connotation in contemporary Iran.

While many religious sources treat play negatively, we have information on a wide range of games and forms of playing in the early and medieval Islamic world that require a systematic analysis. These games are interesting for their philological and linguistic values as each game is connected to a ritual or has some literary, religious, or legal implication. Animals and insects were used in games for gambling, racing, and fighting, but were also kept for pragmatic reasons, such as using pigeon dung as fertilizer for agriculture. Keeping animals was also a token of power as we know from diverse genres that the aristocracy kept animals and kings gave them as gifts to other rulers. Play was regarded as a distraction from God and associated with gambling. In some cases, there were religious scruples about commercial transactions in play goods, a complicated matter in an Islamic legal context.

There are also many literary references to shadow play, which was common in medieval Islamic societies. A shadow play performed especially during the nights of Ramadan is called *khayāl al-Zill* (shadow fantasy) in Arabic, *khayāl-bāzī* in Persian, and *Qaragöz* in Turkish. It is often mentioned in Persian literature (it is translated as *play of illusion* given above). Nizāmī of Ganja (d. 1209) knits this play to his rich and convoluted metaphoric language. Shadow play was popular until the twentieth century, but has been displaced by television, film, and theater.⁹³

Because the Persian term *bāzī* has been closely associated with love, it became an essential term in Persian Sufism. In this literature, the risk aspect of play is developed to indicate the inability of the intellect to comprehend the mystery of God, as all intellectual activities take place in a finite world barred from Infinity. All efforts and

activities of the intellect are futile attempts to unravel the mystery of the universe. Risk, love, and the soul are linked in concepts such as *bāzī-yi 'ishq* (plays of love), *'ishq-bāzī* (love play), and *jān-bāz* (soul play), all references to gambling one's life and soul (*jān* means both) for the sake of love. Such compounds are used especially in the anti-nomian genre. To give one example, I cite the following couplet from one of 'Aṭṭār's ghazals:

برو عطار، بیرون آی باجانان بازی
که هر کس جان درو بازد پشیمانیش نمی‌بینم

O 'Aṭṭār! Come out to play for your life with the Beloved
For I foresee no regrets for one who gambles life with
Him.⁹⁴

Perhaps a main conclusion is the tension between the condemnation of the theologians and the wide range of uses of play in literary and mystic metaphors. While there are religious objections to play in the Quran and in exegesis, in practice people play and it is an intrinsic human instinct. The tension means that playing and references to play must have had sociological, political, and psychological implications, especially in the centuries following the advent of Islam. It is clear that for Persians, certain pre-Islamic forms of play had ritual values connected to festivals, but we know little about play in pre-Islamic Persia. To my knowledge, there are no studies available on the functions and definitions of play in Iranian religions such as Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. This is also a desideratum for understanding the role of play in the daily life of Persians in Islamic Iran. The question of banned games also requires a study. Why were certain games considered gambling while others acquired a role in national and religious rituals? Another desirable subject is to create a taxonomy of forms of play. To what extent do ceremonial plays transmit un-Islamic ideas in a national ritualistic setting such as the Persian New Year, and how was this possible when theologians such as Ghazālī wanted to ban them? What is the boundary between playfulness and seriousness? And what role have games played in transgressive religion?

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NOTES

1. J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949; first published 1944, repr. 1980), 1.

2. W. Otterspeer, *De Hand van Huizinga* [The hand of Huizinga] (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 138–39. Valerie Frissen, Jos de Mul, and Joost Raessens, “Homo Ludens 2.0: Play, Media and Identity,” in *Contemporary Culture: New Directions in Arts and Humanities Research*, ed. J. Thissen, R. Zwijnenberg, and K. Zijlmans (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 75–92.

3. Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); see also B. G. Fragner, *Die “Persophonie”: Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999).

4. Fereydūn Vahman, s.v. “Bāzi,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. For the word’s relation to the concept of “fate or destiny,” see W. Eilers, s.v. “Baḳt. I. The Term,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

5. See Francis Steingass, s.v. “bākhthan,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 136.

6. Niẓāmī Ganjawī, *Khusrow u Shirīn*, ed. B. Tharwatiyān (Tehran: Tūs, 1987), 660, couplet 118.

7. A. Gulchīn Ma‘ānī, “Bāzīhā-yi burd-u bākhthī-yi qarn-i sīzdahum,” in *Hunar va Mardum*, 4, no. 164 (1976): 28–45.

8. F. Rosenthal, s.v. “La‘īb,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

9. These are the contexts in which play, game, or entertainment are referred to in the Quran: 6:32: “And this world’s life is naught but a play and an idle sport; and certainly the abode of the hereafter is better for those who guard (against evil); do you not then understand?” 7:98: “What! Do the people of the towns feel secure from Our punishment coming to them in the morning while they play?” 99: “What! Do they then feel secure from Allah’s plan? But none feels secure from Allah’s plan except the people who shall perish.” 9:65: “And if you should question them, they would certainly say: we were only idly discoursing and sporting. Say: was it at Allah and His

communications and His Apostle that you mocked.” 21:1–2: “Their reckoning has drawn near to men, and in heedlessness are they turning aside. There comes not to them a new reminder from their Lord but they hear it while they sport.” 29:64: “And this life of the world is nothing but a sport and a play; and as for the next abode, that most surely is the life (*ḥayavan*)—did they but know!” 44:8–11: “There is no god but He; he gives life and causes death, your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of yore. Nay, they are in doubt, they sport. Therefore keep waiting for the day when the heaven shall bring a clear drought, that shall overtake men; this is a painful punishment.” 47:36: “The life of this world is only idle sport and play. And if you believe and guard (against evil) He will give you your rewards, and will not ask you your possessions.” 57:20: “Know that this world’s life is only sport and play and gaiety and boasting among yourself, and a vying in the multiplication of wealth and children, like the rain, whose causing the vegetation to grow, pleases the husbandmen; then it withers away so that you will see it become yellow, then it becomes dried up and broken down; and in the hereafter is a severe chastisement and (also) forgiveness from Allah and (His) pleasure; and this world’s life is naught but means of deception.” See also F. Rosenthal, *Gambling in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 82–86.

10. Rosenthal, s.v. “La‘ib.”

11. According to Afsaruddin, “‘Ā’isha’s marriage to the Prophet was not consummated until approximately three years later, when she was either nine or ten years old, as the majority of sources report.” See Asma Afsaruddin, “‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23459. The historicity of the very diverse calculations of ‘Ā’isha’s age at her marriage need not concern us here: the point is that “playing” was a sign that signified preadolescence.

12. Rosenthal, “La‘ib.”

13. The entry “Life” makes a reference to play. Netton writes, “The Qur’ān exhibits an almost platonic rejection of the life of this world (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*), characterizing it as nothing but ‘play and amusement’ (*la‘ib wa lahw*) and contrasting it with the reward of the righteous in the hereafter (Q 6:32).” See Ian Richard Netton, s.v. “Life,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:182–85.

14. “The eschatological contempt for this world betrayed by Q 53:60 and best attested by its dismissal as mere play and amusement in Q 6:32 flourished in pious circles and especially among early ascetics who provided numerous dicta against laughter.” See Ludwig Ammann, “Laughter,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:146–49.

15. Rosenthal, “La‘ib.”

16. *Kashf al-asrār wa-‘uddat al-abrār, ma‘rūf bi-Tafsīr Kawāja ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī*, Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī al-Haravī, (1005–1089), ed. ‘Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat, (1893–1980) (Tehran: Intishārāt-i

Dānīshgāh-i Tīhrān, 1959–60). The original extends to several thousand pages, while this critical edition is in ten large volumes. Abridged versions have appeared in Persian and in translation. See, for example, Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *The Unveiling of the Mysteries and the Provision of the Pious (Kashf al-asrār wa ‘uddat al-abrār)*, selections trans. William C. Chittick (Amman: Royal Ahl al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2015).

17. For an excellent monograph, see Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur’an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

18. See Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa ‘uddat al-abrār*, ed. Ali-Asghar Hikmat (1371; Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1382), 1:558–59.

وَ إِذْ رَزَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانَ اَعْمَالَهُمْ - شَيْطَانِ بَرِّ

ایشان آراست و بچشم ایشان نیکو نمود این زندگانی دنیا، که جز بساط لهو و لعب نیست،

19. Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 2:261.

20. Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 2:376.

21. There are many such anecdotes and passages in Persian mystic literature. Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār recounts a beautiful story in his *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. H. Ritter (Tehran: Tūs, 1989). See also H. Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn Attār*, trans. John O’Kane and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 46–54.

22. E. Beazley, “The Pigeon Towers of Isfahan,” in *Iran* 4 (1966): 105–9; see also P. Jackson and L. Lockhart, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 6, chapter 15; Robert Hillenbrand, “Safavid Architecture,” in Jackson and Lockhart, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 826.

23. Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:141. The Quranic sentence runs as follows:

تَعْبَثُونَ تَبَثُونَ بِكُلِّ رِيعِ اَيَّةٍ

24. See ‘Alī Bulūkbāshī, *Bāzī-hā-yi Kuhan dar Iran* (Tehran: Daftar-i pazhūhishhā-yi farhangī, 2007).

25. The following games are mentioned: *rasan-wāzīg* (rope dancing); *zanjīr-wāzīg* (chain play); *dār-wāzīg* (pole climbing); *mār-wāzīg* (snake play); *čambar-wāzīg* (hoop jumping); *tīr-wāzīg* (arrow play); *tās-wāzīg* (throwing dice); *wandag-wāzīg* (rope walking); *andarwāy-wāzīg* (air play); *mēx ud spar-wāzīg* (ball play); *sel-wāzīg* (javelin play); *šamsēr-wāzīg* (sword play); *dašnag-wāzīg* (dagger play); *warz-wāzīg* (club play); *šīšag-wāzīg* (bottle play); *kabīg-wāzīg* (monkey play) (J. M. Unvala, ed., *The Pahlavi Text: “King Husrav and His Boy”* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, n.d.), 14, 16, 27–29). The page says, “*ud pad čatrang ud nēw-ardaxšēr ud hašt-pāy kardan az hamālān frāztar ham* ‘I am better than my equals in chess, backgammon, and eight-footed.’” Cited from Vahman, s.v. “Bāzī.” For the invention of backgammon see C. J. Brunner, “The Middle Persian Explanation of Chess and Invention of Backgammon,” *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 10 (1978): 43–51. Also see B. Utas, s.v. “Chess,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

26. ‘Unşur al-Ma‘ālī Kay Kāvūs b. Iskandar, *Qābūs-nāma*, 3rd ed., ed. Gh.-Ḥ. Yūsufi (Tehran: Khārazmī, 1985), 77–79; for a translation, see R. Levy, trans., *A Mirror for Princes: The Qābūs-Nāma* (London: Cresset Press, 1951). On chess in medieval Arabian culture see R. Kruk, “Is schaken wel een spel voor heren? Over het schaakspel in de middeleeuws Arabische cultuur,” in *Spelen in de Middeleeuwen: Over schaken, dammen, dobbelen en kaarten*, eds., W.S. van Egmond, M. Mostert, Utrechtse Bijdragen tot de Mediëvistiek 17, Hilversum: Verloren, 2001, pp. 105–122; also see *On the Explanation of Chess and Backgammon (Abar Wizārišn ī Čatrang ud Nihišn Nēw-Ardaxšīr)*, Translated From Middle Persian by Touraj Daryaei, UK: H&S Media, Jordan Center for Persian Studies, 2016.

27. Kay Kāvūs, *Qābūs-nāma*, 54; Levy, *A Mirror for Princes*, 67.

28. See Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, s.v. “Adab, i. Adab in Iran,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

29. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, s.v. “Adab, i. Adab in Iran.”

30. Kay Kāvūs, *Qābūs-nāma*, 54; Levy, *A Mirror for Princes*, 67.

31. Kay Kāvūs, *Qābūs-nāma*, 54; Levy, *A Mirror for Princes*, 68.

32. Kay Kāvūs, *Qābūs-nāma*, 68; Levy, *A Mirror for Princes*, 85.

33. The quotations are my paraphrases.

34. Kay Kāvūs, *Qābūs-nāma*, 142; Levy, *A Mirror for Princes*, 187–88.

35. Manūchihri Dāmghāni, *Dīvān*, ed. M. Dabīr-Siyāqī (Tehran: , 1968), 7.

36. J. T. P. de Bruijn, “The Qalandariyyāt in Persian Mystical Poetry,” in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Šūfism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1992), 80.

37. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 3.

38. See Vahman, in s.v. “Bāzī.”

39. Farrukhī-yi Sistāni, *Dīvān*, ed. M. Dabīrsiyāqī (Tehran: Zavvār, 1992), 21, ll. 419–31. Seyed-Gohrab “My Heart is the Ball, Your Lock the Polo-Stick: ‘Development of the Ball and Polo-Stick Metaphors in Classical Persian Poetry,’” in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on his 80th Birthday*, ed. F. Lewis & S. Sharma, Amsterdam, Rozenberg Publishers / West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University Press, 2007, pp. 183–205.

40. Amīr Mu‘izzī, *Dīvān*, ed. A. Iqbāl (Tehran: Islāmiyya, 1939), 397.

41. Mu‘izzī, *Dīvān*, 648.

42. Vahman, s.v. “Bāzī.” The Danish scholar Arthur Emanuel Christensen (1875–1945) refers to the role of play during the Sassanian period in several places of his book, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1936), 411, 416, 478.

43. Ḥ. Khadijām, ed., *Kīmīā-yi sa‘ādat*, vol. 1 (Tehran: , 1982), 522.

44. See Vahman, s.v. “Bāzī.”

45. As cited by Vahman.

46. See Vahman, s.v. “Bāzī.”

47. He wrote these poems “when a nobleman showed a beautiful set of painted *ganjafa* cards intended as a gift for a prince and said that it

would be wonderful if each card could also carry a poem in addition to the picture. . . . The *robā'īs* contain all the information concerning the value of the card. The suits named in the poem are: *ḡolām* (slave), *tāj* (crown), *šamšīr* (sword), *zar-e sorḡ* (red gold; *ašrafī*, gold coin, in Ahlī), *čang* (harp), *barāt* (bill of exchange), *zar-e safīd* (white gold; *tanka*, silver coin, in Ahlī), and *qomāš* (cloth, bales).” See Mahdi Roschanzamir, s.v. “Card Games,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and the secondary literature he provides in his entry. Also see R. von Leyden, *Ganjefa. The Playing Cards of India. A General Survey with a Catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982).

48. See Sassan Tabatabai, *Father of Persian Verse: Rudaki and His Poetry* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), 80–81.

49. Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, ed. Muḡammad-Taḡī Tafazzulī (Tehran: ‘Ilmī va farhangī, 2005), *qaṣīda* no. 2, p. 706.

50. ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, *qaṣīda* no. 10, p. 747.

51. ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, *qaṣīda* no. 15, pp. 766–67.

52. J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems* (Richmond, VA: Curzon, 1997), 12; H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Farīduddīn Attār* (Leiden: Brill, 1955); English translation: Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*.

53. B. Reinert, s.v. “‘Aṭṭār, Farīd-al-Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 45ff.

54. ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, p. 807, *qaṣīda* 23.

55. See Maryam Ḥuseynī, ed., Abu ‘l-Majd Majdūd ibn Ādam Sanā‘ī, *Ḥadīqat al-ḡaḡīqa va sharī‘at al-ṭarīqa* (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr- Dānīshgāhī, 2004), 228.

56. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975, 219.

57. On these figures of chaos see Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Gog and Magog: The Clans of Chaos in World Literature*, ed. A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, F. Doufīkar-Aerts, S. McGlinn (West Lafayette, IN: , Purdue University Press, 2007; repr., Leiden University Press, 2010); see also E. van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources: Sallam’s Quest for Alexander’s Wall* (Boston: Brill, 2010).

58. ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, *ghazal* no. 26, pp. 18–19.

59. For a discussion on shadow play, see the conclusion.

60. ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, *ghazal* no. 374, pp. 294–95.

61. J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, 76.

62. *Kashaf al-asrar*, trans. W. Chittick (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae; Amman, Jordan: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2015), 167.

63. Francis J. Steingass, s.v. “pāk-bāz,” in *Persian-English Dictionary* (London: Routledge, 1963).

64. J. T. P. de Bruijn, s.v. “Beloved,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Nīzāmī’s Epic Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 218–26.

65. ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, ghazal no. 422, p. 498; the word *miṣṭaba* has several meanings, according to Steingass: “A long and wide bench or stone-platform raised two feet from the ground, on which the people of the East recline; a tavern; a hospice (for strangers), an inn, caravanserai” (Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, 1237).

66. De Bruijn had omitted this hemistich. The meaning could be that the persona is to act as a hypocrite or to appear in disguise. The word *libāsāt* (sing. *libās*) means a garment, vesture, or robe, but it also means dissimulation. The word *labāsī* means forgery, which is also in the semantic field of deception.

67. Mudarris Ražavī, ed., *Dīvān-i Sanā’ī* (Tehran: Sanā’ī Publisher, 1962), *Qaṣīda* no. 29, pp. 74–75, ll. 1–3. For a variant translation, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, “The Qalandariyyāt in Persian Mystical Poetry,” in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1992), 81.

68. de Bruijn, “The Qalandariyyāt in Persian Mystical Poetry,” 86.

69. See B. Utas, s.v. “Chess. i. The History of Chess in Persia,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

70. ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, ghazal no. 613, p. 491. The word *dilshudigān* means literally *have become hearts*, a reference to mystics who have bid farewell to reason and act according to their hearts. In Persian poetry, it simply means *lovers*.

71. Here I follow another reading offered by the editor, which I deem more fitting to the context. Tafazzulī prefers the following line:

بس عقل که شد مات بیک بازی عشقش
ور عقل درو مات نشد مات گرفتیم

The translation remains almost the same: “True, intellect was checkmated by one play of his love / And if intellect is not checkmated in it (i.e., in his love), we would be checkmated.”

72. *Kharābāt* means literally *ruins*, referring to neighborhoods at the periphery of Islamic towns where people of other religions, such as Zoroastrians and Christians, lived. Here one could find taverns, brothels, and other places of ill repute. The word *kharābāt* has come to mean *tavern* and those people who frequent such places are called *kharābātī*. For an excellent introduction of characters in antinomian poetry such as *rind*, see L. Lewisohn, “Prolegomenon to the Study of Ḥāfiẓ: Socio-Historical and Literary Context: Ḥāfiẓ in Shiraz,” in *Hafiz and the School of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. L. Lewisohn (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 3–73.

73. ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, 11–12.

74. J. T. P. de Bruijn, “The Preaching Poet: Three Homiletic Poems by Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār,” in *Edebiyat* 9, no. 1 (1998): 93.

75. Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 47.

76. *Ilāhī-nāma*, 273.

77. See, for instance, the views of Khomeini and Khamenei in their *Towzīh al-masā'il*. Also look at Khamenei's Web sites in which questions on the permissibility of chess are answered.

78. See Erik S. Ohlander, "Kerqa," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XVI/3, 330–32, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kerqa-the-sufi-frock>.

79. 'Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, ghazal no. 798, p. 640.

80. Ganjawī, *Khusrow u Shirīn*, 708, l. 62.

81. Muḥammad Shams ad-Dīn Ḥāfiz, *Dīvān*, ed. P. Nātil Khānlārī (Tehran: Khārazmī, 1983), 2:1059, ll. 13–14. See Sunil Sharma, "Hāfiz's *Sāqināmeḥ*: The Genesis and Transformation of a Classical Poetic Genre," *Persica* 18 (2002): 75–83. Also see Paul Losensky, s.v. "Sāqī-Nāma," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*; Paul Losensky, "Song of the Cupbearer by Mohammad Sūfī Māzandarānī," in *The Layered Heart: Essays on Persian Poetry in Honor of Dick Davis*, ed. Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2019), 173–96.

82. 'Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, ghazal no. 98, pp. 71–72.

83. Mahmoud and Teresa Omidsalar, s.v. "Fox ii. In Persia," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

84. See Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 214, in which the author summarizes the story as follows:

A fox falls into a well which has a device for drawing water consisting of two buckets and a rope. He sits in the one bucket which is down inside the well and holds onto the rope which the bucket is attached to. The wolf comes to the edge of the well, sees the fox below and calls to him: "If you'd like to be together with me, I'll come down there with you or better yet, you come up here!" The fox says: "I'm lame. You have to come down here with me." The wolf then gets in the upper bucket and sinks downward since he's heavier than the fox. The fox rises. When they're face to face half-way down the well, the wolf says to the fox: "Don't leave me alone in here!" The fox says: "Just wait a little. I'll be right back." But the wolf will have a long wait after the fox has run off.

Ritter adds that "The well is the body in which the fox of the spirit (*jān*) has ended up, the wolf is the carnal soul (*nafs*), and the rope which rescues is "the rope of God" (Surah 3/103) (*Asrār-nāma*, 20/9).

85. In other works, 'Aṭṭār compares the reprehensive behavior of a man to a fox, and praiseworthy behavior to a lion. See Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 371. For other metaphors and anecdotes, see the index, under *fox*.

86. 'Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, ghazal no. 91, pp. 66–67. In the last line, *maghz* (pride) is literally the marrow or brain, but in the sense of the brain, it is associated in various idioms with talking too much and with arrogance. Given the previous reference to keeping silent, these are probably the intended connotations. A variant reading runs: "It is not your task, it is the task of the kernel of the soul."

87. See F. D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalāl al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 329.

88. For a translation of Ibn Sīnā's treatise, see M. W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, ed. D. E. Immish (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 484–85.

89. Aḥmad Ghazālī, (*Sawāniḥ*) *Aphorismen über die Liebe*, ed. Herausgegeben von H. Ritter (Istanbul: Ma'ārif, 1942, faşl 36, pp. 54–55; English translation: N. Pourjavady, trans., *Sawāniḥ: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits: The Oldest Persian Sufi Treatise on Love* (London: KPI, 1986), 51.

90. 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, 48–51. The book appeared originally at Ma'ārif in Istanbul in 1940. Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 409–10.

91. Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 409.

92. Rosenthal, "La'ib."

93. J. M. Landau, "Kḥayāl al-Zill," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.; P. N. Boratav, "Ḳaragöz," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Also see Metin And, *Karagöz: Turkish Shadow Theatre*, rev. ed. (Istanbul: Dostyayinlari, 1979).

94. 'Aṭṭār, *Dīvān*, ghazal no. 593, pp. 477–78.