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THE LIVING DEAD OF
TABRIZ: EXPLORATIONS
IN CHRONOTOPIC
IMAGINATION

The following pages are the venue of numerous struggles. The most immediate struggle is mine, aimed at making sense of works composed centuries ago. Then there is the labor of the works' authors, to relate matters assimilated from texts and personal encounters with the living and the dead. In this instance, the act of writing was part of the effort to lead a religious life sometimes at odds with a purely worldly outlook. And there are general existential paradoxes about life and death that have driven human beings to speak since times immemorial. By bringing the notion of struggle to the forefront, I want to emphasize the plenitude of ideas and experiences found in Islamic texts. As scholars of religious worlds, we are compelled to reduce complex sources into systemic phenomena. We have to present the material in distilled form, but doing so glosses over the fact that we usually thematize a small proportion of the works and have no straightforward access to authors' intentions. Although tied to conventions of genre, a complex textual work is also always the final product of a creative exercise in which ideas and experiences from a lived human context have been sublimated into verbal form. Registering the labors that go into writing and reading such works helps us see them as elements of scenes in motion rather than static representations of an unchanging world.

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This essay focuses on a single extensive work that I believe deserves detailed consideration for thinking about the narration of space and time in Islamic contexts. Completed in 1567, the *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* (*Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*) by Ḥāfiẓ Ḥusayn Karbalā'ī (d. 1589) is a monumental description of the city of Tabriz in northwestern Iran.¹ By the late sixteenth century, when the work was composed, Tabriz had been a major urban center for many centuries. A regional hub from the time of the Islamic conquest in the seventh century, it served as imperial capital under the Mongol Ilkhanids (1256–1335 CE) and capital or entrepôt under the Jalā-yarid, Karakoyunlu, Akkoyunlu, and Timurid dynasties (1335–1501). As summary historical and geographical works are eager to point out, the city's political significance correlated closely to its status as a center of learning.²

At the time Karbalā'ī composed his work, Tabriz was in the midst of a highly consequential transition. The process began in 1501, when Ismā'īl (d. 1524), the young hereditary leader of a Sufi group in Azerbaijan, declared himself king of Iran upon entering Tabriz. This event inaugurated the Safavid dynasty, which maintained Tabriz as its capital until 1555 when Shāh Tahmāsp (d. 1576), Ismā'īl's son, shifted the capital to Qazvin. The Safavid family had Sunni origins, but Shāh Ismā'īl declared Twelver Shi'ism his domain's official religion. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the population of Iran (and Tabriz) gradually tilted toward a Shi'i majority, the process depending on local demographic factors and the ebb and flow of the zeal with which the Safavids promoted Shi'ism at particular times. Karbalā'ī's familial background was Sunni, but the names “Ḥusayn” and “Karbalā'ī” both have a strongly Shi'i flavor, as they refer, respectively, to the third Imam and the place in Iraq where he was killed in 680. The *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* does not evince a strong sectarian affiliation, a posture that may have been advantageous in the highly partisan sectarian environment prevailing in Karbalā'ī's time.³

When Karbalā'ī wrote, the city's shrines ranged from the graves of the Prophet Muḥammad's companions, who had arrived with the Arab conquering

¹ Ḥāfiẓ Ḥusayn Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, ed. Ja'far Sulṭān al-Qurrā'ī, 2 vols. (Tabriz: Sutūda, 2005).

² For an overview of literary sources available for the study of premodern Tabriz, see Vladimir Minorsky, [C. E. Bosworth], and Sheila S. Blair, “Tabriz,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, accessed September 21, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1137. The following studies contain more extensive (but largely repetitive) information on earlier sources: Sayyid Āqā 'Awnallāhī, *Tārīkh-i pāñsadsāla-i Tabriz: Az āghāz-i dawra-i Mughūlān tā pāyān-i dawra-i Ṣafaviyān*, trans. Parvīz Zārī Shāhmarsī (Tehran: Mu'assasa-i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 2008); Ayyūb Niknām Lala and Farīborz Zāwqī, *Tabriz dargūzar-i tārīkh* (Tabriz: Yārān, 1995).

³ The rise of the Safavids and Iran's consequent transition to Twelver Shi'ism have been the subject of significant scholarship. For detailed assessments, see Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscape of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Michel M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safavids: Shi'ism, Sūfism, and the Ġulāt* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1972).

army in the seventh century, to monuments dedicated to figures known personally to the author. His Tabriz is not an ordinary space amenable to easy objectification. Rather, *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* presents the city as a cypher, a complex web of space, time, and experience made available to us through the agency of a man who derived his sense of self from the city. The work's overarching goal is to preserve deeply meaningful memory, a recall of things that defines the present and the future. Reading this work attentively now, nearly half a millennium after it was composed, requires simultaneous attention to its affective and informational content. It necessitates a kind of archeology of the text's multiple significations, in which the results one can demonstrate are indebted to the words one reads as well as the taxonomies one employs to understand them.

In this essay and related projects, I urge that we pay special attention to the fact that Muslims have understood the past in a vast variety of ways over the centuries. Modern academic work on premodern Islamic contexts has often regarded literary sources as simple collections of data that we can mine on the basis of our current presumptions about the nature of the past. This approach ignores embedded conceptual commitments that conditioned the authors of the sources to write about the past in particular ways. As a corrective, I wish to account for explicit and implicit guidance found within a work itself, a strategy that involves close attention to the work's structure and declarative content. But my aim is not simply to restate what the work says. Rather, I presume that the words I can read overlay a multifold deposit of ideas and practices connected to the author's life situation. Every text has a theoretical perspective built into it that organizes information into relatable form. To explicate what the text is attempting to accomplish, we need to apprehend this conceptual background. To engage both the text and its underlying framework simultaneously requires us to alternate between navigating the text's surface and delving into the concepts that undergird its materialization. Such a strategy can only ever claim partial comprehension of the work, achieved through struggles over the differing possibilities contained in the words that meet the eye.⁴

MEMORIALIZING TABRIZ

Numerous reasons make Karbalā'ī's *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* an excellent subject for my strategy for reading Islamic works. Its contents indicate that the author sifted through a vast religious, geographical,

⁴ For a more detailed presentation of this methodological point, see Shahzad Bashir, "On Islamic Time: Rethinking Chronology in the Historiography of Muslim Societies," *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (December 2014): 464–519. I am currently finishing a monograph on this topic titled "Islamic Pasts and Futures: Horizons of Time."

and historical literature and combined his gleanings with personal observations to assemble the city's picture. It is massive (more than a thousand pages in print) and among the lengthiest works ever written in Persian on the shrines of a city and its environs. In part because of the length, it is a conglomeration of numerous established genres: local histories in Persian,⁵ shrine guides that map a city or region,⁶ and Sufi hagiography commemorating charismatic men and women.⁷ The work's author comes across as a person who, although intimately aware of precedents, deploys received knowledge in an innovative and carefully calibrated way.

Karbālā'ī's pedigree, education, and intellectual aptitude provided him prodigious access to societal discourses on the topics he engages. The work is an exceptionally rich representation of certain socioreligious topoi within premodern Islamic societies. It is also told in a personal voice, citing the author's own memory and experience in addition to earlier texts. Generic rules that structure the narrative are the assemblage through which a literary self, a subject, makes himself available through speech. The *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* refracts ideas, social constructs, and personal stakes in equal abundance.⁸

My treatment of the work is divided into five main parts that engage different sections to exemplify its various dimensions. I begin by focusing on the work's name as a repository of the religious outlook that runs through it. This

⁵ For excellent recent treatments of local histories in Persian that review earlier scholarship as well, see Mimi Hanaoka, *Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic Historiography: Persian Histories from the Peripheries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Derek J. Mancini-Lander, "Memory on the Boundaries of Empire: Narrating Place in the Early Modern Local Historiography of Yazd" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2012).

⁶ For recent scholarship on graves and shrines in the Islamic context see Devin DeWeese, *Studies on Sufism in Central Asia* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2012); Engseung Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Kelly Pemberton, *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010); Rian Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Azfar Moin, "Sovereign Violence: Temple Destruction in India and Shrine Desecration in Iran and Central Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no. 2 (April 2015): 467–96.

⁷ For a consideration of Sufi hagiography as a genre, see Shahzad Bashir, "Naqshband's Lives: Sufi Hagiography between Manuscripts and Genre," in *Sufism in Central Asia: New Perspectives on Sufi Traditions, 15th–21st Centuries*, ed. Jo-Ann Gross and Devin DeWeese (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 75–97.

⁸ For the topic under discussion, I do not wish to claim exceptionality for the city of Tabriz or Karbālā'ī as an author. I see Tabriz as an important city, among many others throughout the Middle East and Central and South Asia, that was made the subject of literary representation in Persian. Similarly, Karbālā'ī's *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* is one important work, among others, useful for thinking about the relationship between space and time in the Islamic context. Although utilizing different sources and attuned to other ends, important recent works by Hanaoka and Mancini-Lander, mentioned above, make arguments that parallel my reading of Karbālā'ī's Tabriz.

discussion highlights the work's purpose, in which a vision of the cosmos as a whole is conjoined to material realities of a city existing in time. The author's effort to write about the shrines of Tabriz comes through as a devotional act, the grand-scale version of the visit to a shrine. The work's narrative far exceeds its dogmatic purpose, accommodating a wide variety of interconnected stories filled with details from human lives. I treat this aspect of the work in the second and third sections, describing the work's structure and then concentrating on Karbalā'ī's description of shrines associated with a family of religious notables located in the countryside near Tabriz. The stories told in this section are typical of the work, but the group at issue here is exceptional: its women are said to have possessed greater religious authority than the men. Since the text as a whole is devoted overwhelmingly to men, the focus here on women requires the author to adjust the narrative, thereby revealing normative commitments pertaining to gender in relation to time and space.

The fourth section examines the author's chapter-long presentation of the life of Amīr Badr al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī of Lāla (d. 1507), a Sufi shaykh in Karbalā'ī's own spiritual lineage. This Sayyid and prominent master in Tabriz is the most cited authority in the work. Karbalā'ī's knowledge, and his sense of entitlement with respect to Sufi practice and the city of Tabriz, derived from his family's connection to this master. This aspect of the work relates to the sociopolitics of religious authority vested in shrines.⁹ The fifth section of the essay contrasts the authorial voice we hear when we read Karbalā'ī's work with what else we know about his personal circumstances. Contrary to custom, I treat the author last rather than first in order to underscore the separation between the man and his literary product. In the text, the human agent responsible for its production is accessible only in aspects and degrees that are revealed in the narrative. We do have available an additional short portrayal of Karbalā'ī, written by an author who met him more than a decade after the completion of *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart*. The variant

⁹ Some modern scholars identify Amīr Badr al-Dīn Aḥmad as Karbalā'ī's grandfather (e.g., Lewisohn, "Ḥosayn Karbalā'ī," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, accessed September 21, 2019, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hosayn-karbalai>) or great-grandfather (e.g., DeWeese, *Studies on Sufism in Central Asia*, 18). I am unable to corroborate this family connection. Karbalā'ī's extensive description of Badr al-Dīn makes no mention of his genealogical connection and, instead, he identifies his father as simply a caretaker at the shrine of Bābā Faraj and a certain Darvīsh Ḥasan as his grandfather in other parts of the work. Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 1:382, 381, 425. Neither the name Ḥasan nor the *nisba* Karbalā'ī are mentioned in the description of Badr al-Dīn's family. Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:179–81. The only further possibility is that the connection may have been through Karbalā'ī's mother, but then it seems out of place that the author would not make a point of revealing this in his narrative. My opinion, then, is that the supposed family connection reflects a confusion between Karbalā'ī's natal and spiritual lineages.

senses of the author that can be substantiated reinforce the insurmountable limits of our understanding.¹⁰

As a work depicting a city, *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* is an intertextual web that reflects varying modes of spatiotemporal relations. Unsurprisingly for a narrative of this scale, we encounter unevenness and irreducible complexity rather than easy comprehensibility. The authorial self that my partial readings attempt to substantiate was itself a product of the circumstances it narrates. The work is a human geography that nevertheless took the idea that the materialized world is an aspect of divine self-manifestation as an ontological fact. Stories recounted in the work symptomize social and political relations that are contradictory and conflicting as much as purporting to show the enactment of a preordained divine plan. In the midst of all this, Tabriz is a continually evolving matrix of space and time, narrated in line with imperatives of religious ideology and practice that impinged upon the author. My brief treatments of some particulars below are half-open windows allowing us partial access to the work's complex edifice. When confronted with a work such as this, I suggest acknowledging its translucence is the most productive posture for appreciating the social relations that caused it to be produced and are reflected in the heterogeneity of its contents.¹¹

PARADISE AS CHRONOTOPE

Karbalā'ī's work is a congress of many voices. We hear from religious authorities, enjoining attention to burial sites as a means for gaining merit and clarifying religious ideas. Occupants of graves tell of their lives and misdeeds. Men and women who have memorialized the saintly protagonists describe their companionship and real and visionary encounters. Situated in the middle, the author is a curator who arranges the material based on Sufi religious practice and his personal investment in the sanctity of the space of Tabriz. Among the many different threads on which one can pull to see the construction of *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart*, the author's explanation for the work's memorable, palindrome-like name is an advantageous option. Charting the logic of the title leads to presumptions underlying the work's production.

¹⁰ Many details of Karbalā'ī's work are reminiscent of sections in other Persian sources that speak about cities and shrines. Although I am aware of these correlations, my narrative precludes citing them as a matter of methodological preference. As I see it, the other works contain their own particular configurations pertaining to ideology and literary preference different from Karbalā'ī's representations. To do them justice would require detailed analyses beyond the scope of my concern in this essay.

¹¹ My understanding of Karbalā'ī's work as a human geography has been aided by discussions contained in Jon May and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality* (London: Routledge, 2001).

The key to understanding the title is “paradise,” a concept with a large Islamic footprint whose usage by Karbalāʾī I would like to elucidate via Mikhail Bakhtin’s well-known exploration of the literary chronotope. Bakhtin’s basic notion of the chronotope is straightforwardly intuitive: “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.”¹² But his detailed assessments of the various chronotopes he finds in ancient and modern novels give his conceptualization a particular flavor. My appeal to his work is an approximation whose limitations need explicit acknowledgment. If we take Karbalāʾī at face value, he means to represent the past as he considered it to have happened. He is a self-effacing author whose declared purpose is to renarrate truthfully for a religious purpose. His work contains a liberal mixture of genres—its meandering details not amenable to summary. Karbalāʾī claims are, as it were, ontological (understanding “real” existence) and soteriological (salvation through correct thought and action). In comparison with these characteristics, Bakhtin’s lengthy descriptions of various kinds of chronotopes show the co-production of time and space in fictional works. He focuses on genre, literary typology, and the creative process that channels human subjectivity from authors to their artistic products. His ultimate concerns are narratological (understanding the world created within a narrative) and epistemological (how knowledge of the world gets configured within a text via subjective endeavor).¹³

While imperfectly matched, Bakhtin’s dense exploration of the literary chronotope is helpful to me because of his suggestive use of it as a lens to examine multifaceted narratives. Of the literary types he dissects, the idyllic novel is especially close to Karbalāʾī’s narrative in *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart*. In Bakhtin’s description of this type of novel, the special relationship between time and space is expressed in

an organic fastening down, a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one’s own home. Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one’s children and their children will live. . . . The unity of the life of generations (in

¹² Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

¹³ The chronotope has been the subject of an extensive academic discussion. In addition to the original essay in translation cited above, I have benefitted from the following: Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 366–432; Nele Bemong, Pieter Borghart, Michel De Dobbeleer, Koen De Temmerman, and Kristoffel Demoen, eds., *Bakhtin’s Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* (Gent: Academia Press, 2010); Liisa Steinby and Tintti Klapuri, eds., *Bakhtin and His Others: (Inter)subjectivity, Chronotope, Dialogism* (New York: Anthem Press, 2013).

general, the life of men) in an idyll is in most instances primarily defined by the unity of place, by the age-old rooting of the life of generations to a single place from which this life, in all its events, is inseparable.¹⁴

The notion of paradise is to Karbalā'ī's narrative what the idyll is to the idyllic novel. Both are idealized entanglements between space and time that act as backdrop and prescription for describing human communal life over an extended period. Unlike the idyll, paradise is not a state of unmarred natural and social harmony located somewhere in the human past. Rather, it is a paradoxical realm beyond earthly existence. Islamic canonical materials such as the Quran and ḥadīth imagine paradise as a material place of infinite pleasure, promised to the righteous at a time after death. The pleasures of paradise are invoked in bodily terms, through explicit reference to durative experience such as the sensation of eating delicious food, observing beautiful sights, and enjoying sexual gratification. Although material in content, paradise is a place denuded of temporal and spatial limitations that circumscribe usual earthly existence.¹⁵

In Bakhtin's reading of the idyllic novel, the idyll as chronotope conditions the novelist's intricate invention of a complex human world in the work. The idyll saturates the ostensibly mundane world one encounters in the narrative. Akin to such a novelist, Karbalā'ī deploys paradise as a concept covering multiple venues. His paradise is many things, sometimes simultaneously and at other times individually. It is the state of extraordinary felicity to be experienced after death by those who act well while on earth. The bodies and/or shrines of the religious-elect such as prophets and Sufi masters can be called paradise. Sanctified space such as the city of Tabriz is an earthly paradise. And Karbalā'ī gives the name *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* to his literary composition.¹⁶

¹⁴ Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," 225.

¹⁵ A full consideration of Islamic understandings of paradise (and hell) are beyond the scope of this essay. For recent analyses, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Rhetoric for the Senses," in *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), 165–82; Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson, eds., *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that Persian works that have words for garden and paradise (*rawza*, *janna*) in their titles proliferate in premodern literature. Picturing a narrative as a garden was a common conceit and not something invented by Karbalā'ī. However, the way an author justifies calling a text a garden varies greatly between works, and Karbalā'ī's version is distinctive. For perceptive analysis of a poetic work, composed contemporaneously with Karbalā'ī, that contains an elaborate account of time as a garden, see Paul Losensky, "The Palace of Praise and the Melons of Time: Descriptive Patterns in 'Abdi Bayk Shirazi's *Garden of Eden*," *Eurasian Studies* 2 (2003): 1–29. Interestingly, the notion of time as a garden has parallels in European historical reflection as well. See Lucian Hölscher, "Time Gardens: Historical Concepts in Modern Historiography," *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (2014): 577–91.

In Bakhtin's reading, the idyll retains its relevance as a powerful signifier in the idyllic novel through appeal to intergenerational continuity. Characters that populate the novel are mirrored from one generation to the next, replicating prototypes even as they are granted agency to act. In my reading of Karbalā'ī's work, the primary connecting glue is not the intergenerational family (or at least not that alone) but the Sufi religious community whose proponents mark territory through their earthly actions and their posthumous presence in shrines. For Bakhtin, the chronotope is valuable for understanding literary products because it shows how "time as it were thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."¹⁷ Karbalā'ī's picture of space and time understood as Tabriz is chronotopical in a similar vein and shows him crisscrossing between cosmology, history, religious practice, and literary invention.

Aided by possibilities identified in Bakhtin's description of chronotopes, let us now turn to the specifics of Karbalā'ī work. Karbalā'ī writes in the very beginning:

Praise be to God who made manifest all existent beings, other entities, and the archetypes, so that they may act as vessels for his self-manifestation. Then he chose humankind to be the best among them by his power, wisdom, and knowledge. He purchased from them their properties and selves in lieu that they may have *paradises of the heart*. He enlivened their hearts with the lights of knowledge, truthfulness, and certainty. He caused their material forms to die and made graves the places for their bodies. He commanded them to visit the prophets, [God's] friends, and the ordinary people of belief and Islam. Prayers and salutations on Muḥammad, the one sent to all of humankind and the jinn, and on his pure descendants and companions, the receivers of the good news about the *gardens of paradises*.¹⁸

This statement summarizes the emanationist cosmology that was common to much of post-Mongol Sufi thought in the Iranian sphere. It pertains to the human condition as such, as well as to the special place of exemplary religious individuals in the enactment of lives in the material sphere. As objects of the material world, human bodies share in the manifest aspect of God's being. But these bodies also contain the heart, an organ that transcends purely material existence and marks the bodily beings as beholden to God in a way not true of other objects. This is the station of the human in the cosmos, which makes the species a bearer of special privileges and duties. The part of the earth that contains human remains is marked off as exceptional for being

¹⁷ Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," 84.

¹⁸ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 1:1. All translations in this essay are my own unless otherwise noted. The use of italics here is my intervention for emphasis.

the final repository of the material aspect of a being with potential (derived from the heart) that exceeds the capacities of other material objects.

Graves that contain bodies of the class of people that includes God's friends (*awliyā'*), prophets, and their companions are physical locations that provide access to metaphysical realities. Karbalā'ī posits a cosmological homology between human hearts that have reached their religious destinies and the graves of the elect. These entities transcend simple materiality while being situated within the material world. Reflecting the perspective anticipated in the discussion of chronotypes above, the homology rests on using the term "paradise" in relation to both: the religiously fulfilled heart is called a paradise (paraphrasing a verse from the Quran),¹⁹ and the earthly graves of those promised eternal felicity after death are to be treated as gardens of paradise. Paradise is apt for both since it is an entity described in physical terms that is not subject to the limitations of ordinary materiality. Conjoining gardens of paradises (*rawẓāt al-jinān*) to paradises of the heart (*jannāt al-janān*), the full title of Karbalā'ī's work deploys a chronotope to entangle aspects of a complex cosmology.

The long passage I have translated above ends on the idea that God has commanded human beings to visit the graves of the elect. This encapsulates the direct connection between Karbalā'ī's cosmological vision and religious practice undertaken on a quotidian basis. Citing a formulation found also in earlier works on Sufi shrines, he locates the specific efficacy of such visits in the complementary capacities of the living and the dead. "It is related from some greats among Sufis that the spirits (*arvāḥ*) of those who visit graves have a greater share of light of acts (*nūr-i 'amal*) while the spirits of the people who are in graves have more of the lights of divine epiphanies (*anvār-i tajalliyāt-i rabbānī*). Whenever the living visit the dead, their spirits come upon each other and their lights become intermingled. In this event, the benefits of the living accrue to the dead, and vice versa."²⁰ Here, living bodies as well as graves are presented as two types of material envelopes that contain nonmaterial spirits. The spirits of the living and the dead differ in the way they participate in the structure of the cosmos, the distinction being denoted through functions of light. This formulation is based on the Quranic identification between God

¹⁹ Quran 9:111: "God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions against the gift of Paradise; they fight in the way of God; they kill, and are killed; that is a promise binding upon God in the Torah, and the Gospel, and the Koran; and who fulfills his covenant truer than God? So rejoice in the bargain you have made with Him; that is the mighty triumph." A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), 1:220.

²⁰ Karbalā'ī, *Rawẓāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 1:12. This statement is a generic feature of shrine guides in Persian and is present in identical form in a work on the shrines of Herat composed circa 1459–60. See Sayyid Aṣīl al-Dīn 'Abdallāh Vā'iz, *Maqṣad al-iqbāl-i Sulṭāniya*, ed. Māyil Hiravī (Tehran: Pizhūhishgāh-i 'Ulūm-i Insānī va Muṭāla'āt-i Farhangī, 2007), 8.

and light in the famous light verse.²¹ In the cosmology underlying the statement, the spirits of the living are actors, animated through the dynamism of God's agency as light. The spirits of the dead, in contrast, are passive recipients of God's self-manifestation in epiphanies. The meeting of the spirits of the living and the dead joins together two different aspects of divine presence—the physical or active versus metaphysical or receptive aspects of being—both of which are contingent on God's essence. As places where the dead come into contact with the living, graves are venues for the confluence of complementary aspects of manifested being. This renders the imperative of visiting graves into a call to make the cosmos whole through propitiatory movement.²²

Karbalā'ī further states that his narrative is an entity equivalent to the act of visiting the graves of the elect buried in Tabriz. This issue is, in fact, the linchpin of the work's name: "Since recollecting (*zīkr*) regarding the mausoleums and burial places of these greats is, in truth, itself like a garden from the gardens of paradise, [this book] has been named *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart*."²³ The term "recollection" (*zīkr*) references Sufi practice, now transformed from bodily action to the act of writing. Karbalā'ī's "recollection" of these objects assimilates them into his mind—a process that involves absorbing and narrating their physical characteristics as well the lives of those interred within them. Recollection is then a recovery of space imprinted with temporality in the form of stories of human lives.

The idea that Karbalā'ī's narrative of recollection—space and time assimilated into written text—is itself a paradise is an extension of the chronotope from the way it is deployed in the work's title. By signifying human hearts, graves of the elect, and his own narrative as paradise, Karbalā'ī puts all three entities in the interstice between metaphysics and materiality. Importantly, the title's ultimate point of reference is Tabriz. The chronotope endows the time and space of the city with an otherworldly quality tied to the discourse of eternal felicity.

FROM GRAVES TO STORIES

The material I have presented so far comes from the work's introduction, which conveys Karbalā'ī's own explanation for the ideological background

²¹ Quran 24:35: "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star kindled from a blessed tree, an olive that is neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil almost shines, even if no fire touched it; light upon light." (This translation is a modified version of Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, 2:50–51.)

²² The Kubravī chain of Sufi authority (*silsila*) into which Karbalā'ī had been initiated included numerous authors particularly concerned with the place of light in cosmology and religious experience. For a review of the prominent views in this regard see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 119–28.

²³ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 1:3.

to his work. The remaining contents of the work far exceed the cosmological and didactic framing, consisting of a massive wealth of human stories filled with details of events quotidian as well as extraordinary. Taken together, the reports amount to an extensive description of Tabriz and its environs, containing shifting ways of mapping the relationships between space, time, and human experience. The paradisaical chronotope remains active through this material as a structuring principle, but it does so without rendering the contingent details of human lives superfluous.

Past the theoretical introduction, the work is divided into eight chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter is named a garden (*rawza*), a synonym for paradise, and the narrative is an emplotment of space and time in a thematic manner that varies as we progress through the text. Karbalā'ī begins with the pre-Islamic past, stating that the space where Tabriz came to be located was populated by Zoroastrian “fire-worshippers” before the rise of Islam. The land’s “Islamization” was keyed to the burial within it of up to seventeen men identifiable as either Muḥammad’s companions (*ṣaḥāba*) or the first generation of Muslims who did not have direct contact with the Prophet himself (*tābi'ūn*). These men had arrived in the region in the midst of military campaigns in the seventh century CE, and their graves had continued to be regarded as places of veneration over more than nine centuries. Karbalā'ī’s notices on the shrines mentioned in this chapter include information gathered from earlier sources, combined with stories of people deriving benefit from them in periods long after the men’s interment.²⁴ The organization of this chapter forefronts time in the form of the beginning of the Islamic era; space and experience are assimilated into time through the process of their identification with Islam.

Its Islamic credentials established, the space of Tabriz is at the forefront in chapters 2–6. These chapters proceed regionally, covering (2) Sarkhāb (or Surkhab), (3) Charandāb, (4) Gajīl, (5) the inner city of Tabriz, and (6) the surrounding countryside. While organized around the physical shrines of the religious elect, the work contains little in the way of describing structures. Each of these chapters is subdivided into sections that begin with the words “The resting place and shrine of . . . (*marqad va mazār-i . . .*) [is located in such and such place].” Then follow personal histories and hagiographical stories associated with the saintly persons buried in the shrines. These sections showcase Karbalā'ī’s extensive knowledge of Islamic literary sources in a wide variety of genres. The author often ventures far outside Tabriz while tracing lives of itinerant individuals, which brings historical details pertinent to many different regions with Muslim communities into the narrative. However, the structural focus on shrines ensures that at the beginning of each new

²⁴ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 1:20–46.

section, we are brought back to a specific spot in the environs of the chosen city. The narrative also contains long asides on debates regarding Sufi thought and practice, providing ideational punctuations in the midst of descriptions of space and time. Overall, then, the work's middle chapters present a richly detailed picture of Islamic (especially Sufi) history and practice, all continually looping through the physical surroundings of Tabriz.

The work's last two chapters change the narrative's spatiotemporal pattern by bringing human biographies to the forefront. The seventh chapter (treated in a section later in this essay) is an extensive account of the life and times of Badr al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī of Lāla, the prominent Sufi master who was an important anchoring point within the Kubravī *silsila*, Karbalā'ī's chain of Sufi initiation. Chapter 8 extends the past of this affiliation further backward in time by describing the lives of individuals in the chain from Badr al-Dīn's master Sayyid 'Abdallāh Barzishābādī (d. 1468) all the way to Prophet Muḥammad. The materials covered in these chapters range far beyond the space and time of Tabriz alone, conveying the sense of a particular temporality compounded into religious authority. The work's epilogue contains definitions of various types of Islamic (particularly Sufi) religious authority, a kind of summation of the ideology exemplified in biographical details related throughout the work. The *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* ends on a chronogram: "pilgrimages to the graves of friends" (*ziyārāt-i qubūr-i awliyā*). The *abjad* value of the letters that make up the phrase adds up to 975, the Hijri year when the work was completed (1567 CE). This deployment of a phrase to denote a date is quite typical in premodern Persian literature. It is an especially evocative reminder of the chronotopic imagination that runs throughout the work.²⁵

GENDERED AUTHORITY

The general description of the work I have provided can be made livelier through the details of a section from chapter 6 that is concerned with the city's suburbs. The section begins by identifying the shrine of a man named Ḥaẓrat Bābā Faqīh Aḥmad, famous as Bābā Faqīh Asbustī, in the village of Asbust. He is said to have come to the place from Konya and been known for his knowledge of jurisprudence. The scene then shifts, and the author relates from Amīr Badr al-Dīn of Lāla that when he visited this grave, the dead man joined him in reciting parts of the Quran he had chosen to say at the grave. From this, he turns to the lifetime of the buried man and the fate of his family, saying that once while still living, he was sitting on a hill with his son and a man passed by in the distance whom he identified as a living pole

²⁵ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:529.

(*qutb*) of the Sufis. He asked his son to go and greet this man. When the son got there, he found the great man in prayer and stood by his left until he was done. After the prayer, the man told Asbustī's son that if he had stood by his right while waiting, all successive males in the family's line would have been assured of high Sufi status. Since he had stood on the left, this honor would now be guaranteed to all the family's women instead, although some men may also reach high stations.²⁶

Following from this prediction, the remainder of the section concerned with the family's shrine complex contains stories about three extraordinary women who were all buried adjacent to the original patriarch. We are not informed about the precise relationships between Asbustī and these women, although there is a strong sense that the narrative is proceeding in the order of successive generations. The lack of dates as well as precise family connections has the effect of flattening the time of the stories into a single overall complex of narratives that is quite typical of Sufi hagiography. The saintly figures act similarly, but the gender difference disrupts the paradisaical chronotope running through the work as a whole. Unlike for men, who are represented in all times and places, Karbalā'ī's depictions of the women of Asbust are restricted to situations that would be deemed acceptable for high-status individuals in his social context.

Of the women, Karbalā'ī pays the greatest attention to one Māmā 'Iṣmat, described as a formidably strong character with a personality colored by the quality of God's majesty (*jalāl*). She once went into a garden where the branches of a pear tree became entangled in her veil, causing it to slip from her head. She then went into a trancelike state and managed to uproot the tree all by herself to correct its insolence. Further, she was interested in agriculture and on one occasion tried to correct a plowman regarding his technique for sowing seeds. He replied that since she was a woman and knew nothing about farming, she had no place from which to interfere. She rebuked him, and he died on the spot. Her own reaction to the events of both these stories was to suggest that her acts represented God's will, without interference from her selfish desire. When she died, the person washing her body tried to take her gold ring as compensation for the work without asking, which caused her dead hand to become active and slap the washer.

In a less combative vein, a traveler to the Ḥajj reported that Māmā 'Iṣmat appeared to him in the wilderness of the desert, carrying water at a time when his group was feeling desperate from thirst. She is also said to have had foreknowledge of political developments expected in the region. Jahānshāh Karakoyunlu (d. 1467), who would later rule over Azerbaijan and the surrounding

²⁶ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:49.

region, was brought to her as a young boy by his mother. Upon meeting him, she foretold that he would one day become king.

Karbalā'ī also provides a story with moving details that he had heard from a personal connection. A certain Shaykh 'Alī Khusrawshāhī had told this acquaintance that when he had been a small boy, he had accompanied his mother to a wedding in Asbust. At night, when almost everyone had fallen asleep, one woman was performing *zīkr* in front of Māmā 'Iṣmat when the latter went into a state of ecstasy (*vajd*). He and the others present then saw lights of different colors emanating from the openings of the sleeves and skirts of her dress to such a degree that the room felt like it was filled with lamps. After her death, her grave continued to function as her body had, becoming a site where people would acquire religious guidance and relief from afflictions.²⁷

Achī Bēgī, the second holy woman Karbalā'ī describes, was taught by Māmā 'Iṣmat but exhibited qualities of God's mercy (*jamāl*) rather than his majesty. Once, when Azerbaijan was afflicted by a great famine, she appeared in someone's dream to give him a round cake. He felt happy upon waking up, and the famine lifted the very same day. The corpse washer whom Māmā 'Iṣmat had slapped when she had tried to take her ring after her death was appointed to the same task upon Achī Bēgī's death. She once again saw a ring on the finger and wished to take it as her wages but was afraid given her earlier experience. However, this time the corpse deliberately opened up the hand to make it easy for her to take the ring from the finger.²⁸

The last woman Karbalā'ī discusses in this context is named Hazrat-i Nahnah. One of her miracles was that she would cook eggs by placing them in her hand and inserting it in fire without feeling any pain or any harm coming to her. Karbalā'ī states that a caretaker of the shrine (the man named Khusrawshāhī who had, as a child, seen Māmā 'Iṣmat emanating light) had told him that once Amīr Badr al-Dīn Aḥmad of Lāla had gone to the shrine complex in Asbust, bringing the gift of a mantle for Hazrat-i Nahnah, still alive at the time. He asked the caretaker/reporter to bring the cloth to the lady, together with the request that she recite a prayer for him. She "recited the *fātiḥa*, copious tears rolling down from her eyes continuously. She said, 'what is my status that he should ask of a *fātiḥa* from me! He is himself one of the greats.'"²⁹

The stories summarized above are distinctive in that they reflect on gender, an issue closely connected to matters of time and space. When it comes to individuals' ability to occupy functions as God's friends, gender seems largely inconsequential. The saintly women appear as powerful beings, predominated

²⁷ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:49–54

²⁸ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:54–55.

²⁹ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:55.

by divine qualities of majesty or mercy in the same ways as their male counterparts. But the depiction of their physical interactions during their lifetimes are clearly inflected by their gendered identities. The special status of the family's women results from the spatial choice made by a man (standing behind the left rather than the right side of the *qutb*). A woman is shown to act vehemently when female attire is disturbed (uprooting of the pear tree) or when she interferes in activity usually reserved for men (death of the plowman). The extraordinary qualities of female bodies are shown to the reader through the eyes of a woman and a small boy rather than men (the corpse washer and Khusrawshāhī). Finally, the male-female difference seems not to matter when the women appear in dreams and visions or after they die—since both women and men's shrines are shown as equally accessible to both genders.

Karbalā'ī's representations of women communicate the constraints of his social experience and disrupt the smooth functioning of the paradisaical chronotope. The fact that women could be religiously authoritative in the same measure as men stands in contrast with the spatiotemporal strictures they endure in the stories. As a man living in gendered space and time, his own access to women was highly circumscribed. His narrative reproduces social boundaries by indicating the separation between male and female spheres of action and conveying the scenes he narrates through intermediaries who could be privy to them in a socially unproblematic way. As works penned by men, narratives such as Karbalā'ī's work provide us views of women's lives that seem truncated and impoverished as compared to what we are told of interactions between men. But when women do appear, as in the case of the shrines of Asbust, we get a glimpse into gendered spatiotemporal dynamics of a complex hierarchical society. Differences between times and spaces occupied by women and men are transmitted from the social scene to the narrative irrespective of authorial intention. As exceptions, the women of Asbust help us see the significance of the gendering rules. The paradisaical chronotope that governs Karbalā'ī's work is thoroughly androcentric when ratifying social authority.³⁰

Hagiographical stories have the interesting feature that incidents placed in the past are persistently concerned with the ability to predict the future. We see this directly in the interaction between the Sufi *qutb* and Asbustī's son, and by implication in the way the author inserts his own spiritual lineage into the narrative via reference to Amīr Badr al-Dīn. The presence of these figures warrants his telling of the past along with his authority as a Sufi adept with a

³⁰ For more extensive treatments of the representation of women in Persian hagiographical narratives, see Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 148–63; Aziza Shanazarova, "A Female Saint in Muslim Polemics: The Case of Aghā-yi Buzurg" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2019).

bona fide genealogy. The words he ascribes to Hażrat-i Nahnah exalt a master who was the father of his own master, and by extension Karbalā'ī himself as the inheritor and future narrator. This pattern repeats throughout the extensive work, resulting in a narrative that gathers the time and space of Tabriz in the service of authorizing his own lineage. In functioning as a tour guide to the shrines of Tabriz, the author takes the reader to physical places that act as portals to pasts filled with details of hagiographical incidents. But this myriad of journeys into times past maintain consistent connections to the author's own present and have prescriptive messages for the reader's future. Karbalā'ī's awe-inspiring, moving, and colorful stories act as connective tissues that conjoin past, present, and future. His ultimate investment, epitomized in the paradisaical chronotope running through the length of the extensive narrative, is in making the past matter for those alive in the present and future of his own time.

THE LIVING DEAD

We have already been introduced to the most consequential link in the spiritual genealogy of the author of *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart*. The shrine and life of Amīr Badr al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī of Lāla (d. 1507) are the subject of a whole chapter, a prominence that is in proportion with the tremendous respect Karbalā'ī registers for this Sufi master throughout the narrative. In keeping with the work's overall pattern, his entry on the topic begins with the protagonist's grave and then provides details of his background, life circumstances, religious accomplishments, children, and the effect he had on those who came into contact either with him during his life or with his grave after his death.

Karbalā'ī places Badr al-Dīn's shrine in the Gajīl quarter of Tabriz, saying that it is well known enough to preclude the necessity of providing a precise location.³¹ But near the end of the chapter, we are given more details about the shrine. This occurs in the section that describes the master's death since he is said to have chosen the place of his future grave after careful consideration. At a time before showing any indication of an impending demise, he made known that he was looking for an appropriate spot for his burial. First, residents of Sarkhāb lobbied him to choose their quarter. He declined by stating that another saintly person buried in that area represented the manifestation of God's majesty (*jalāl*), which he could not withstand. He eventually chose Gajīl based on the following criteria: "We wanted a place in which no dead body had been placed before. It needed to be virgin land so that no other grave would be encountered during digging. Also, it had to be at

³¹ Karbalā'ī, *Rawżāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:109.

the head of a thoroughfare so that passers-by going back and forth would be reminded to say the *fātiḥa*.” Then on Friday, 10 Shavvāl 912 (February 23, 1507 CE), he came to the space, circled around it together with other dignitaries, and indicated the precise placement of the grave to the diggers with the following instructions: “[First] make a canopy for us and then dig the grave under it. It should be of a type that one can sit within it comfortably.”³² Two days later, he gathered his children around him and gave them instructions about proper behavior, stating also:

Whenever you are beset by doubts, come to the place of my grave and these will be dispelled completely. Do not think that I will be oblivious to your situation when I am in the condition of being dead. I will not be ignorant. Yes, when friends [of God] have passed away in the apparent sense, entering the state of death, they have, in truth, [only] moved from one station to another. They are the true believers in the sense of “believers do not die, but they transfer from one place to another.” They are the true believers indeed, as it is established that a perfected spirit (*rūḥ-i kamāl*) has powers and the capability to affect others that precede and succeed its connection with the physical body. [This occurs] through the stratagems and powers of the imaginal body (*badan-i miṣālī*), in the [imaginal] world.³³

On the day before his death, he gathered his children once again and said that all that God had promised him with respect to the world was now fulfilled and he was ready to take his leave. He then asked that the Sufi cloak (*khirqā*) he had been given by his master Sayyid ‘Abdallāh Barzishābādī be brought to him, and he detached the inner lining from the mantle. The lining was to be used as his shroud, of a type that clung closely to the body, and the mantle was to be cut into two, with one half used to cover the ground under the body and the other to drape over the enshrouded corpse. He then dismissed the family and, later that night, passed away despite the lack of any outward sign of illness. In Karbalā’ī’s words: “It should not remain hidden that the perfected friends possess awareness of predestination (*qadar*) and divine decree (*qaḍā*). Since they have this knowledge, they also would know about their own life and existence, and departure and dying.”³⁴

Amīr Badr al-Dīn’s death caused a tremendous outpouring of grief in Tabriz, as if the moment of apocalypse and resurrection (*qiyāmat*) had arrived upon the city. The person who would eventually wash the body before the funeral saw a dream the night before in which the Prophet Muḥammad had

³² Karbalā’ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:177.

³³ Karbalā’ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:178. For the notion of the imaginal in Sufi thought see Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 34–42, and William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-‘Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994).

³⁴ Karbalā’ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:181–82.

died, and another person saw a dream in which the Prophet told him that he was on his way to attend the funeral of a son. After the burial in the intended location, the city's notables would gather there to offer prayers. On most days and nights, the whole Quran would be read at the spot, conveyed to the deceased through an open window that had been preserved on top of the grave. However, in the spring of that year, the region became afflicted with a complete absence of rain. Someone then saw a vision in which it was revealed that no rain would fall as long as the window on the grave remained open. Badr al-Dīn's descendants then ordered the window closed, and rain arrived the very same day or the following night. A mausoleum was eventually erected over the grave, although its occupant had deprecated the idea that his grave be marked as being special in any way.³⁵

To interpret Karbalā'ī's description of Badr al-Dīn's life, let us return to Bakhtin for a moment. His essay on the chronotope was composed in Russian in 1937. To this he added a section titled "Concluding Remarks" in 1973, which is included in the English translation published in 1981. Here he describes the significance of the chronotope by making a distinction between information about an event versus its representation. The former includes "precise date on the time and place of its occurrence," whereas the latter requires its refraction through a chronotope "that provides the ground essential for the showing-forth . . . thanks precisely to the special increase in density and concreteness of time markers—the time of human life, of historical time—that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas."³⁶ The conceptual bifurcation between information and representation utilizes chronotopic analysis to highlight the layered nature of complex literary works.

Karbalā'ī's description of Amīr Badr al-Dīn's life contains much information about events: the man was born in Darband, established a hospice in the village of Lāla near Tabriz, acquired great fame, and was buried in Gajīl in the manner summarized above. These details are inert, as it were, lifeless, until they get refracted through the paradisaical chronotope to become meaningful representation. Now his life becomes the most elaborate encapsulation of the ideology at the center of all the immense effort that went into the writing of *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart*. Occurrences involving him are no mere events but form an ordered sequence that was the predestined unfolding of a saintly life with prototypical features. In this frame, he inherited a distinguished status from being born in a Sayyid family with connections to religious and political elites. These innate capacities were carried to fruition through training by Sufi masters who initiated him into the Kubravī chain of practice and authority. He was sent to Azerbaijan and made Tabriz

³⁵ Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:183.

³⁶ Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," 250.

his home based on requests, visionary and in person, that the city needed his presence. After twelve years, he made Lāla his permanent home when dreams revealed this to be the wish of the Prophet Muḥammad and deceased members of his Sufi chain. The hospice he established there, known as Darvī-shābād, was visited by people from near and afar and was the scene of miraculous occurrences. And the news of Shāh Ismāʿīl's declaration of kingship over Iran in 1501 was conveyed to him in advance through the dream of an associate.³⁷

In Karbalāʾī's presentation, Amīr Badr al-Dīn's grave is a sublimation of the paradisaical chronotope and a stand-in for all the other hundreds of shrines discussed in the work. Invoked at the beginning as well as the end of the biography, the grave entombs Amīr Badr al-Dīn's memory in multiple dimensions. His body was the subject of extraordinary distinctions and experiences. Its presence under the earth, enwrapped in the mantle of authority, sanctifies the space in a permanent way. And the shrine provides the occasion to continually rehearse stories associated with his life. These stories repeat hagiographical topoi, showing the saintly friend of God as a savior figure. Whereas the body and its time come to an end with the death, the shrine and its associated narrative were to remain active as long as there were people who sought the friend of God and told the story. Karbalāʾī makes it plain that he saw himself in this role, fulfilling the conditions of his discipleship in the Sufi community in which he had been initiated. Panning our field of vision out from Amīr Badr al-Dīn, Karbalāʾī saw the whole region surrounding Tabriz as sanctified land. His effort to memorialize it—to create paradises of words to match hearts and shrines—was the enactment of a religious duty that was commanded by his forbears and was directed toward his future readers.

THE AUTHOR'S TIME AND PLACE

Although the *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* contains ample use of the first-person voice, the work provides us precious little in terms of Karbalāʾī's own history. The self-references are nearly invariably in the service of identifying his sources for the lives of others or for indicating his presence in the places that are a part of his description of the city. The work's most poignant moment in this respect occurs in the context of his explanation for a ḥadīth report in which the Prophet Muḥammad states: "Whoever shakes my hand, I will shake his hands on the day of resurrection. Likewise, one who shakes the hand of someone up to seven links of someone who

³⁷ This life summary is based on Karbalāʾī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:109–18, 146–70.

shook my hand, I will shake his hand on the day of resurrection and intercession for him is obligatory upon me.”³⁸

In Sufi traditions preceding Karbalāʾī's time, the usability of the great boon suggested by this ḥadīth had been extended to many centuries through positing individuals with unnaturally long lives. One such person was Saʿīd Ḥabashī, who is said to have shaken Muḥammad's hand and then remained alive until 815 (1412–13 CE). Most pertinently for Karbalāʾī's purposes, Ḥabashī is reported to have shaken the hand of Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī (d. 1385), a renowned Kubravī master within the author's own chain of authority. Further in time, he states: “The inscriber of these letters, dust on the feet of dervishes, Ḥusayn Ḥāfiẓ Karbalāʾī was ennobled with the handshake and the audition of the ḥadīth [about it] on Saturday, 3 Shaʿbān 952 (10 October 1545 CE).” Karbalāʾī's counterpart in this handshake was Amīr Khalīlallāh, a son of his own master, which placed him as the seventh link from the chain originating in Muḥammad.³⁹

Karbalāʾī's coverage of the ḥadīth regarding handshakes is geared toward self-exaltation and humility in equal measure. By placing himself in the chain of handshakes, he claims intimacy with the Prophet and guaranteed entrance into paradise. Such an assertion exempts him from religious apprehensions pertaining to ordinary people. But the handshake is contingent upon his connection to his Sufi companions of the present and the past. It comes with a debt, which he is bound to pay through acts of humility in front of his master and the words of his work that glorify others and demean himself. The working of his own voice within his work is infused with these double characteristics of humility and triumph.⁴⁰

We do possess some other information about Karbalāʾī besides his self-representations. The modern editor of *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* cites a small manuscript that is purported to have belonged to Karbalāʾī. He calls this “the author's notebook” (*bayāz-i muʿallif*), saying that it contains “many unique items related to death and birth dates, genealogies, teaching certificates, verses, stories, and other useful matters.”⁴¹ The editor provides no information regarding the location of the manuscript, and our access to this material is limited to what he cites while clarifying the work's contents. The notebook contains samples of Karbalāʾī's work as a

³⁸ Karbalāʾī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:170.

³⁹ Karbalāʾī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 2:171. The chain is: Saʿīd Ḥabashī, Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī, Khwāja Iṣḥāq Khuttalānī, Sayyid ʿAbdallāh Barzishābādī, Amīr Badr al-Dīn Aḥmad Ḥusaynī, Amīr Shihāb ʿAbdallāh Ḥusaynī, and Amīr Khalīlallāh Ḥusaynī.

⁴⁰ The ḥadīth of handshakes is part of larger complexes pertaining to Sufi social patterns. For details, see Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 1–8, and Devin DeWeese, “Intercessory Claims of Sufi Communities during the 14th and 15th Centuries: ‘Messianic’ Legitimizing Strategies on the Spectrum of Normativity,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 197–220.

⁴¹ Karbalāʾī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 1:57 (in editor's introduction).

calligrapher, a skill that can be corroborated from a manuscript signed by him that contains the letters of a learned secretary and chronicler named ‘Abd al-Karīm Nīmdihī (d. circa 1500 CE).⁴²

Our most substantial source of external information about Karbalā’ī is the notice in an Arabic work on significant personalities of the age that was left incomplete upon the death of the author in Damascus in 1615 CE. Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Būrīnī’s *Biographies of Notables from the People of the Time* (*Tarājīm al-a’yān min abnā’ al-zamān*) is a major source for the history of Damascus during the sixteenth century, based primarily on the author’s personal observations.⁴³ He writes that Ḥusayn Karbalā’ī, famous by the sobriquet Ibn al-Karbalā’ī, arrived in Damascus for the first time around 988 (1580–81 CE) on his way to perform the Ḥajj and spent two months in the city in total on the way to and from Mecca. This report puts him outside Tabriz thirteen years after the completion of *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart*. After the Ḥajj he returned to Tabriz but then decided to come back to Damascus to settle down permanently. His wife and younger son joined him shortly, and an older son followed suit thereafter. Here he worked as a copyist and participant in the gatherings of the city’s learned classes. He, and his father before him, had been caretakers of the shrine of Bābā Faraj, a legendary Sufi buried in Tabriz.⁴⁴ He had been a disciple of Sayyid Mujtabā al-Ḥusaynī, his dedication being such that he had become counted among the Sayyids of Lāla. In Būrīnī’s description, this Sayyid family was Sunni, which had caused the Safavid ruler Shāh Tahmāsp (d. 1576 CE) to move them from Tabriz to Isfahan, away from the border with the Ottoman empire lest they correspond with the Sultans who were their coreligionists. This involuntary move is implied as the reason for Karbalā’ī’s own exit to Damascus, although he is also said to have simply become fond of the city.⁴⁵

⁴² ‘Abd al-Karīm Nīmdihī, *Kanz al-ma’ānī*, MS. Reisülküttab Mustafa Efendi 884, Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, fol. 197a. The signature states Damascus, end of Jumādā II 996 (April–May 1588) as the place and date of copying. The signature also identifies Karbalā’ī’s father’s name as Aḥmad, which is not attested in other sources. I am grateful to Judith Pfeiffer for providing me access to this manuscript.

⁴³ For summary information about the author and the work, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, “al-Burini, Hasan b. Muḥammad,” in *Historians of the Ottoman Empire*, accessed September 21, 2019, <https://ottomanhistorians.uchicago.edu/en/historian/al-burini-hasan-b-muhammad/>.

⁴⁴ See Devin A. DeWeese, “Baba Faraj,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson, accessed September 21, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24264.

⁴⁵ Major sources for Iranian history for this period provide few details about the activities of this family. The identification of someone belonging to the family is limited to a single passing reference to a “Mīr Makhdūm Lāla” in one source (Iskandar Bēg Munshī’s *Tārīkh-i ‘ālam-ārā-yi ‘Abbāsī*). For the details of the incident where this occurs (which does pertain to Sunni influence on a briefly reigning Safavid king), see Shohreh Golsorkhī, “Ismail II and Mirza Makhdum Sharifi: An Interlude in Safavid History,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 479.

Ambiguity concerning the motives for the move reflect the transitional sectarian atmosphere prevalent in Safavid Iran during the sixteenth century.

Much of Būrīnī's notice remarks on his personal intimacy with Karbalā'ī. They met for the first time in the courtyard of the Umayyad mosque, where Karbalā'ī queried him about matters of jurisprudence. In subsequent intercourse, he acted as his tutor in Persian and the two composed verses in praise of each other. He possessed extensive knowledge of history and was a great conversationalist. On one occasion, Būrīnī spent three days and nights straight with him in his rooms while absorbed in discussions. He died in Sha'bān 997 (June–July 1589) and was buried in the vicinity of the shrine of Abū Shāma. His younger son, Aḥmad, predeceased him, and the older, Muḥammad, died later, and the three were buried close to each other.⁴⁶ Devoid of miracles and preordained greatness, Būrīnī's biography of Karbalā'ī is ordinary compared to the ones told in Karbalā'ī's own work. The difference in part reflects that of genres, biographical dictionary versus hagiography, that are anchored in divergent chronotopes. While providing information not related by Karbalā'ī himself, the biography affirms his self-portrayal as a learned documenter of the lives of extraordinary men and women who did not belong to the same class.

The two views of Karbalā'ī available to us contain different types of presence. Būrīnī's biographical notice is straightforward because it is descriptive. Karbalā'ī's presence within *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* is more pervasive but also more elusive, as it is embedded in the mind and the pen that materialized the work yet does not always reveal itself. The work as a whole is constituted in the interplay between his volition, the social setting and unstated rules of genre he inherited, the paradisaical chronotope, and didactic intent directed toward the future that drove him to compose the work.

CONCLUSION

Karbalā'ī's vision of Tabriz in *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart* contains overlaid and intersecting understandings of space, time, and human experience. Seeped into the narrative's texture, the paradisaical chronotope conjoins the author's perceptions of sanctified space, human hearts, and his own narrative. This is the vision of the city as it ought to be, devoid of contingency and disruption, a copy of the postapocalyptic paradise described in religious literature. In between the persistent evocations of paradise,

⁴⁶ Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Būrīnī, *Tarājim al-a'yān min abnā' al-zamān*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, 2 vols. (Damascus: al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī bi-Dimashq, 1959, 1963), 2:165–69. The “author's notebook” used by the editor of *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān* contains more information about Karbalā'ī's children and grandchildren. Karbalā'ī, *Rawzāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, 1:62 of editor's introduction.

Karbalā'ī's narrative is filled with stories containing the aspirations and disappointments of human lives. From these we see matters such as the gendering of space and time that indexes social strictures, variant roles and expectations, and differentiated access to socioreligious authority. Here women and men navigate the structuring presumptions of a religious space constructed hierarchically.

In Karbalā'ī's Tabriz, men such as Amīr Badr al-Dīn of Lāla occupy pride of place. During their lives, they sanctify the city through their presence. Their interactions with others generate narratives that become memorialized in hagiographical texts. After their deaths, their burial places add to the continuing accrual of religious power on the land. Karbalā'ī's map of Tabriz is a conglomeration of shrines established over the course of more than nine centuries. While individuals interred within these shrines lived at various moments within this long span, Karbalā'ī's narrative makes them available simultaneously. The text, and the landscape full of shrines it is attempting to represent, gather the messiness of passing human lives into time and space made meaningful by being subjected to chronotopic inflection.

The meager details of Ḥusayn Karbalā'ī's own life available to us stand in sharp contrast with the wealth of eulogistic material about others preserved by his authorship of *Gardens of Paradises and Paradises of the Heart*. Within his work, his description of his own circumstances and experiences is invariably keyed to the purpose of exalting others or indicating the special benefit he received from saintly figures. He nevertheless manufactured the vision of the world we are presented in his work. We know the city and its dead and alive inhabitants through his authoritative mediation. Ideational and social perspectives that run through hagiographical narratives always represent the views of disciples rather than the masters who occupy center stage in the descriptions. Walking through the space and time of Tabriz in step with Karbalā'ī, we are shown a world both puzzling and infused with divine presence. The miracles he catalogs are enigmatic for us, interpretable only as discursive tropes since they challenge empiricist plausibility. But we can appreciate their meaningfulness by identifying the chronotopic tether to paradise. Karbalā'ī's construction of a world, a paradise of devotion in his own terms, remains productive as a historical source for us as long as we regard it as textual practice produced in conjunction with religious and social imperatives visible hazily through the veils of his words.

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