

From Court to Archive: The Mughal Imperial Library and the Institutional Afterlife of *'Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn*

SHAHLA FARGHADANI

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Abstract

This article traces the four-century journey of the earliest surviving copy of *'Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn va 'Arasāt al-‘Ārifīn* (MS 5324, Malek National Library, Tehran), a seminal Persian poetic anthology compiled by Taqī al-Dīn Awhadī Balyānī in Mughal India. Through a microhistorical analysis of codicological features, ownership seals, inspection notes, and valuation marks, it reconstructs the manuscript's passage from the library of the nobleman Sayf Khān into the Mughal Imperial Library, and later into Qajar Iran and the collection of Ḥusayn Āqā Malek.

This study demonstrates that the manuscript's status as a cultural relic was not simply inherited but was actively constructed through what I call archival performativity. I use this term to describe the cumulative bureaucratic, administrative, and curatorial acts through which custodians produced the manuscript's cultural authority. Among *tazkiras*, *'Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn* was uniquely authoritative and thus treated with archival performativity. By analyzing how Mughal librarians, Qajar princes, and elites

reclassified, inspected, and valued this literary work, this case study demonstrates that these custodians did not merely preserve the manuscript but actively shaped its meaning and long-term cultural authority within Persianate literary heritage. Its journey thus offers a framework for understanding the material afterlife of premodern books and the infrastructural mechanisms that have maintained their symbolic value across empires and eras.

Keywords: Mughal Imperial Library, Malek Library, Qajar Collections, Persian Tazkira, Provenance, Codicology, Archival Performativity, *'Arafāt al-'Ashiqīn*, Persianate World.

این کتاب کمیاب که دری است نایاب از مواهب رب الارباب، از هر جهت ممتاز است و بی شریک و انباز، چنانکه مشتمل است بر حالات سه چهار هزار نفر از شعرا و در فهرستی که در کتابخانه موجود است از کتابخانه های دنیا، چه کتابخانه های فرنگ و هندوستان و مصر و شرق نزدیک، در هیچ یک از فهرس دیده نشد و هر قدر تفحص و تجسس شد نسخه ی دیگری نیافتم. و انا العبد الاقل حسین بن محمد کاظم ملک التجار ۱۳۲۸/۶/۸ شمسی.

This rare book, which is a unique pearl of the gifts of the Divine, is excellent in every way, without peer or equal, in that it consists of the biographies of three to four thousand poets. After scrutinizing and searching through the catalogues that are available at the [Malek] library of the [holdings of]

the libraries of the world—whether those of Europe, India, Egypt, or the Near East—it was not mentioned anywhere, and I have not found another copy.

—The least servant, Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad
Kāzīm Malek al-Tujjār, August 30, 1942

Introduction

The reverence expressed by Ḥusayn Malek in 1942—who described *ʿArafāt al-ʿĀshiqīn* as “a rare book without peer”—speaks to the manuscript’s evolving symbolic significance across centuries. Malek’s inscription provides a clear example of how later custodians actively created the aura of rarity (see Figure 1 for the folio with his handwritten note) that now surrounds the manuscript, a process central to the argument of this article. This article situates that valuation within a longer institutional history, tracing how Mughal and Qajar elites reframed this seventeenth-century anthology as a bureaucratic and archival artifact. I argue that these libraries functioned as dynamic agents in sustaining the manuscript’s cultural significance, not merely preserving texts but shaping their meaning through the administrative protocols that governed literary heritage. In doing so, it foregrounds how libraries functioned not merely as repositories but as dynamic agents whose administrative protocols shaped the meanings of the works they housed.

This article explores the material and institutional history of *‘Arafāt al-‘Ashiqīn va ‘Arasāt al-‘Ārifīn* (*The Mount Arafāt of Lovers and the Courtyards of the Gnostics*), a seminal Persian poetic anthology (tazkira) compiled in Agra between 1613 and 1615 by the Safavid-Mughal scholar Taqī al-Dīn Awhadī Balyānī (d. ca. 1630). Through a case study of MS 5324 (Malek National Library, Tehran), likely the earliest extant copy, transcribed around 1036/1626, I examine how Mughal and Qajar elites transformed this manuscript from a literary work into an object of bureaucratic, archival, and cultural significance. Despite its significance, the material and custodial history of MS 5324 has been largely neglected in scholarship, even though the text itself has been published and made accessible in modern critical editions.

Furthermore, the manuscript remains misclassified in institutional catalogues, including at the Malek National Library, where it is inaccurately labeled as a mystical or Sufi tazkira. This label conceals its broad encyclopedic literary scope. I argue that this misclassification reflects the manuscript's long institutional history, emphasizing how cataloging practices shape the reception of literary works. By analyzing paratextual features such as ownership seals, inspection notes, and valuation marks, I trace the manuscript's changing institutional path and advocate for a reevaluation of how literary texts were actively reclassified and recontextualized in courtly and bureaucratic settings.

The case of MS 5324 illustrates how Persian literary heritage transcends political boundaries. Here, I provide a framework for examining the institutional afterlives of premodern books within global collections. This encompasses the ways in which manuscripts have been revalued, reclassified, and circulated through various custodial regimes. By combining codicological

analysis with provenance research, this article traces the manuscript's four-century journey, from its probable commissioning by the Mughal noble Sayf Khān to its current status as a curated archival treasure. This trajectory underscores the material afterlife of literary texts and the bureaucratic infrastructures, imperial, courtly, and institutional, that have upheld their significance amid shifting regimes of custodianship. In this sense, the manuscript's history becomes a lens through which to examine the mechanisms that produce cultural memory in the Persianate world.

ʿArafāt al-ʿAshiqīn occupies a central place in Persian literary historiography. Comprising over 3,500 biographical entries and approximately 80,000 verses, the text introduced a novel tripartite classification of poets: ancients (*mutaqaddimīn*), medievals (*mutavassitīn*), and moderns (*mutaʿakkbirīn*). This system shaped the genealogical frameworks of later anthologists across the Persianate world. Its influence was both immediate and enduring within Mughal India.

This is concretely demonstrated by the work of Sirāj al-Dīn ʿAlī Khān Ārzū (d. 1756), who compiled an abridgment of the *ʿArafāt*, titled *Intikhab-i Tazkīrat-yi Taqī Awḥadī* in his own hand. This abridgment served as a direct source for his major tazkira, *Majmaʿ al-Nafāʾis*, from which he borrowed biographical entries and poetic selections extensively, often verbatim. This pattern of deep engagement, continued by other Indian-based anthologists like Vālih Dāghistānī (d. 1756), established the *ʿArafāt* as an indispensable subcontinental resource. The text's authority proved so significant that its influence stretched for centuries, shaping the works of later figures like Rizā Qulī Khān Hidāyat (d. 1871) in Iran,

the author of *Majma' al-Fuṣṣḥā*, and Shibli Nomani (d. 1914) in India, whose *Shi'r al-'Ajam* similarly builds on the genealogical framework established in the *'Arafāt*. This lasting impact led modern scholar Ahmad Gulchīn-Ma'ānī, who himself distilled the content of his *Karavān-i Hind* from the *'Arafāt*, to conclude that nearly all universal (*'umūmī*) tazkira writers after Awhadī were effectively his “descendants (*'ayāl*).”

Furthermore, Awhadī's own methodological statements reveal his embeddedness within the vast intertextual networks of Persianate literary scholarship and his self-conscious ambition to reform the tazkira genre. In his preface, he explicitly criticizes both “the earliest and the recent” (*qudamā va judadā*) authors of tazkiras, noting they included fewer than two hundred poets and had “not composed them as they ought to have been” (*chinān-cha bāyad nasākhta*), thereby adopting an exclusionary approach that neglected many figures. This vision was unprecedented in its scope; Awhadī sought to encompass poets from every era, milieu, and social rank, from kings, viziers, and saints to women, literary elites, and even those from whose pen “only a single line of poetry has survived.” In doing so, he presented his work as a definitive and inclusive record of the Persian poetic tradition.

The value of the *'Arafāt* lies not only in its vast biographical scope but also in the extraordinary poetic corpus it preserves, some 75,000–80,000 verses drawn from diverse and often rare sources. Many of these excerpts derive from poetic collections that Awhadī consulted firsthand, allowing him to transmit material from older or scarcely available works, such as 'Awfī's *Lubāb al-Albāb* (618/1221), to readers who no longer had access to them. In addition, Awhadī recorded primary material on Safavid–Mughal

poets whom he encountered personally during his travels through Iran and India (ca. 1580–1631), making the *‘Arafāt* an indispensable repository for both earlier and contemporary verse.

Although Awhadī’s *tazkira* was highly esteemed and evidently in demand among Mughal courtly and scholarly circles, the surviving manuscript tradition of the *‘Arafāt* is surprisingly small and uneven. Only two complete seventeenth-century copies are known today: MS 5324 (Malek National Library, Tehran) and the two-volume Khuda Bakhsh manuscript (H.L. 229–230), copied in 1050/1640 for the Mughal noble Mīr Ṣābir while he served as governor of Gujarat. The Khuda Bakhsh copy represents a slightly revised recension of the text. It preserves evidence of its subsequent movement through Gujarat, Agra, and Patna, though it also suffers from numerous scribal inconsistencies, omissions, and later reader interventions. Alongside these complete witnesses, two fragmentary manuscripts survive. MS 2285 (Habibganj Library) covers entries from *ḥā’* to *shīm* and contains marginal corrections made by later owners. MS 3654 (formerly India Office Library 313), now housed in the British Library, includes the introduction and sections from *alif* to *qāf*; both seem to have been copied from multiple exemplars and probably represent portions of larger, now-lost codices.

The manuscript tradition also includes several early modern abridgments. The earliest and most authoritative, the *Ka‘ba ‘Irfān* (MS 314), was prepared by Awhadī himself in 1036/1626 at the request of Jahāngīr Shāh (r. 1605–1627). Later readers and scholars produced additional epitomes, including an abridgment by Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān Ārzū, preserved today in Manchester, which selectively distilled material from the *‘Arafāt* within the intellectual

milieu of eighteenth-century Delhi. Taken together, this diverse group of complete copies, partial manuscripts, and abridgments reveals a textual tradition shaped by courtly patronage, scarcity, and patterns of elite circulation. Against this wider backdrop, MS 5324 stands out not only as the earliest extant witness to Awhadī's *tazkira* but also as the copy with the densest administrative and paratextual record, making it an unparalleled case for examining the institutional afterlife of the *'Arafāt* and the bureaucratic practices that sustained its cultural authority.

MS 5324: Description and Codicological Features

A rare and valuable copy of the *'Arafāt al-'Āshiqīn*, currently preserved in the Malek National Library and Museum in Tehran, has recently been included in the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Register of the Memory of the World. Notably, this manuscript has been inaccurately catalogued in the Malek Library under the subject of mysticism (*'irfān*) and described as a mystic memoir. This classification fails to accurately reflect the work's comprehensive scope and literary structure as a poetic *tazkira*. The manuscript consists of 608 folios written on delicate, thin *tirma* paper. Each page features 23 lines of text, along with 18 marginal lines, and measures 34.8 × 22.2 cm (Fig. 1). It was copied in Persian using the calligraphic *nasta'liq* script, with the main text rendered in black ink and headings in red ink (Fig. 2). Although the manuscript is not illuminated, the blank spaces at the top of the introduction and the beginning of each section (*'arṣa*) indicate that space may have been intended for later decorative embellishments.

A few sections of the manuscript are missing, including the entries for medieval and modern poets in the *fā'* (ف) section, as well as the

entire *lām* (ل) section. The date of the inscription is not specified, nor is the name of the scribe present. Consequently, it is difficult to determine whether this version is the original manuscript authored by Taqī Awhadī or a copy commissioned by a nobleman in Jahāngīr’s court. Although the lack of a colophon complicates the dating process, the seals and inscription notes provide valuable insights into its probable date of production, provenance, and the patterns of ownership and circulation.

Some internal textual evidence indicates that the Malek manuscript was copied around or shortly after 1030/1621. The latest date noted in this copy appears under the biographical entry for Munisī Shūshtarī, whom Awhadī recorded meeting in Surat during the same year. The Khuda Bakhsh manuscript (MS. 229 & 230), on the other hand, features a later date, 1040/1631, under the entry for Khwāja Jān Khwāfī. However, this reference was likely added by a scribe rather than by the author himself. Consequently, the latest reliable date across extant versions—1036/1626—should be considered the *terminus ante quem* for the transcription of MS 5324. Taken together, this evidence supports the conclusion that the Malek manuscript represents the earliest surviving copy of the ‘*Arafāt*, one that was likely produced during Awhadī’s lifetime.

The fourteen seals located on the flyleaves of the manuscript indicate that it was part of the Mughal Imperial Library during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The arrangement and inscriptions of these seals reflect the hierarchy within the library’s administration. The inscriptions, primarily from the superintendents (*dārūgha-yi kitābhāna*) of the imperial library, are predominantly located at the top of the front page. They are large and circular, often accompanied by dates and the name of a Mughal king. Other seals, positioned closer to the bottom of the page, can be attributed to the library inspectors. These are smaller and oval-

shaped, except for one that is square. This square-shaped seal likely belonged to a representative of Sayf Khān's library, who certified the manuscript's transfer to the royal library. Together, these inscriptions and seals not only help establish the manuscript's approximate date but also trace its circulation through time and space.

The back flyleaf (Fig. 4) also contains three verses of the 16th-century poet Vahshī Bāfqī, transcribed in two different hands. While the exact date of these additions remains unclear, their presence likely reflects the manuscript's Iranian phase, possibly during the Qajar or early Pahlavi period. Several additional annotations, including repeated lines and partial phrases, also appear on the back flyleaf, likely the product of casual or practice writing. These jottings, possibly by different hands, do not appear to be formally connected to the manuscript's transmission. Their placement in a space less regulated by institutional protocol suggests they were added after the manuscript's archival phase, perhaps during a period of private or informal use in Iran.

Among the manuscript's paratextual elements is a modern seal belonging to Ḥusayn Āqā Malek, bearing the Latin initials "HM." This seal appears on both the front and back flyleaves, and its use of Latin script sharply contrasts with the ornate Persian seals of the Mughal period. Its placement and style reflect a shift in archival identity: from imperial object to nationally significant relic. Malek's bilingual signature suggests an emerging archival consciousness shaped by 20th-century institutional and global curatorial norms, marking the manuscript not just as a cultural artifact but as part of a modern heritage project.

Provenance and Ownership History

The manuscript of the *ʿArafāt* came into the custody of the Malek National Library and Museum Institution probably in 1331/1952, as part of a collection that originally belonged to Ḥusayn Āqā Malek (d.1973). The seals and inscription notes that appear on the flyleaves provide evidence of earlier ownership of this copy of the *ʿArafāt*, notably two inscriptions placed perpendicular to one another (Fig. 3). The first inscription indicates the date the manuscript was entrusted to the Mughal royal library during the reign of Shāh Jahān (r. 1628–1658):

عرفات از اموال سیفخان به تاریخ هشتم ذی قعدة سنه ۱۴
جلوس مبارک تحویل خواجه سهیل شد.

The *ʿArafāt* was entrusted to Khwāja Suhayl from Sayf Khān's inventory, 8 Zī Qa'da, year 14 of the auspicious reign [16 February 1641].

The note was written and certified by a librarian named Mahmud. The second inscription reveals the price for obtaining the manuscript, which was 150 rupees:

عرفات از اموال سیفخان در بیستم ذی قعدة سنه ۱۴ جلوس
مبارک تحویل خواجه سهیل شد بقیمت یکصد و پنجاه روپیه.

The *ʿArafāt* was entrusted to Khwāja Suhayl from Sayf Khān's inventory, 20 Zī Qa'da, year 14 of auspicious reign [2 March 1641] with the value of one hundred and fifty rupees.

The record was certified by ʿAbd al-Rashīd Daylamī, a renowned calligrapher of the Mughal court and nephew and student of the

celebrated master Mīr ‘Imād. He also served as superintendent of Shāh Jahān’s royal library during this period. His seal, which reads “*banda-yi Shāh Jahān ‘Abd al-Rashīd Daylamī*” (“Servant of Shāh Jahān, ‘Abd al-Rashīd Daylamī”), appears at the bottom of the inscription, marking both his bureaucratic authority and artistic prestige. The twelve-day gap between the manuscript’s registration and purchase dates suggests an interim period of inspection and valuation before its official accession into the imperial library. This can be seen as an early instance of the administrative practices of archival performativity, in which bureaucratic procedures conferred authority and institutional value upon a manuscript.

In addition to the two inscriptions, there is a seal on the front flyleaf that reads: “Safī Sayf Khān, [the servant of] Muḥammad Jahāngīr Shāh, through the grace and favor of the Divine (*aḡ lutf va faḡl-i ilāhī*)...” This seal, which uniquely bears the name of Jahāngīr Shāh, strongly supports the conclusion that Sayf Khān was the original owner of the manuscript. Accordingly, the manuscript must have been copied prior to 1037/1627. Based on scattered references in a few literary sources and chronicles, such as the *Mir’āt-i Aḡmadī* (written in 1170/1746), we know that Sayf Khān was a high-ranking nobleman during the reigns of Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān.

He belonged to a distinguished family of Persian émigrés who rose to prominence in the Mughal court. Sayf Khān was also the brother-in-law of Empress Mumtāz Mahal and the father-in-law of ‘Ināyat Khān, the superintendent of the royal library in 1068/1658, the final year of Shāh Jahān’s reign. His given name was Muḥammad Ṣafī, and the title “Sayf Khān” was conferred upon him by Jahāngīr in 1032/1623. During Jahangir’s reign, Sayf Khān

served as *dīwān* of Gujarat and was later appointed provincial governor (*subihdār*) of Gujarat in 1045/1636, though he was dismissed from the post the same year. He died in Aḥmadabad in 1050/1640—the same year the ‘*Arafāt*’ was transferred to the royal library.

During his tenure as governor of Gujarat, Sayf Khān played a significant role in the cultural and urban development of Aḥmadabad, commissioning a complex that included a hospital (*dār al-shifā*), a mosque, and a madrasa bearing his name. In addition to his administrative duties, he was deeply engaged in the intellectual life of the Mughal court and was recognized among the literary elite, actively supporting poets and scholars. A notable example is the Indo-Persian poet Munīr-i Lāhūrī (d. 1639), who received regular financial assistance and a monthly stipend from Sayf Khān, as documented in his collected letters. This network of literary patronage firmly establishes Sayf Khān within the cultural circles of early seventeenth-century Mughal India, precisely the milieu in which Awhadī operated.

The ‘*Arafāt*’ itself provides subtle but meaningful evidence of a personal connection between the two men. In the biographical entry on Khwāja Jān Khwāfī, a Mughal nobleman who served as chief news recorder (*vāqī‘a-nivīs*) in Aḥmadabad between 1021/1613 and 1030/1621, Awhadī alludes to a “dear old friend” who also held an official position in the city during the same period and was appointed by the reigning monarch. While the friend is not named, the timing and administrative details align closely with historical accounts of Muḥammad Ṣafī (later titled Sayf Khān), who was appointed *dīwān* of Gujarat in 1025/1616. This convergence of context and roles makes it plausible that Sayf Khān

was the unnamed confidant in Awhadī's narrative. If so, the connection not only strengthens the case for Sayf Khān's ownership of the *ʿArafāt* manuscript but also raises the possibility that he commissioned or supported its transcription during Awhadī's lifetime.

Shortly after Sayf Khān died in 1050/1641, the *ʿArafāt* manuscript was transferred to the Mughal royal library during the fourteenth regnal year of Shāh Jahān, where it remained for several decades. A series of dated seals belonging to the superintendents of the royal library provide evidence of its ongoing custodianship under successive emperors. Among these are the seal of ʿAbd al-Rashīd Daylamī, servant to Shāh Jahān, dated 1050/1641–42; the seal of ʿInāyat Khān Shāhjahānī from year 31 (1068/1658–59); Murshīd Hādī ʿĀlamgīr Shāhī's seal from year 14 (1083/1673–74); the seal of Muḥammad Amīn ʿAʿzam Shāhī dated to year 42 (1110/1698–99); and finally, the seal of Arshad Khān Khānih'zād, issued under Shāh ʿĀlam Pādishāh-i Ghāzī in year 2 (1120/1708–09). Collectively, these seals attest to the manuscript's continued presence in the royal library well into the early eighteenth century.

It is important to note that the superintendents' seals typically appeared only once during the transition or transfer of ownership within the royal library. An exception to this is found in the period of Shāh Jahān, during which two chief librarians affixed their seals to a manuscript. As Seyller has pointed out, although ʿInāyat Khān served as superintendent of the royal library only in the final year of Shāh Jahān's life, his seal is frequently found on several manuscripts from the library. Therefore, we cannot interpret his seal as a sign of ownership transfer for the *ʿArafāt*. Concerning the dates, the seals used by the superintendents of the royal library

display both a regnal (*julūs*) year and an Islamic lunar (*hijrī*) year. It is uncommon for superintendents' seals to include notes, with the notable exception of 'Abd al-Rashīd Daylamī's seal, which is accompanied by a note certifying the manuscript's acquisition for the royal library.

Alongside the seals within the manuscript, several inscription notes are present, including the phrase “*arẓ didib shud*” (it was inspected) found on the flyleaves. These annotations raise questions about their precise meaning and institutional significance. Scholars have proposed a range of interpretations regarding their intent. For example, Irfan Habib suggests that such inscriptions indicate that a book “had been seen by the emperor,” implying these entries were recorded upon the emperor's request to review a volume. However, as Iraj Afshar and John Seyller have shown, such phrases are most commonly found in manuscripts from royal libraries or religious institutions and likely signify routine inspections by library staff. Seyller further notes that Mughal librarians were responsible for these examinations to ensure the preservation of their collections, as negligence could result in severe repercussions. While Habib's interpretation remains plausible for certain cases, the broader evidence suggests these inscriptions typically reflect formal institutional checks rather than direct imperial scrutiny.

Whether recording an imperial viewing or a librarian's routine check, these notes serve a core purpose: they are performative acts of institutional custody. Their frequent occurrence, at least twelve times over several decades, transformed a simple administrative task into a continuous ritual of archival performativity. Each inspection, carefully dated and certified, physically inscribes the manuscript's ongoing presence within the imperial collection, actively performing and reaffirming its status as a governed object

of the state library. This sustained ritual is documented in the inspection notes themselves, which include:

- Inspected on the first day (*ghurra*) of Ramazaṅ in the 21st year of the auspicious accession, certified by Al-ʿbd Muhammad Jaʿfar al-Ḥusaynī, 1055.
- Inspected on the 19th of Rabīʿ al-Sānī, in the year of the auspicious accession.
- Inspected on the 25th of Jamādī al-Avval in the 24th year of the auspicious accession.
- Inspected on the 14th of Shaʿbān in the year 1069/1659, certified by Muhammad.
- Inspected on the 20th of Shaʿbān in year 13.
- Inspected on the 23rd of Rajab al-Murajjab in year 29, certified by Muhammad.
- Inspected on the 8th of Rabīʿ al-Sānī in year 30.
- Inspected on the 19th of Zī-Ḥajja in year 32.
- Inspected on the 3rd of Shaʿbān in year 44.
- Inspected on the 19th of Ramazaṅ in year 44.
- Inspected on the 2nd of Rabīʿ al-Avval in year 7.

As the above entries show, with one exception, nearly all inspection notes follow a consistent pattern, recording the Islamic month and regnal (*julūs*) year in which the manuscript was examined. Since the monarch's name is rarely included alongside the regnal year, it is often difficult to precisely identify the emperor under whom the inspection took place. However, certain patterns allow us to infer probable timelines. Any inspection dated before the fourteenth regnal year must predate the manuscript's accession into the imperial library under Shāh Jahān and can therefore be excluded. Furthermore, since Aurangzeb ʿĀlamgīr (r. 1658–1707) was the only Mughal emperor after Akbar Shāh (r. 1556–1605)

whose reign extended beyond thirty years, the three inspections dated to regnal years 32 and 44 (twice) can confidently be attributed to his reign. These entries suggest that the manuscript continued to receive regular attention during 'Ālamgīr's rule. Overall, the frequency and consistency of these inspection notes throughout the manuscript's time in the royal library indicate careful handling and preservation, which likely contributed to the good condition in which it survives today.

The provenance of the MS 5324 becomes uncertain following Bahādur Shāh's reign and the Mughal dynasty's decline. As Seyller notes, by the mid-eighteenth century, the Mughal library had begun to be plundered and dispersed, with surviving manuscripts left to the ravages of climate and neglect. What remained of the imperial collection was acquired by the British colonial government in 1859, and in 1876, 3,710 volumes were transferred to the India Office Library. However, MS 5324 diverged from this trajectory: it was removed from the royal library and transported to Iran, likely in the early nineteenth century. This inference is supported by a single verse inscribed on the back flyleaf, dated to the first day (*ghurra*) of Shavvāl 1240 AH (June 1825 CE):

تکیه بر گوشه ی ابروزده چشمت آری
ترک چون مست شود تکیه به شمشیر کند

Your eyes are resting in the corner of an eyebrow
Yes, when a Turk gets drunk, he leans on his
sword.

The poem was recorded as part of an incomplete ghazal of the Qajar poet, Shāḡīr ‘Abbās Ṣabūhī (d. 1315/1898). However, the date inscribed on the back flyleaf of this manuscript reveals that the poem must have been composed before Sabūhī was born. This strongly suggests that Sabūhī did not write the poem and that it was incorrectly attributed to him. My investigation reveals that the same verse appears in *Safīnat al-Maḡmūd* (The Anthology of Maḡmūd), a tazkira compiled in that same year. There, it is credited to ‘Ismā‘īl Khān-i Burūjerdī, who was known by the pen name Sarbāz (d. 1289/1872). According to the author, Maḡmūd Mīrzā (d. 1855–58)—a Qajar prince and patron—Sarbāz was a mediocre poet from Lorestan. The verse in question appears as part of a ghazal dedicated to Maḡmūd Mīrzā himself, suggesting both literary and social ties between them. Given the alignment of date, content, and context, it is reasonable to infer that the verse was likely inscribed by Maḡmūd Mīrzā or someone from his literary circle.

The evidence strongly indicates that the ‘*Arafāt*’ manuscript was transferred to Iran by the early nineteenth century and was likely in the possession of a Qajar household member, most probably Maḡmūd Mīrzā. Notably, no seals or accession notes from Qajar royal libraries appear on the manuscript. This absence suggests that ‘*Arafāt*’ may have circulated in elite private hands during the 19th century rather than entering an institutional library. The 1825 inscription on the back flyleaf, which is likely tied to Maḡmūd Mīrzā’s literary circle, supports this interpretation. Taken together, these details point to a mode of engagement during the Qajar period that was personal, exclusive, and situated within an elite literary milieu.

We know with certainty that this manuscript was later owned by the Qajar intellectual and diplomat Rizā Qulī Khān Hidāyat (d. 1871) before passing to Ḥusayn Malek. Yet, it is unlikely that Hidāyat recorded the poem himself or accessed *ʿArafāt* as early as 1825. As Kevin Schwartz points out, Hidāyat’s position at the Qajar court gave him access to a wide variety of texts. Thus, the most convincing scenario is that Hidāyat encountered the *ʿArafāt* manuscript later, likely through the Qajar royal library during the reign of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (r. 1848–96), who commissioned Hidāyat to compile a universal tazkira.

Although the details of Ḥusayn Malek’s 1942 acquisition are not documented, a handwritten note by him, dated two years before his purchase, is important for understanding the manuscript’s provenance and perceived value. In this note (cited earlier as the epigraph), Malek not only refers to the *ʿArafāt al-ʿAshiqīn* as a “matchless gift of the Divine,” but also meticulously outlines his unsuccessful attempts to locate parallel copies in major libraries across Europe, India, Egypt, and the Near East. This careful effort to verify the manuscript’s uniqueness highlights two key points: first, Malek’s scholarly diligence in establishing its rarity, and second, his deliberate choice to preserve it as a singular treasure in his collection.

For the purposes of this study, the note serves as a significant testament to the manuscript’s 20th-century journey. It affirms that the copy currently residing in the Malek Library was recognized as extraordinary long before its academic rediscovery. Furthermore, it positions Malek not only as an owner but also as a discerning custodian who appreciated the text’s cultural and literary importance. His connection to the manuscript, as highlighted by

the note, encourages us to reconsider the impact of private collectors like Malek on the preservation and dissemination of rare Islamicate texts in modern Iran.

Conclusion

The four-century history of MS 5324 demonstrates that the endurance of Persian literary heritage depends not only on what authors wrote but also on what institutions did. In this study, I have argued that the surviving authority of *'Arafāt al-Āshiqīn* was actively created through what I call archival performativity, the cumulative bureaucratic, administrative, and curatorial acts that gave the manuscript value over time.

From its likely production under Sayf Khān's patronage, to its repeated inspection, valuation, and certification in the Mughal imperial library, to its later preservation and sacralization by Ḥusayn Āqā Malek, MS 5324 amassed cultural authority through processes that exceeded its textual content. Each seal, inspection note, price, and accession statement did not merely document ownership; it performed the manuscript's significance, embedding it within shifting regimes of courtly, institutional, and private stewardship. By tracing these layers of paratext and provenance, I have shown that MS 5324 was not passively preserved but continually reclassified, reaffirmed, and revalued. Its custodians, from imperial librarians to Qajar princes to modern Iranian collectors, participated in a long tradition of elevating certain works to the status of cultural relics, while leaving countless others to disappear.

This case raises broader questions about the infrastructures that influence literary survival. What criteria determine which texts are

examined, priced, or officially registered? How might other Islamicate manuscripts uncover similarly complex histories of bureaucratic care or neglect? And to what extent do institutional practices, rather than literary merit alone, shape the boundaries of Persianate cultural memory? Ultimately, I argue that the survival of MS 5324 reveals a broader truth: the endurance of Persian literature has depended not only on authors and readers, but on the sustained labor of those who cared for books across generations. The seals, inspections, valuations, and cataloguing decisions that mark this manuscript show how custodians continually produced, affirmed, and renewed its authority. These layered acts of stewardship, often invisible in traditional literary history, formed an ongoing archival practice through which the manuscript was preserved and its cultural meaning transmitted across empires.

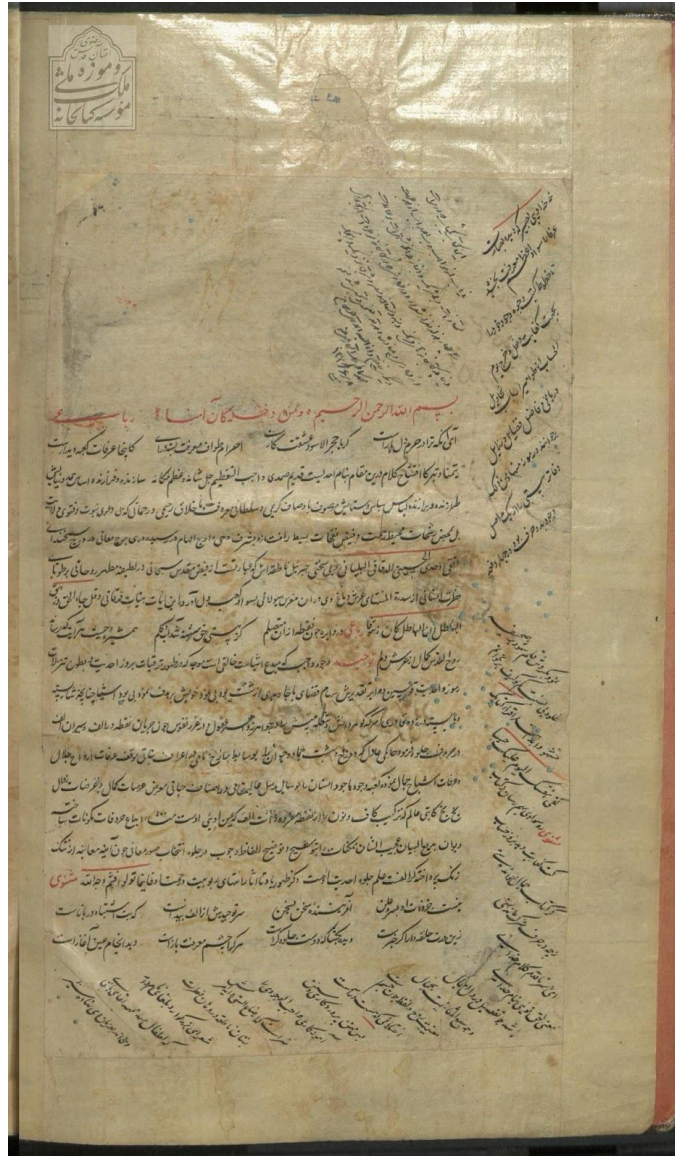


Figure 1. Folio of ‘Arafāt al-‘Ashiqh (MS 5324, Malek National Library, Tebran) containing Hūsayn Aqā Malek’s handwritten note dated 1942, in which he praises the manuscript’s uniqueness.

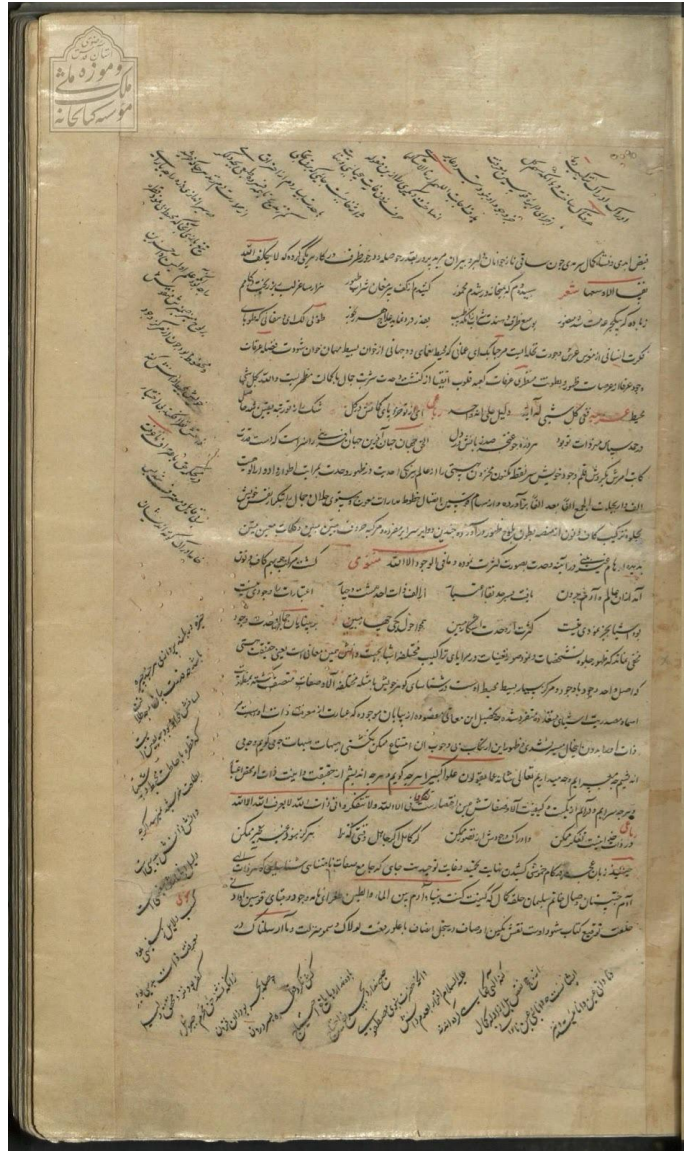


Figure 2. Folio from 'Arafat al-Asbiqin' (MS 5324, Malek National Library and Museum, Tehran) showing nasta'liq script, rubricated headings, and marginal annotations, early 17th century



Figure 3. Front flyleaf of 'Arafāt al-'Ashiqīn (MS 5324, Malek National Library and Museum, Tebran) with multiple Mughal imperial seals and inscriptions documenting accession to the royal library, 17th century.



Figure 4. Back flyleaf of 'Arafāt al-'Ashiqīn (MS 5324, Malek National Library and Museum, Tebran) with verses attributed to Vahsbi Bāfqi and later annotations from the Qajar period, early 19th century.

References

Afshar, Iraj. “‘Arż dar Nuskha-hā-yi Khattī.” *Ma‘ārif* 41 (1376/1997): 3–31.

Aktam, Sayyad Farīd. *Surūda-bā va Nivishta-bā-yi Munir Lābūrī*. Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Duktur Maḥmūd Afshār, 2009.

Āl-i Dāvūd, Sayyid ‘Alī. “‘Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn: Sayrī dar Aḥwāl va Āthār-i Mu‘allif-i Ān.” *Nāma-yi Farhangistān* 3, no. 1 (1374/1995): 44.

Ārzū, Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān. *Tazkīra-yi Majma‘ al-Nafā’is*. Edited by Zīb al-Nissā ‘Alī Khān. Vol. 1. Islamabad: Markaz-i Taḥqīqāt-i Īrān va Pākistān, 2004.

‘Awfī, Muḥammad. *Lubāb al-Albāb*. Edited by Muḥammad Qazvīnī and Edward G. Browne. Vol. 1. London and Leiden: Brill, 1903–6.

Awḥadī Balyānī, Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad. ‘*Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn*. MS 5324, Malek National Library and Museum, Tehran.

_____. ‘*Arafāt al-‘Āshiqīn va ‘Arasāt al-‘Ārifīn*. Edited by Zabīhullāh Sāhibkār and Āmina Fakhar Ahmad. Vols. 1 and 6. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mīrās Maktūb, 2013.

Bland, N. “On the Earliest Persian Biography of Poets, by Muḥammad ‘Awfī, and on Some Other Works of the Class Called Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 9, 1846, pp. 111–176,

Brookshaw, Dominic Parviz. "Maḥmūd Mīrzā." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, August 2006. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/mahmud-mirza>.

Farghadani, Shahla. "A History of Style and a Style of History: The Hermeneutic of Tarz in Persian Literary Criticism." *Iranian Studies* 55, no. 2 (2022): 501–19.

_____. "Intikhāb-i Tazkira-yi Taqī Awhadī: Mu'arrifī va Tahlīl-i Āsar-i Naw-yāfta az Sirāj al-Dīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū." *Āyina-yi Paṣḥūbesh* 33, no. 6 (March 2023): 109–125.

Fatma, Sadaf. "Urbane Life in Mughal Gujarat." PhD diss., Aligarh Muslim University, 2010.

Fūladī, Alirizā. "Mas'ala-yī bi Nām-i Shātīr 'Abbās-i Sabūhī." *Justār-hā-yi Nuvin-i Adabī*, no. 198 (1396/2017): 33–50.

Gulchīn Ma'ānī, Ahmad. *Tārikh-i Taẓkira-hā-yi Fārsī*. Vol. 1. Mashhad: Āstān-i Quds-i Razavī, 1369/1990.

Habib, Irfan. "Persian Book Writing and Book Use in the Pre-Printing Age." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 66 (2005–2006): 514–37.

Hidayat, Rizā Qulī Khān. *Majma' al-Fuṣḥā'*. Edited by Mazāhir Muṣaffā. Vol. 1. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 2002.

Iran UNESCO. "'Arafāt al-'Āshiqīn va 'Arasāt al-'Ārifīn." Accessed August 1, 2025. <https://fa.irunesco.org/-/العاشقين-عرافات-العارفين/>.

Khān, 'Alī Muḥammad. *Mīr'āt-i Aḥmadī: A History of Gujarat in Persian*. Edited by Sayyid Nawab 'Alī. Vol. 1–2. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1928.

_____. *Mir'āt-i Aḥmadi: A Persian History of Gujarat*. Translated by Sayyid Nawab 'Alī. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1965.

Kia, Mana. *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place And Origin before Nationalism*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2020.

Lāhūrī, Abu'l-Barakāt Munīr. *Munsha'āt-i Munīr*. MS 2/14169 (IR395), Majlis Library, Tehran.

Losensky, Paul. "Biographical Writing: Tadhkere and Manāqeb." In *A History of Persian Literature*, edited by Bo Utas, vol. 5, 339–78. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2021.

Memon, M. U. "Abu'l-Barakāt Lāhūrī." *Encyclopædia Iranica* I/3, 268–269.

Mīrzā, Maḥmūd. *Safinat al-Mahmūd*. Edited by Abd al-Rasūl Khayyāmpour. Vol. 1. Tabriz: Mu'assassa-yi Tārīkh va Farhang-i Iran, 1967.

Nobuaki, Kondo. "Ā'in-i Akbarī as a Tazkira of Poets," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, suppl., no. 3 (2024): 93–105.

Nomani, Shibli. *Shi'r al-'Ajam*. Azamgarh: Ma'ārif Press, 1921.

Qīlichkhānī, Ḥamīd Rizā. *'Abd al-Rashīd Daylamī (Gulistān-i Hunar 6)*. Tehran: Paykara Publications, 2018.

Schwartz, Kevin L. *Remapping Persian Literary History, 1700–1900*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

Seyller, John. "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library." *Artibus Asiae* 57, nos. 3–4 (1997): 243–349.

Shāhnavāz Khān, Samām al-Dawla. *Ma'āsir al-Umarā*. Edited by Mawlawī 'Abd al-Raḥīm. Vol. 1. Kolkata: Ayshiyātik Sosāyitī-yi Bangāla, 1888.

Sharma, Sunil. *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Subḥānī, Tawfīq-i. "Darbāra-yi Mulakḥkhaṣ yā Shāh Jahān Nāma-yi Muḥammad Ṭāhir-i Āshinā Ma'rūf bi 'Ināyat Khān." *Nāma-yi Anjuman*, no. 17 (1384 Sh./2005): 109–117.

Ẓiyā'uddīn, Muḥammad. "Role of Persians at the Mughal Court." PhD diss., University of Baluchistan, 2005.