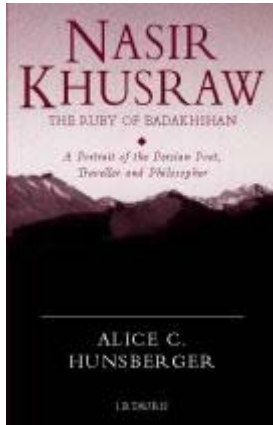




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*Nasir Khusraw, the Ruby of Badakhshan:
A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher*

by Alice C. Hunsberger

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A Reading Guide by Jasmin Mamani

The passage of a millennium has not diminished Nasir Khusraw's relevance nor dulled the lustre of his poetry. It continues to uplift and inspire, reminding us that we are the authors of our own destiny. As he has said, we can be like a poplar tree which chooses to remain barren, or we can let our path be lit by the candle of wisdom, for only 'with intellect, we can seek out all the hows and whys. Without it, we are but trees without fruit'.

His Highness the Aga Khan¹

Introduction

One of the foremost poets of the Persian language and a major contributor to Muslim thought, Nasir Khusraw has attracted interest for nearly a thousand years from admirers and critics alike. Celebrated for poetry that combines art with philosophy, and revered and criticised for his

theological texts, Nasir Khusraw remains one of the most fascinating figures in Muslim history and literature.

The *Safarnama* (Travelogue), a personal record of his seven-year journey from Central Asia to the Mediterranean coast, Egypt, Arabia and back again, has been studied for its detailed descriptions of the many cities, societies and customs Nasir visited and witnessed. Verses of his poetry from the *Divan* appear in every major anthology

¹ Address at the Foundation-Stone Ceremony of The Ismaili Centre Dushanbe, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 30th August 2003.

of Persian poetry compiled since his death in 1077 CE. Today, both his prose and his poetry are studied by schoolchildren in Iran and Tajikistan, and his *qasidas* (odes) are sung by communities all over Central Asia.

Alice Hunsberger’s vivid and compelling account of Nasir Khusraw’s life and writings provides an overview of this extraordinary individual. Peppared with excerpts of his writings, it draws the reader into understanding the life, personality and characteristics of Nasir Khusraw. The book is highly readable and written in an engaging narrative style, transporting the reader to the richness of the past which Nasir Khusraw so meticulously describes during his travels:

For this is a man who does not just visit Jerusalem; he measures it, pacing out the dimensions of the city with his own feet, step by step. This is a man who does not just observe people at their daily work; he inquires what they are doing and why. This is a man who does not just listen to local lore; he tests it out. When told by local inhabitants that a certain valley near Jerusalem is called the Valley of Hell because from the edge one can listen and hear the cries of the people in hell, he goes to see for himself: ‘I went there but heard nothing,’ he records (*Safarnama*, 22; *Ruby of Badakhshan*, 33).

General readers as well as specialists will find this book a tremendous source of detailed historical information about the Ismaili *da’wa* (mission) at the height of the Fatimid Caliphate-Imamate, while also providing detailed descriptions of places, people and events that are of relevance to the larger context of Islamic history.



Divan 13th/19th century

Structure and Content of the Book

The book is divided into 12 chapters which follow Nasir Khusraw through the various stages of his life and the stops along his journey, providing commentary and insight into features of Ismaili philosophy. Nasir’s Neoplatonic philosophy² is delicately weaved within Hunsberger’s narrative of his travels: while in Jerusalem, there is an analysis of his philosophy of God;

² The modern term for a school of philosophy that took shape in the 3rd century AD, based on the teachings of Plato and other Platonists. Neoplatonists did not consider themselves as anything other than Platonists; however, their interpretations of Plato were perceived by others to be so significantly different or novel from Plato’s own teachings and writings that it was felt that distinction was warranted. Neoplatonism was also present among medieval Muslim and Jewish thinkers such as al-Farabi and Maimonides, and it experienced a revival in the Renaissance with the acquisition and translation of Greek and Arabic Neoplatonic texts.

in Cairo, a discussion of his philosophy of the Intellect; and on the journey home, his philosophy of the Soul.

Readers will find a broad overview of his life and writings, including brief descriptions of the content of each of his edited writings, including his poetry, travelogue and philosophical texts. Hunsberger scrutinizes the most significant biographical statements that have been made by other writers about Nasir Khusraw over the past millennium, and weighs their veracity and verifiability. She also includes a chronology of events and a map illustrating the extent of Nasir Khusraw's seven-year journey.

The History of Nasir Khusraw

The first chapter 'A Soul Higher Than Fortune' presents an overview of the life of Nasir Khusraw as four key periods: about the little-known early years of Nasir's life, up until his religious conversion at about the age of forty; the seven-year journey when he wrote his *Safarnama* and some references in his poetry; his return home to Khurasan as head of the da'wa for the Ismailis in the region; and, finally, his exile in the Pamir mountains of Badakhshan in the district of Yumgan.

The content and context of Nasir Khusraw's writings in this chapter (i.e. the *Safarnama*, his *Divan* and philosophical texts) provide insight

into the character of Nasir Khusraw, giving the reader an appreciation of the spirit and steadfastness with which he approached life. Hunsberger vividly illustrates his great appreciation for the physical world and the human talents employed to improve it, pointing out:

But, for Nasir Khusraw a more urgent current ran under such delights of the world, namely his aching desire to have some purpose, some answer to the question of why all this exists. Why the world, why human happiness, why human sadness, why beautiful pearls within ugly scabby oysters? (5).

Hunsberger introduces the reader to examples of Nasir's poetic skill and motifs and his outlook on life, such as applying intellect to it rather than blaming fate for one's misfortunes. By tracing the dramatic shift in Nasir Khusraw's life when he decides that the life of a court poet or administrator is too superficial for him, Hunsberger powerfully demonstrates to the reader that the experiences of his travels are linked to the development of his work and the intimate relationship between contemplation and action in his life.

'Heretic, Magician or King,' the second chapter, investigates the myths, stories and writings about Nasir Khusraw, by his contemporaries and others. The reader learns about the different literary sources which make reference to Nasir Khusraw and his writings, as well as the complications involved in researchers piecing together the

“ For this is a man who does not just visit Jerusalem; he measures it, pacing out the dimensions of the city with his own feet, step by step. ”

“ ...for Nasir Khusraw, a more urgent current ran under such delights of the world, namely his aching desire to have some purpose, some answer to the question of why all this exists. Why the world, why human happiness, why human sadness...? ”

threads that reveal his personality and the historic events in which he participated. Throughout this survey, the author takes us on a journey of becoming familiar with the character of Nasir Khusraw, “the actual human being, who lived and developed over time, who faced the fears of a tortuous spiritual quest and whose passion for life was fuelled by the conviction that everything has a higher purpose” (32).

Chapter Three, ‘The Wonders of this World’ details Nasir Khusraw’s early education and life at court: Nasir and other members of his family were in government service under the Ghaznavids and their successors, the Saljuqs. This suggests that Nasir was well-educated not only in the literatures and sciences of his day, but also in Arabic learning, and in Qur’anic and *hadith* studies. Hunsberger points out that “his poetry and prose are suffused with allusions to, and actual portions of Qur’anic verses, sayings of the Prophet and Arabic poetry” (37). She also delves into a poem from the *Divan* and a *qasida* as a means to illustrate the types of themes, metaphors and constructions of poetry which Nasir used. This example describes the importance placed on knowledge and each person’s duty to strive to attain it.

Blame not the azure wheel of Heaven;
 away with such balmy notions!
 Note well that this wheel is above all
 actions
 it suits not the wise to blame the good.
 As long as the world is following its custom
 of torturing you,
 you must learn the habit of showing
 patience.
 Take the heavy burden off your back today;
 do not put off this advice until
 tomorrow!

When you are the author of your own ill-
 fated star,
 look not to Heaven for a lucky star
 (*Divan*, 64;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 39).

Transformation

Nasir Khusraw’s spiritual awakening and conversion to the Ismaili interpretation of Islam is the focal point of the next chapter, ‘The Turning Point’. The chapter begins by navigating the reader through the opening of the *Safarnama*, where Nasir Khusraw recounts the whole story of his conversion, including a powerful dream which prompts him to realize that his life up to that point was one of slumber. Hunsberger comments that “the first two pages [of the *Safarnama*] thus contain some of the most significant sentences in his entire corpus. They are packed with meaning” (50). Three sentences uttered to Nasir Khusraw by a man in his dream contain, in the words of the author, “the seeds of all that follows in Nasir’s life”:

attend to the clarity of your senses;
 always seek to increase your reason and
 wisdom;
 and guide others to that wisdom (54).

The message in these words proves to be that which Nasir steadfastly attends to throughout his journey and enables him to make the radical shift in his life and destiny.

Using both poetry, which is embedded with clues to his intellectual and spiritual development, and as well as prose as points of entry, Hunsberger enables the reader to comprehend and engage with this significant moment in Nasir Khusraw’s life. Below is an excerpt of a verse that is used to

illustrate Nasir Khusraw's new consciousness about himself and life's purpose:

Feeling that to me my own body is the dearest,
I inferred that in the world there must be someone who is the
 most precious of all that had been created,
Just as the falcon is the noblest of the birds,
 or the camel among the quadrupeds,
Or the date palm amongst the trees, or ruby amongst the jewels,
Just as the Qur'an amongst the books,
 or Ka'ba amongst the houses,
Or the heart amongst the organs of the body,
 the sun amongst the luminaries (56).

Chapter Five, 'Knowledge and Action,' illustrates the ways in which Nasir sought to make his inner change manifest in his external life, and it is from this point that the author delves into the heart of what underlies Nasir's writing on the *zahir/ batin* doctrine of Islam.

Using examples from his philosophical writings in the *Wajh-i din*, the reader is invited to appreciate "one of the most important lessons of Nasir's newly converted life, captured in this metaphor: 'The price of each jewel is determined not by its external qualities, but by its inner qualities'" (72-73). It is from this metaphor that Hunsberger determines that Nasir Khusraw sees that "everything manifest has a hidden quality which is not only the essence of the thing, but which indeed carries the explanation, the meaning, the true significance of the thing" (73).

Elaborating this point in looking at pairs of opposites in the physical world, Nasir writes:

The price of each jewel is determined not by its external qualities, but by its inner qualities.

Nasir Khusraw

One element of each pair is apparent to the senses, while the other is hidden. But each does not, and cannot, exist without the other. Like the two sides of a coin, one may seem to be solely in evidence at any time but the other still necessarily exists (75).

This metaphor is applied to religion:

The scriptures and the law are both manifest. That is, the Qur'an as the Book of God is visible and tangible to everyone, as is the *shari'a*, the law of Islam. But their inner meanings and esoteric interpretations (*ta'wil*) are hidden to those who do not know, while obvious to those who do know

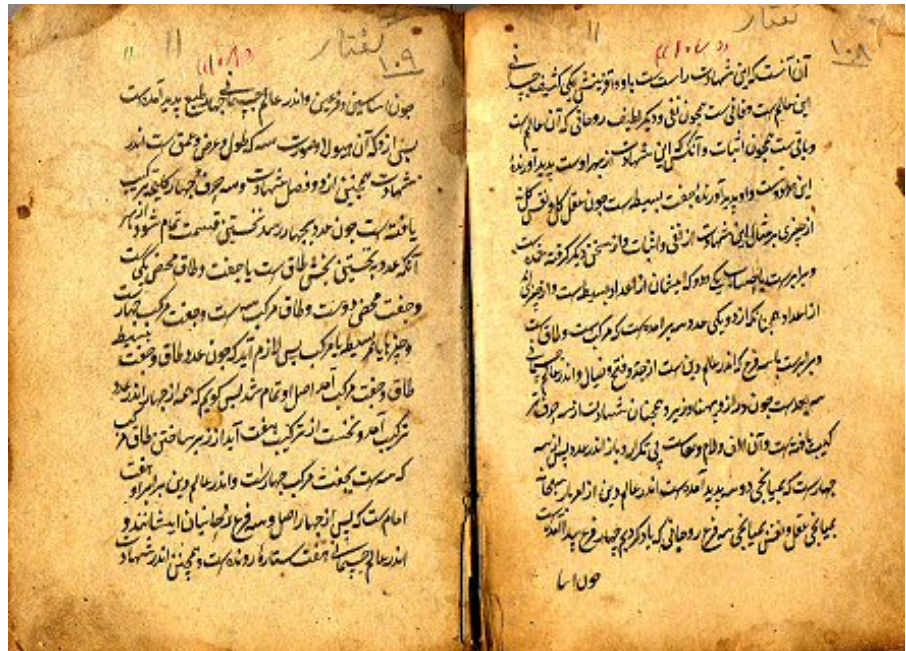
(*Wajh-i din*, 82;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 75).

Nasir's Travels

Chapter Six, 'The Journey Begins,' sees Nasir, having now committed to the Ismaili interpretation of Islam, ready to embark on a pilgrimage to Mecca accompanied by his brother, Abu Sa'id. He leaves his job, his home, and his family, with the conviction and commitment to learn all he can about Ismaili philosophy and theology. The remainder of the chapter traces his one-year journey to Jerusalem, with descriptions of the towns and people he encountered along the way.

Chapter Seven takes the reader through a description of all that Nasir sees of the holy city of Jerusalem: the cultivation of olives, figs and other produce in the outlying areas, and engineering details about the cities' fortifications, public baths, and ablution pools in the mosques (109).

He visits many monuments: the Dome of the Rock, the tombs of Abraham, his wife Sarah, and his son Isaac, as well as the tombs of Jacob and his wife and their son Joseph. Nasir observes that local cultivation and production near the tomb of Joseph provide all pilgrims with food:



Wajh-i din 13th /19th century

Everyone who goes there is given a daily ration of one loaf of bread, a bowl of lentils cooked with olive oil and raisins, a custom that has been maintained from the time of Abraham himself down to the present. On some days there are five hundred people present, all of whom receive this hospitality (137).

Hunsberger uses the city of Jerusalem, filled with many sacred places of prayer and meditation, as the backdrop to discuss Nasir’s philosophy of God; for Nasir, ‘God is a very real, living presence’ and at the same time, ‘His essence (*huwiyyat*) is above everything, and nothing can have a relation to Him’ (*Shish fast*, 34; *Ruby of Badkhsan*, 114). The apparent contradictions between these two approaches (one affirming God’s presence even in the things of this world and the second declaring his absolute otherness) is a product of different levels of interpretation, as well as two modes of understanding God, through the concepts of the *transcendent* and the *immanent*³ (115).

³ Transcendent, the state of being beyond the reach or apprehension of experience; its opposite is *immanence*. God conceived as a creator external to the perceivable world he creates is *transcendent*.

Proof of the transcendence of God is found in the Qur’an in verses such as:

Say, *He is God, One, God the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one* (Qur’an, 112:1-4; *Ruby of Badakhshan*, 115-116).

The mode of understanding God as immanent is found in the concepts of mercy (He is *rahman*), compassion (He is *rahim*) and generosity (He is *ikram*), the first two illustrated by the invocation with which each chapter of the Qur’an, bar one, begins: ‘*Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim*,’ meaning ‘In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate’ (116). The reader is then taken through a discussion on humanity’s relationship and understanding of God through

God, who is identified with the perceivable world, or some part of it, is *immanent* (see Anthony (Lord) Quinton, “Transcendence” in Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley (eds.), *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*. London, 2000, p. 881).

gratitude and worship, before concluding with a discussion on the oneness of God (*tawhid*).

Chapter Eight, 'The Splendour of Fatimid Cairo', provides the reader with detail upon detail about court life, politics, administration, governance and prosperity under the reign of the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Mustansir.

The author discusses the significance of the Fatimid Caliph-Imams "who represented for their followers the earthly summit of all temporal and spiritual matters" (141) as they ruled over both faith and politics. In doing so, they embodied a core tenet of Shi'i Islam. This tenet is exemplified through Caliph-Imam al-Mustansir, who was not only a blood descendant of the Holy Prophet through his daughter Hazrat Fatima and her husband Hazrat 'Ali, but also the legitimate spiritual descendant of 'Ali in his role as rightful interpreter of the Holy Qur'an. Poetry from Nasir's *Divan* praises the Caliph-Imam and reflects this theological concept:

The Prophet's descendant has taken up the
seat of his ancestor
in majestic glory, the tip of his crown
stretching all the way to Saturn.
The Chosen One is the one whom God has
chosen;
what foolishness do you keep babbling on
about?
There, where the Prophet sat by God's
command,
his descendant sits today by the same
command

(*Divan*, 232:70-2;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 141).

Spending time at the Fatimid court, the seat of the Caliph and Imam of the time, had a significant impact on Nasir's faith and life's purpose. His

poetry is suffused with details and metaphors of the concept of Imamah, vividly illustrating the spiritual authority of the Imams, the prominence of the *ahl al-bayt*, and the designation of Hazrat 'Ali as the rightful interpreter of the Qur'an entrusted by God with its *ta'wil* (true interpretation).

A tree of wisdom was our Prophet, and
from him

each member of his family is a tree with
the same fruit.

Today, the worthy sons of 'Ali

have sons, just as the Prophet's daughter
had sons.

The sons of 'Ali are those who are the
Imams of truth,

as famed as their father for their
greatness.

Their father spread justice throughout the
land;

why be surprised that his sons follow
their father's wisdom?

(*Divan*, 31:25-7; 32;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 142).

The virtues Nasir observes about Fatimid Cairo in the *Safarnama* are markers of the peace, good governance and stability the Fatimid Caliph-Imams are credited with engendering throughout their reign. Nasir observes the satisfaction of the military and how this is related to the tax collection system and social calm. He applauds the hierarchical pay scale in the justice system, which affords security to the vulnerable in society and protection from corruption. Respect for artists (paid fully for their craft), and financial support to pay for the maintenance, staff and furnishing of mosques, are further examples of the successful administration Nasir experiences under the Fatimid Caliph-Imams (144-49).

The people are so secure under the [caliph's] reign that no one fears his agents, and they rely on him neither to inflict injustice nor to have designs on anyone's property

(*Safarnama*, 55;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 140).

Nasir lived in Cairo for three years where he studied and trained at court with other Fatimid intellectuals of various religious persuasions including poets, theologians, grammarians, jurists, and astronomers. It was the place where in the 10th -11th centuries, “some of the liveliest theological and intellectual debates of the Muslim world” took place (155). Amidst this intellectual backdrop, Hunsberger takes the reader into the depths of Nasir's theory of creation, examining the characteristics of his concept of Intellect (*'aql*), another important tenet of the Ismaili interpretation of Islam.

Chapter Nine provides details of the places and rituals of *hajj*. Nasir has the privilege of performing three pilgrimages to Mecca in the service of the Fatimid Caliph-Imam; the third journey is the only one he describes in full detail, and marks the beginning of his return back home. Hunsberger expertly brings in the richness of Nasir's observations of the journey from Cairo to the Holy City: the prominent place and fortification of Aswan; the perils of the journey for pilgrims; and the customs stations for ships and crossings to the Arabian Peninsula (180-84). There are exquisite details in Nasir's

“Cairo was the place where in the 10th – 11th centuries, ‘some of the liveliest theological and intellectual debates of the Muslim world’ took place.”

descriptions about the Ka'ba, its orientation and location within the al-Haram Mosque; the size and details of the double door made of teak wood containing inscriptions in gold and silver; a wooden staircase ‘wide enough for ten men abreast;’ and the rich

ornamentation of the cloth covering the Ka'ba, a white⁴ cloth decorated with bands and medallions of embroidery in gold thread (186).

Hunsberger points out that for all the attention to detail that Nasir gives to the place and rituals of *hajj*, the physical act of pilgrimage is not valid without understanding the meaning of the act performed. Nasir “taught the necessity of both the *zahir* and the *batin*, that true faith entails observing both its exoteric and esoteric aspects” (188). Nasir devotes an entire chapter in the *Wajh-i din* to elaborate on the inner meaning of *hajj*. Hunsberger gives excerpts from this chapter to discuss the parallels Nasir draws between the outer, physical acts of the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba, and the inner, spiritual journey of the Ismaili devotee to the recognition of the Imam (189).

“Nasir ‘taught the necessity of both the *zahir* and the *batin*, that true faith entails observing both its exoteric and esoteric aspects.’”

[Just as the] physical act of travelling to reach the Ka'ba requires provisions and beasts of burden[, the] spiritual analogy for provisions is

knowledge and the modes of transportation are found in the personages of the *hujjat* and the *da'i*. The stations along the road to Mecca signify

⁴ The colour of the Ka'ba veil changed over time: during the reign of the Sunni Abbasids it was black (as it is today); under the Fatimids it became their official colour, white (*Ruby of Badakhshan*, 148).

the stations of knowledge which the believer achieves through taking action and acquiring knowledge. Each time a pilgrim leaves one of the stations (signifying his house, his current situation), it corresponds to his rejection of a false faith in order to arrive at the way of truth. For Nasir, this destination is ‘the Imam of the Time, who is the house of the knowledge of God.’ Thus we see again that while the Ka‘ba may serve as the physical goal of all Muslims, the Imam and his knowledge are in fact the spiritual goal of the Ismaili Muslim (190).

Nasir’s Return to Iran

‘The Journey Home’ to Iran is where Chapter Ten begins. Nasir and his brother have experienced a radical shift in fortune, from the wealth of the Fatimid court to being almost destitute within a few months of leaving Mecca. They encounter long delays waiting for local Arab tribesmen to give them safe passage through the next legs of their journey. On the way north, they have an extended stay in Basra, a major centre of Shi‘i piety and learning where Nasir visits all 13 shrines in the city dedicated to Imam ‘Ali.

For Nasir, the physical changes and scenery that he encounters on the journey home are paralleled with an equally rigorous spiritual journey. It is at this point that Hunsberger introduces a discussion of Nasir’s philosophy of the Soul, found in philosophical works like his *Shish fasl*.

Nasir Khusraw holds that within each human being is an individual soul (*nafs-i juz‘i*) which directs the person’s life. For Nasir, it is this soul – not the intellect – which decides to seek knowledge, which directs both the person’s intellect and senses and which chooses between good and evil (212).

This concept is also illustrated within Nasir’s poetry, where the soul is the driving force behind human action, and one’s intellect provides the counsel:

Your soul is king of your body,
Your mind the scribe, your intellect the vizier

(*Divan*, 91:15;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 214).

This is a beautiful metaphor illustrating that one’s intellect provides the mechanism for the individual soul to find its way and navigate between the intelligible and material worlds, to enable it to attain perfection (the soul being imperfect by being separated from God). This example also illustrates Nasir’s conviction (as described in Chapter Five above) that we should strive to make the inner change manifest in our external life.

Chapter Eleven, ‘The World Turns Dark’, marks the third phase of Nasir Khusraw’s life, when he returns home to Khurasan as chief *da‘i* for the Ismailis in the region, with “the imperative to share knowledge with those without such knowledge” (221). This impetus and responsibility to share knowledge is a reflection of the pyramidal structure of the Fatimid Ismaili *da‘wa*, where teachings are transmitted in descending order from the higher ranks (Prophet and Imam) to lower ranks (*da‘i*⁵, *hujjat*⁶, preachers, etc.).

⁵ Literally a ‘summoner,’ a term for a missionary amongst various Muslim communities, one who ‘summons’ or invites to Islam. Amongst Shi‘a Muslims, it was the invitation to adopt the cause of the *Imamat*. Used as a term among the Ismailis before and during the Fatimid and Alamut periods of Ismaili history (see ‘*da‘i*’ in the glossary at www.iis.ac.uk).

Hunsberger highlights the important historical consequence of Nasir Khusraw's teaching and preaching at this time; it prompted the conversion of many people to the Ismaili interpretation of Islam, the descendants of many of whom are from present-day Tajikistan, northern Afghanistan and Pakistan⁷ and who "proudly declare that their ancestors or their entire region was converted by Nasir Khusraw" (222). His preaching activities put him at risk with the ruling Sunni Abbasid Caliphate based in nearby Baghdad so that he was forced to flee his home and find refuge, living the rest of his years in the Pamir Mountains of Badakhshan in the district of Yumgan.

Pass by, sweet breeze of Khurasan
to one imprisoned deep in the valley
of Yumgan,
Who sits huddled in comfortless tight
straits,
robbed of all wealth, all goods, all
hope

(*Divan*, 208:1-2;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 9).

Hunsberger describes the challenges and loss this extraordinary philosopher-poet experiences at the times when he becomes embittered

⁶ A Qur'anic term meaning both 'proof' and 'presentation of proof.' In Shi'i Islam it designates Prophets and Imams as 'proofs' of God's presence on earth. In the Ismaili *da'wa* of the pre-Fatimid and Fatimid periods, it was also applied to senior *da'is*, and in the Alamut period of Ismaili history it came to be applied to those representing the Imam (see '*hujjat*' in the glossary at www.iis.ac.uk).

⁷ Members of these communities have also settled in many parts of the world, including Europe, Canada and the USA.

and resentful with his forced exile and loss of youth. She also demonstrates how "his artistic talent turns these emotions into exquisite poetic images":

“Hunsberger describes the challenges and loss this extraordinary philosopher-poet experiences at the times when he becomes embittered and resentful with his forced exile and loss of youth.”

The scorpion of exile
has stung my heart so,
that you would say
heaven invented
suffering just for me
(*Divan*, 6:1;
Ruby of Badakhshan,
228).

In this twelfth and final chapter, 'Glory Regained', we see that despite the disheartening spirit in which Nasir sometimes writes, he maintains and demonstrates confidence and absolute surety in the divine purpose: "just as the mighty wheel of heaven full of planets and stars must follow certain rules, then so too must human beings" (241). Hunsberger describes four elements or structures which Nasir observes to have had an impact on his faith while in exile, structures that enable Nasir to "gain his faith in God, in the Prophet Muhammad and in his descendants, the Ismaili Imams, and with this faith, [he] finds a way of living wisely in the world" (242).

The first element is the natural order of things, understanding the world as a duality of *zahir* and *batin*, in which they co-exist, neither of which can be done away with: "the physical is to be used in the service of the spiritual"⁸ (243). The second element is looking at all

⁸ Nasir speaks about clues in the physical world that guide one's search and journey (*Ruby of Badakhshan*, 243). These are reminiscent of verses from the Qur'an (30:20-25) which speak about the signs Allah has given humanity: "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. Lo! Herein indeed are portents for men of knowledge" (30:22).

humanity with optimism and confidence that the inner core is ultimately good; for Nasir it is the spiritual side of human beings that really counts (245). This idea is repeatedly found in Nasir's poetry with metaphors and allusions to 'the jewel within.'

The world is a deep ocean, its water is time;
Your body is like a shell, your soul the pearl.
If you wish to have the value of a pearl,
Raise up the pearl of your soul by learning
(*Divan*, 145:47-48;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 245).

The third element that Nasir observes is the certitude that his faith is true: that there is more to understand than is readily apparent in the outward forms of nature and religions, and that this hidden knowledge was given to the Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali (248). Consolation in his achievements in the midst of his exile is the fourth element which Nasir observes as he understands them to be a fulfillment of his life purpose: through his preaching and writing he "sets out to challenge himself and others to search for the truth and to reject the easy way out" (250). The following line of poetry by Nasir illustrates this idea well, indicating that the individual is responsible to take action for his or her own search, although God has provided all else that is needed:

Even though God makes the mother, the breast and the milk,
The baby still has to suckle the milk by himself

(*Divan*, 25:22; *Ruby of Badakhshan*, p. 251).

With this idea in mind, the final chapter brings us full circle to the address by His Highness the Aga Khan quoted at the start of the Reading Guide: The impetus and will is upon the individual, to use the 'candle of wisdom' to light their path and seek out the purpose of their existence.

Those who choose to abstain and remain comfortable or oblivious to the signs around them will not find the reward or the fruit that nourishes the soul, and will be destined to be 'trees without fruit'.

Conclusion

And I reflected that
until I changed all my ways
I would never find happiness
(*Safarnama*, 2;
Ruby of Badakhshan, 49).

Hunsberger brings the character and the very spirit of Nasir Khusraw alive. Her book delivers all it promises in the title: 'A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher.' Her narrative style enables the reader to visualize the movement of all that Nasir sees and experiences, as well as to understand the wonder of the places he visits, with all its historical and cultural richness.

Throughout the book we see the development and transformation of this extraordinary individual who not only 'changed his ways,' but the way communities over a millennium would understand and express their faith. Nasir encouraged believers to express their beliefs in all aspects of everyday life.

Whether in private acts, personal prayer, or public displays of faith such as the pilgrimage, Nasir maintains, the believer must look deep within his or her soul to fathom the esoteric meanings of such acts
(*Ruby of Badakhshan*, 223).

The communities from the present-day areas of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, China and Pakistan sustain a rich cultural and musical tradition⁹, suffused with poetry, music and dance that are a testament of Nasir's teachings. His teachings focused on the understanding of the relationship between the physical world and the spiritual world, the message of God brought by the Prophet Muhammad and the inner meanings of this message conveyed by the Imam of the Time (223).

The works of Nasir Khusraw also represent a significant contribution to Muslim literature in Persian, and to the Persian language in particular. During the time of Nasir Khusraw, Arabic was the predominant medium of intellectual and philosophical discourse, and his writings pioneered Persian for philosophical prose, ensuring its future as a vibrant and vital language for the people of Central Asia and Iran.

Readers of *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* will find an engaging study of Islam during its golden period: the flourishing

⁹ Contemporary efforts like the *Expression of the Pamirs* and the Aga Khan Music Initiative in Central Asia (see www.akdn.org), as well as related exhibitions and musical performances that make the rich cultural and artistic heritage of this region accessible to a wider audience, provide an important opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the inspiration that underpins and sustains the faith of the communities from the Pamir Mountains.

environment of the Fatimid Caliph-Imams, their philosophies, doctrines and administration. Hunsberger's discussion and investigation into Nasir's poetry and philosophy also provide an important backdrop to a deeper understanding of Ismaili history and faith. This book is an ideal introduction for any individual interested in a comprehensive study of Nasir Khusraw's work and for investigating the Fatimid epoch of Ismaili history.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Music and Poetry from the Pamir Mountains, multi-media electronic web gallery at www.iis.ac.uk

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