

Firoozeh Papan-Matin

**‘AYN AL-QUDĀT AL-HAMADHĀNĪ’S PERSECUTION
IN BAGHDAD OR THE EXILE OF THE SOUL**

The exilic state of the soul as a stranger in the material realm of existence is a major discussion in the mystical literature of medieval Iran. This literature argues that the soul remembers its original home in close vicinity to God and yearns to return there. Its longings as an exile is a constant allusion to this homeland. The wayfarers who are sentient of this longing strive to understand their own souls in order to better understand the qualities of the exile, the homeland, and the return journey. This has determined the focus in the writing of the poets and authors of mystical literature through metaphorical, allegorical, or autobiographical accounts of the separation of the soul from its place of origin, its imprisonment in the confines of the body, and the qualities of the spiritual journey. These writers depicted the soul as a migrant bird who could neither settle in its niche nor escape its innate desire for flight toward the next destination. Moreover, these authors described and justified their own feelings of alienation and their inability to contend with the world around them in terms comparable to the condition of the soul. The prominent writers in this genre include Sanā’ī Ghaznawī (d. A.D. 1131) the author of *Sayr al-‘Ibād ilā al-Ma‘ād* (The Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return), Aḥmad Ghazzālī (d. A.D. 1126) the author of *Risālat al-Ṭuyūr* (The Treatise of the Birds), Farīd al-Dīn Aṭṭār (d. A.D. 1220) the author of *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* (The Conference of Birds), and the celebrated Rūmī (d. A.D. 1273) the author of the *Masnawī* (Couplets). Aṭṭār’s allegorical tale of the journey of a flock of birds in search of the fabulous bird *simurgh* (griffin) comes to an end with the birds’ realization that their destination and goal were never far from them, but rather within their own hearts. The seeking and the traversed distance offer this invaluable knowledge which the wayfarers reach on their own as a consequence of venturing on the journey. Rūmī’s famous *Nay Nāmih* (Tale of the Reed)—the opening thirty-five lines of the great Persian mystical masterpiece, the *Masnawī*—is a metaphorical narrative about the separation of the lover, personified as the reed, from the homeland, the reed-bed, where it had belonged with the divine beloved. Another important work in this category is the treatise *Qiṣṣat al-Ghurba al-Gharbīya* (The Tale of Occidental Exile), a combination of autobiography and allegory by Shihāb al-Dīn al-

Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (d. A.D. 1191). The works of these accomplished authors were preceded by the contributions of the twelfth-century mystic scholar Aḥmad Ghazzālī whose *Treatise of the Birds* served as the template for Aṭṭār and others. Ghazzālī's disciple 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī (A.D. 1096/98–1131), the subject of the present study, described his famous defense treatises, *Shakwā al-Gharīb 'an al-Awṭān ilā 'Ulamā' al-Buldān* (The Complaint of a Stranger Exiled from Home to the Scholars of the Lands), composed while he was held in prison in Baghdad, to be an example of this genre and an opportunity to contemplate the separation of the soul from its homeland. The following study argues that the actual circumstances of 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's incarceration produced his defense as a legal appeal to the authorities in charge of his release from the Tikrīt prison in Baghdad. These circumstances also served as the inspiration for his brooding on the spiritual and metaphorical qualities of the exile of the soul in the material realm of existence. This dual approach motivates the writing for the defense treatise.

Abū al-Ma'ālī 'Abdallāh ibn Abī Bakr Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Miyānjī, known as 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī was born in Hamadhān, a city in northwest Iran, in A.D. 1096 or 1098, to an established family of *shāfi'ī* jurists and was executed in the same town in 1131. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt is renowned for his significant contributions to the mystical heritage of Iran. He was a brilliant scholar and an accomplished author who addressed subjects ranging from mysticism to mathematics, natural sciences, grammar and semantics, Arabic literature, commentary on the *Qur'ān*, and the nature of prophecy. The most important work of this prolific author is the *Tamhīdāt* (The Introductions), which captures his visionary perceptions of the unseen worlds and the gnosis that they convey. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's famous defense treatise *Shakwā al-Gharīb 'an al-Awṭān ilā 'Ulamā' al-Buldān* (The Complaint of a Stranger Exiled from Home to the Scholars of the Lands), stands out as a document that the author was inspired to write as a metaphorical reference on the exilic state of the soul. *Shakwā al-Gharīb* is not an allegory but an intriguing defense narrative that propels the plot forward with metaphors and intimations. It is a court document that 'Ayn al-Quḍāt issued to the judges in charge of his case with the intention of winning their support for his freedom. *Shakwā al-Gharīb* is an extremely well-written work that describes the author's feelings of desolation, loneliness and alienation (*ghurba*) in prison, away from his homeland. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt adorns his prose with selections from his own poetry and the poetry of famous Arab poets whose reflections on separation and captivity give him solace. The initial lines of the defense are as follows:

This is a flash issued to the outstanding scholars and renowned servants—may God perpetuate their shadows outstretched over the dwellers in the farthest horizons, and may all the regions of the earth never cease to be most brilliantly illuminated by their lights—by one in exile from his motherland,

and afflicted by the trials and tribulations of time. His eyelids are ever beset by sleeplessness, and trepidation is the constant companion of his pillow, with prolonged weeping, and sighs and lamentations; anxiety grips the whole of his heart; his soul entire is inflamed with grief, whose repeated onsets his heart’s core can no longer endure. His heart, consumed by the fire of separation, burns with yearning for his friends and brothers; the burning pangs of love blaze in his bowels, and the marks thereof appear ever more clearly with the passing days. His only companions are the stars, to which he whispers with flooding tears:

What, prison bars and iron chains,
And yearning’s flames, and exile pains,
And sundering far from those I love?
What mighty anguish these must prove!¹

This overture to the text highlights the two narratives that inform ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s argument: his appeal to the men in charge of his case by introducing and identifying himself as an exile who is suffering the intolerable pain of separation from his homeland. This is how he beseeches his captors for freedom from the Baghdad prison and for return to the city of his birth, Hamadhān. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was granted release and allowed to return home. Afterwards, some of his associates criticized him for writing the defense and pleading his case with his captors. In a personal letter (Letter 98) written to one of his disenchanting critics whose identity remains unknown, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt categorized the defense as a metaphor for the trials that the soul suffers in its longing for the spiritual homeland.² The following study argues that when ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt described his defense treatise as a work that belonged in the genre of exile of the soul, he elaborated on the interpretation of the genre as a medium that could include the details of the author’s persecution and imprisonment at the hands of his rivals and adversaries. Therefore, he rhetorically treated the factual events of his captivity as mere allusions to the deeper reality of the separation that the soul endures. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was neither the first nor the only author whose incarceration inspired him to write about the trials and tribulations of the soul. The outstanding distinction in his case is that the rhetorical quality of his writing and the material and style of the defense facilitate his release from prison. They, nevertheless, do not prevent his eventual execution.

¹ ‘*Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī*. A Sufi Martyr: The Apology of ‘Ain al-Qudat al-Hamadani. Translated by A.J. Arberry. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969. P. 21; henceforth cited as *Arberry*. A Sufi Martyr.

² ‘*Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī*. Nāmihhā-ye ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Edited by ‘Afīf ‘Usayrān and ‘Alīnaqī Munzavī. Tehran: Manūchehī, 1983. “Letter 98.” P. 355–363; henceforth cited as “Letter 98.” English translations of the original texts are mine unless indicated otherwise.

'Ayn al-Quḍāt does not identify his adversaries but in the *Shakwā al-Gharīb* indicates that his enemies are motivated by envy toward him. He outlines the charges against him as follows: (1) his views on God as the all-encompassing Being with limited knowledge of the particulars, (2) his views on prophecy as a stage past the stage of reason and the stage of sainthood, and (3) his views on the role of the spiritual leader (*imām*) in the life of the believer. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt argues that his adversaries have distorted his views and further elaborates his position on these topics by referring to the sayings of the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and 'Alī, as well as prominent scholars of theology and mysticism. He calls attention to the intended meaning of certain terminology that the mystics use in their writings, and asks the reader to pay heed to the specialized use of these technical terms. He explains that scholars, in all branches of knowledge, have communicated their ideas to each other by using technical vocabulary that is specific to their field. Terms such as subsisting (*baqā'*), annihilation (*fanā'*), contraction (*qabḍ*), expansion (*bast*), etc., convey an etymology that belongs to an intellectual history going back to the time of the Prophet.³ 'Ayn al-Quḍāt explains this specialized discourse is further defined by the specific context of a given argument. He explains that his enemies have taken some of his ideas out of context in order to produce a case against him.⁴ 'Ayn al-Quḍāt argues his case, communicates his views on the knowledge of the unseen and the nature of prophethood, dissociates himself from the Ismā'īlīs, and makes an appeal for freedom from prison in Baghdad. The arrangement and orchestration of these arguments produce the complex and rhetorical text of the *Shakwā al-Gharīb*, which can be read on different levels as an apologia and a metaphor for one's longing for the homeland.

'Ayn al-Quḍāt challenged his enemies and insisted on his demand for freedom despite the fact that in his mystical treatises he reiterated his spiritual resolve to die. In fact, he often invoked death for himself and is said to have enthusiastically described the details of his own execution in the following verses:⁵

We ask God for death and martyrdom
 And that we want by three worthless things.
 If the friend does what we want
 We want fire, oil, and straw.

³ 'Ayn al-Quḍāt. *Shakwā al-Gharīb* 'an al-Awṭān ilā 'Ulamā' al-Buldān. In *Muṣṣanaḑāt*, edited by 'Afif 'Usayrān. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehrān, 1962. P. 44–50; henceforth cited as *Shakwā al-Gharīb*.

⁴ *Ibid.* P. 51. Cf. *Arberry*. A Sufi Martyr. P. 53:

When the intelligent and impartial person hears such expressions, he ought to refer for their meaning to the one using them, saying, "What did you mean by these words?" To pass judgement against the speaker, before seeking from him an explanation of what was intended by these expressions, and to condemn him as an atheist and a heretic, is truly a shot in the dark.

⁵ *Rīḑā Qulī Khān Hidāyat*. Tadhkarih-yi Riyāḑ al-'Ārifīn. Eds. Mullāh 'Abd al-Ḥussayn and Maḥmūd Khawnsārī. Tehran: Wiṣāl, n.d. P. 109; henceforth cited as *Hidāyat*. Riyāḑ al-'Ārifīn.

According to the author of *Tadhkarih-yi Riyāḍ al-‘Ārifīn*, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was killed in a most horrific manner and his execution was turned into a spectacle for everyone to remember.⁶

The envious were not satisfied with sending our philosopher far away from his homeland, Hamadhān, and putting him in the Baghdād prison, but took him back to Hamadhān and skinned him [alive] and crucified him in the courtyard of the school where he used to teach. Then, they took him down on the ground and wrapped him in a straw-mat, poured oil on him, and set him on fire.⁷

His gruesome execution was carried out in the presence of Sultan Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad ibn Malikshāh (r. A.D. 1118–1131),⁸ who at the time was twenty-five years old.⁹

The surviving documents fail to give us definitive answers as to the motivation for his violent death. In his defense treatise, *Shakwā al-Gharīb*, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt talks about the charge of heresy against him. However, the account is self-censored and avoids referring to some of his writings, including his most important treatise, the *Tamhīdāt*. He was clearly trying to withhold information on those aspects of his life that would further complicate his case. In addition to the defense, the other source that speaks about his trial and untimely end is ‘Imād al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid al-Iṣfahānī al-Kātib (519–97/1125–1201), the acclaimed Saljūq historian of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s era. ‘Imād al-Dīn, best known as the historian of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s Levant conquests and the author of *Barq al-Shāmī*, had firsthand knowledge of court intrigues and the end of many noble men who fell prey to them. His famous text, *Kharīdat al-Qaṣr wa Jarīdat al-‘Aṣr fī Dhikr Fuḍalā’ Ahl Fārs*, contains the earliest account of the execution of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. In 623/1226, al-Faṭḥ ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Bandārī al-Iṣfahānī (586–643/1190–1246) provides an abridged version of ‘Imād al-Dīn’s other book, *Nuṣrat al-Fatra wa ‘Uṣrat al-Fiṭra fī Akhbār al-Wūzara’ al-Saljūqīya*.¹⁰ His rendition is called *Ta’rīkh Dawlat Āl Saljūq*. This text also provides valuable information on the personalities and the circumstances that involved ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. Both medieval and modern scholars who have written

⁶ Ibid. P. 108–109.

⁷ ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī. “Zubdat al-Ḥaqā’iq” // Muṣannafāt-i ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī. Ed. ‘Afif ‘Usayrān. Tehran: Tehran University Press 1962. P. 1. Cf. *Hidāyat*. Riyāḍ al-‘Ārifīn. P. 108–109.

⁸ Maḥmūd, the son of Malik Shāh Saljūq, became the king in 511 A.H. and died of an illness on the way from Baghdād to Iran in 525 A.H. He was twenty eight years old.

⁹ *Hidāyat*. Riyāḍ al-‘Ārifīn. P. 108–109. Cf. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī. *Shakwa-l-Gharīb ‘ani l-‘awṭān ‘ila ‘Ulamā’-l-Buldān*. Edited and translated by Mohammed ben Abd el-Jalil // *Journal Asiatique*. Janvier-Mars 1930. P. 18.

¹⁰ This text is ‘Imād al-Dīn’s Arabic rendition of *Nafīhat al-Maṣdūr*. Nūshīrwān ibn Khālid al-Kāshānī (d. A.H. 532/A.D. 1138), the vizier to the Saljūq rulers Maḥmūd and Mas‘ūd, wrote this now lost text in Persian.

about ʿAyn al-Quḍāt’s death have relied on ʿImād al-Dīn’s history and ʿAyn al-Quḍāt’s *Shakwā al-Gharīb*. Although a convincing explanation for his execution cannot be definitively ascertained, a careful analysis of the account by ʿImād al-Dīn and ʿAyn al-Quḍāt offer insight on some of the questions that surround his death.

These sources have considered his execution either in a political framework, in his association with the members of the court nobility who were no longer in the position of power, or in the context of his mystical views that were branded as heretical. In the *Shakwā al-Gharīb*, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt explains that his adversaries, who are envious of him, have distorted his words in order to convict him. He justifies his views in the context of the scholarship he has produced. ʿImād al-Dīn’s historiography, on the other hand, points to the court intrigues and liaisons that led to the arrest and execution of many individuals, including ʿAyn al-Quḍāt and the author’s own relatives. His account is focused on the princes, viziers and other influential personalities who characterized that epoch. This discussion involved his own uncle, Abū Naṣr Aḥmad ibn Ḥāmid Nafīs ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAlī ibn Maḥmūd ibn Hibat Allāh ibn Ālūh, known as ʿAzīz al-Dīn (472–527/1080–1133), and his enemy, Sultan Maḥmūd’s vizier, Qavām al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn ʿAlī Abī al-Qāsim al-Dargazīnī. According to ʿImād al-Dīn, al-Dargazīnī was the one responsible for sending both ʿAyn al-Quḍāt and ʿAzīz al-Dīn to the gallows. Consider ʿImād al-Dīn’s discussion on ʿAyn al-Quḍāt:¹¹

Abūʿl-Maʿālī ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī Bakr Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī originally from Miyānjī, residing in Hamadhān, was the successful, close companion of my martyred uncle ʿAzīz al-Dīn, may God bless his soul. When misfortune overtook my uncle and he went into hiding, the vizier al-Dargazīnī took charge of ʿAyn al-Quḍāt. He helped fate achieve its aims, and envy got the best of him. Indeed he [ʿAyn al-Quḍāt] was among the most noble of the scholars and one who was referred to as an example of excellence and commitment [to scholarship]. After al-Ghazzālī no one ever shone like him in his excellence. He produced writings in the Arabic language in a style all his own: writings that gave meaning to the Truth. In his interpretations he followed the way of the people of the path [mystics], and he acquired the ability to explain it [meaning of the truth] in the language of mysticism. He spread the scent of his perfume in knowledge, and hearts absorbed the stream of his excellence. His fame spread in both difficult and easy times, and going to him was like a pilgrimage, and visiting him was an opportunity that was taken as an auspicious blessing.

¹¹ *ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī*. *Kharīdat al-Qaṣr wa Jarīdat al-ʿAṣr fī Dhikr Fuḍalāʾ Ahl Iṣfahān, Khurāsān wa Harāt, Fārs*. 3 vols. Edited by ʿAdnān Muḥammad Āl-i Ṭuʿma. Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr al-Tarāth al-Makhtūṭ, 1999. Vol. 3. P. 137–138.

He was among the most noble friends of God; indeed, he reached the highest state of spiritual perfection and his miracles flared like the illumination of the comets. The pseudo-scholars envied him and misinterpreted subjects mentioned in his writings that he had not expanded on. They took them out of context and interpreted them at face value; they did not ask him for their meaning. The barbarian vizier arrested ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and rushed to prosecute him. He was harsh in his judgement and carried ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in chains to Baghdād in order to find a way to make the shedding of his blood permissible and to punish him for his crime. And when the truth prevailed [he could not prove that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was guilty], treachery overtook al-Dargazīnī’s pride. Then he returned him to Hamadhān; and he and his supporters treated him like the Jews in the case of Jesus when they dressed him in the clothes of Moses, but God saved His prophet from the unbelievers. “And they did not kill him or crucify him but it appeared that way.”¹² And He put His friend [friend of God] to trial by means of him. Before his execution, he [‘Ayn al-Quḍāt] paused, reminded them of God, and recited the words of God to them. This was the evening of the 17th of the *Jumādā al-Ākhir* in the year 525. Then he walked toward the gallows, he embraced them and read [this verse]: “And soon will the unjust assailants know what vicissitudes their affairs will take!”¹³

‘Imād al-Dīn explains that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was executed after the author’s uncle lost his status at the court. He does not explain whether ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was sent to the gallows because he no longer had a powerful protector who would defend him against the charge of heresy that was brought against him by his own adversaries, or because the enemies of ‘Azīz al-Dīn were trying to give him a warning by killing his friend in a violent manner. The works that evaluate this period do not provide a definitive answer to these questions.

‘Azīz al-Dīn was arrested in the same year (525/1131) soon after ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s death and was executed two years later. The reason why Sultan Maḥmūd turned against his once favorite advisor, ‘Azīz al-Dīn, is as perplexing as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s execution. ‘Imād al-Dīn sees Maḥmūd’s vizier, al-Dargazīnī, as the instigator of these executions.¹⁴ Al-Dargazīnī is an enemy of ‘Azīz al-Dīn, and by implication, of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and the cause of their executions. ‘Imād al-Dīn explains that Maḥmūd became suspicious of ‘Azīz al-Dīn when he had a finan-

¹² The Meaning of the Holy Qur’ān. Translated by ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī. Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989. Vol. 4. P. 157. English translations of the Qur’ānic verses are from this source unless indicated otherwise; henceforth cited as *Qur’ān*.

¹³ Ibid. Vol. 26. P. 227.

¹⁴ ‘Imād al-Dīn’s narrative is the oldest historical account on the circumstances of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s execution, however, his views could be prejudiced by his personal vendettas against al-Dargazīnī.

cial dispute with Sultan Sanjar (d. 552/1131), his own uncle and father-in-law.¹⁵ Maḥmūd's dispute with Sanjar was over the dowry of Sanjar's daughters, Mahmalak Khātūn and Sitī Khātūn, who were both married to Maḥmūd but who had already passed away. Al-Rāwandī describes the dowry of Mahmalak Khātūn as a treasure that was carried on the back of elephants from Khurāsān to Maḥmūd in Iraq.¹⁶ After the death of Mahmalak Khātūn, Sanjar wedded his other daughter, Sitī Khātūn, to his young nephew. When she also passed away, Sanjar requested the return of their gold and jewelry. Maḥmūd did not want to return the jewelry. Al-Dargazīnī, who was looking for an opportunity to remove 'Azīz al-Dīn from the court, told Maḥmūd it was best to imprison 'Azīz al-Dīn, who knew about the jewelry and would tell Sanjar's delegate about it. Maḥmūd agreed and 'Azīz al-Dīn was sent to prison in Tikrīt. Sanjar's delegate arrived and, contrary to their expectations, did not ask for 'Azīz al-Dīn's testimony on this matter. In the meantime, 'Azīz al-Dīn remained in prison in Tikrīt. Maḥmūd wrote to him and promised that he was going to release him from prison, but Maḥmūd became ill and died (525/1131) before he could fulfill his promise. Eventually, al-Dargazīnī, who had obtained a few signed blank decrees from Sanjar, carried out the execution of 'Azīz al-Dīn at Tikrīt in 527/1133. The new ruler, Ṭuḡhrul, who was not interested in the powerful agents of the former ruler, and was already suspicious of al-Dargazīnī's diplomatic relationship with the Shī'is, passed the death sentence on al-Dargazīnī. He was executed only forty days after 'Azīz al-Dīn.¹⁷ Considering the rivalry among the Saljūq princes and the shifting fronts they established in seeking power, it is normal that they were suspicious of everyone around them.¹⁸ For instance, 'Imād al-Dīn's villain, al-Dargazīnī, was one of their loyal servants who was engaged with the Shī'is in order to secure his Saljūq patrons a superior position apropos the Caliph. But the new ruler Ṭuḡhrul sent him to the gallows on suspicion of collaborating with the dissident Shī'is.

In the final analysis, 'Imād al-Dīn's history fails to provide a convincing explanation for 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's execution and his relationship with the purges

¹⁵ *'Imād al-Dīn*. Ta'rīkh Dawlat Āl Saljūq, 2nd ed. Edited by al-Bandārī. Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1978. P. 142–143.

¹⁶ *Al-Rāwandī*. Rāḥat al-Ṣudūr wa Āyat al-Surūr dar Ta'rīkh Āl Saljūq. Edited by Muḥammad Iqbāl. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1985. P. 305.

¹⁷ *'Imād al-Dīn*. Kharīdat al-Qaṣr. Vol. 1. P. 44.

¹⁸ A number of sources have discussed extensively the political milieu of Saljūq rule, its significant individuals, their relationship with each other and with the Caliph. The political complexities of the Saljūq rule involve two main factors (1) the dispute among Sanjar and his nephews over sovereignty and (2) their desire to break away from the authority of the Caliph in Baghdād. These factors determine their overall political attitude. See: *'Imād al-Dīn*. Ta'rīkh Dawlat Āl Saljūq, and Kharīdat al-Qaṣr, vols. 1–4. *Al-Rāwandī*. Rāḥat al-Ṣudūr wa Āyat al-Surūr dar Ta'rīkh Āl Saljūq; The Cambridge History of Iran. Vols. 5–6. Edited by R.N. Frye and J.A. Boyle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

that took place between 525/1131 and 527/1133. The *Shakwā al-Gharīb* is composed against this background.

In a personal letter, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that this treatise bears symbolic meanings, since his imprisonment in Baghdad, where he was in captivity away from his homeland Hamadhān, is the major metaphor for the exile of the soul. Notwithstanding his claim, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is addressing the defense to specific readers who are in charge of his case. In fact, the text adopts a discursive narrative structure which is autobiographical and explicates the author’s scholarship as justification for his views. The rhetorical nature of the defense convinces ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt to be selective about presenting and withholding evidence in order to advance his arguments strategically and tactfully. For instance, he does not mention some of his major writings in order to divert the attention from additional sources of objection against him. Consequently, when his personal letter elaborates the metaphorical nature of his defense, he must be specifically recalling the beginning sections of the *Shakwā al-Gharīb* where he laments his imprisonment in Baghdad and beseeches his captors for release. It is logical that the personal tone of the defense in the beginning is extended into a biographical discussion concerning the author’s work on mysticism as a scholarly discipline. In this manner, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt combines his appeal for freedom with his discussion of his life achievements and his sense of alienation from this world. These subjects, juxtaposed with each other, constitute the plot of the *Shakwā al-Gharīb*.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt calls attention to his place of origin and recalls Hamadhān as a place of childhood memories:

That land where amulets were hung
About my neck, when I was young,
And I was suckled at the breast.

His home, the place of love and security, and his early life is juxtaposed with prison where he finds himself as a mature man contending with the threat of death hovering over his life. Separation and the dangers that it entails are complicated with respect to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s resolve to die, which he often reiterates in his mystical writings. In fact, his keen desire for death as a venue for one’s apperception of the unseen, is a subject that he discusses abundantly. Therefore, when he composed the defense it aroused strong reactions from some of his associates who were unable to excuse or justify his pleas to his captors, which appeared to contradict his mystical determination to embrace death. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt responded to these objections by explaining that the exile and the captivity that the *Shakwā al-Gharīb* referred to are a metaphoric intimation of the state of the soul as a stranger in the material realm of existence. He turned to the familiar topoi of homeland and exile that appear in mystical literature in order to explain his use of prison as an occasion to contemplate the existential predicaments of man.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that, in the *Shakwā al-Gharīb*, the mountains and the steppes of Hamadhān—*Alwand* and *Mawashān*—are metaphors for the spiritual

plains where harm and treachery have never set foot. A man who has seen these sites and has partaken of their delights knows that he is a prisoner in the world of matter, which seems like a dungeon or a dark cave that he must escape. In contrast to the dismal pit that we call life, the spiritual quality of the place that he calls home redeems the soul. ʿAyn al-Qudāt imagines that these climes can make anyone, even a man’s foes, rejoice so greatly that hostility is taken out of their minds.

Methinks I see the Iraqi caravan arriving at Hamadhan and setting down their loads on the slopes of Mawashan. The heights and valleys there are verdant green, bedecked by spring in raiment which all other lands would envy. Her flowers waft abroad as it were the scent of musk, her rivers flow with crystal-limpid water. The travelers alight amid elegant gardens, and betake themselves to the shade of leafy trees. They begin to chant over and over again this verse, and they are cooing like doves and warbling like nightingales:

O Hamadhan, may copious rain
Water abundantly thy plain,
Nor may fresh showers ever fail,
O Mawashan, thy fertile vale.¹⁹

The Iraqi caravan, by implication, takes ʿAyn al-Qudāt’s current jailers from Baghdad to Hamadhān. Through this journey they become strangers in a new place where they discover the magical qualities of a land that ʿAyn al-Qudāt yearns for. The journey to Hamadhān makes them understand the true meaning of prison and freedom. They realize that in Baghdad they were prisoners without knowing it themselves. Arriving at Hamadhān and the spiritual plain that it represents, these travelers jump for joy and astonishment. Their reaction to this locale brings to light their ignorance thus far about the possibility of such happiness. Upon reaching these plains, the Iraqis celebrate their newly found resting station in Hamadhān: a new land to them, but home to ʿAyn al-Qudāt. The caravan feasts on the beauty of Hamadhān and its paradisiac delights. In fact, the exhilaration that these travelers experience so transforms them that their voices echo the sound of the doves and the nightingales in the gardens of paradise. These travelers are free like the birds who praise beautiful gardens in their songs of delight. They are free like the birds in Ghazzālī’s *Treatise of the Birds* who venture their arduous journey in order to arrive at their destination where the mythical bird *sīmurgh* (griffin) is to be met.

In response to a letter from his disapproving friend, ʿAyn al-Qudāt cites the *Qurʾān* in order to make clearer the issue of the homeland and its metaphorical treatment in the *Shakwā al-Gharīb*.

¹⁹ Shakwā al-Gharīb. P. 28. Cf. *Arberry*. A Sufi Martyr. P. 26.

If Moses, peace be upon him, yearned for mount Sinai, his yearning was not for dirt and pebbles. And if in the eternal *Qur’ān* he takes a vow on these two mountains, the Fig and the Olive (*al-tīn wa al-zaytūn*),²⁰ that vow is not on the earth and stones. Alas, no one except lovers can understand the mysteries of love.²¹

The Qur’ānic verse, *al-tīn*, points to four sacred symbols: the fig, the olive, mount Sinai, and Mecca. (1) The fig represents man who, like the fruit, can be full of delight and sweetness or engrossed with corruption. (2) The olive refers to the Mount of Olives, where the Gospel unfolds. (3) Sinai is the locus for the message of Moses. (4) This city of security, which the Prophet Muḥammad refers to, is Mecca or the site of the revelation. These locations signify the prophetic mission and its validity. They allude to elements that belong to this world and this humanity but extend beyond them and connect with other realms of reality. The fig is a parable for the nature of man. The mountains and the plains stand for places where God has addressed humanity. The Prophet takes a vow on this history in order to attest to the noble creation of man who at the same time is destined to be ensnared by matter and thus be the “lowest of the low.”

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt reiterates that his allusions to Hamadhān express mystical meanings. He wishes to return to his homeland because, on the soul level, he does not belong to the corporeal world and desires to return to his eternal home. He also wishes to be released from the Baghdad prison and go back to Hamadhān, where as a child he was suckled and adored by those who love him. Hamadhān is a place like Mecca, the Mount of Olives, and Sinai, where ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, another inspired man, hears the call of God and follows the path of mysticism. Pondering his present predicament, he remembers his separation from the homeland and from his home. He suffers the pain of imprisonment in a strange land that reminds him of his double exile as a man and as a spirit.²²

You ask: What is this longing for Hamadhān? I am attached to Hamadhān. Should I say I am not?

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s nostalgia for Hamadhān reflects both the condition of his soul and his desire for return to his home and abode in the city of his birth. Thus, he invites the reader to appreciate the state of the wayfarer who is cast away into this world, and to perceive the true meaning of *Alwand* and *Mawashān* as celestial plains. The stranger (*al-gharīb*) is one who is aware of his state of exile: a condition that he becomes aware of through mystical practice and visionary perception of the unseen. In his characteristically astute style of writing, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s letter of response to his critic undermines the facts of the imprisonment of this exceptional scholar in the dungeons of Baghdad and instead underscores

²⁰ *Qur’ān*: 95: 1–3.

²¹ “Letter 98,” Section 556.

²² *Ibid.* Section 561.

the role of this unfortunate occasion as the inspiration for composing the *Shakwā al-Gharīb*.

'Ayn al-Quḍāt's letter explains that a man who greets his soul is aware that he is in this world of his own accord in order that his soul gain experience in the corporeal realm of existence. This notwithstanding, he is homesick for his origins where he longs to return.²³

Indeed I cry because of my exile:
The eyes of the stranger always cry,
The day I left my land
I was wrong.
I wonder why I left
My homeland where my love is.

O friend! I cannot talk about how this forced separation is the consequence of my voluntary departure. Can you hear [what I am telling you]?

The one who is cast away from Him is but His kin:
The one who leaves the land where his beloved is.

The voluntary departure of the soul is motivated by its desire to know God through the creation. This desire finds its genesis in God's intention for manifesting the creation. According to a famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, God told the prophet David that He was a hidden treasure and produced the creation in order to be known through His creation. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt says that the desire to know and to be known is at the root of the creation and involves both God and man.²⁴

The journey of the soul takes place against this background. The soul departs from its homeland, the realm of God's command, and comes into this world in order to know God in the material world where the passions reign. During the course of its journey, the soul matures through its dealings with these forces and accosts a higher level of gnosis. The soul sees the creation as a manifestation of God's attributes and observes the creation as a metaphor for the reality of God.²⁵ Itself part of this creation, the soul's mode of perception is distinct from the reality of seeing. The latter can only occur through the perspective of God, a subject that constitutes the discussion on the nature of reality and illusion. With regard to the wayfarer, this mode of perception can be experienced at junctures when the adept and the path merge with each other at different stages of the journey. These activities comprise the substance of a dramatic, arduous, and wondrous journey.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī. Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq. Edited by 'Afif 'Usayrān. Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1961. P. 19.

²⁵ 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī. *Tamhīdāt*. 4th ed. Edited by 'Afif 'Usayrān. Tehran: Manūchehrī, 1991. Section 219. P. 163–164.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt lived at a volatile time when being an original thinker was dangerous. He was a scholar, a visionary mystic, and a brilliant author. He did not find any merit in remaining shackled in the Baghdad prison and thus authored his discursive and emotive defense in order to claim his freedom. He was also a man who transcended his body in approaching his soul. The prison was indeed an apt metaphor for the exile that the soul endures as it observes, experiences, and suffers its estrangement in the dark dungeons of the material world. The exact date of his release from the Tīkrīt prison in Baghdad is not determined. The recorded fact is that this unparalleled mystic and scholar was brutally executed in A.D. 1131, in his homeland, Hamadhān.