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CORRESPONDENCE III. FORMS OF OPENING AND CLOSING, ADDRESS, AND SIGNATURE
Article by **Hashem Rajabzadeh**

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CORRESPONDENCE

iii. Forms of opening and closing, address, and signature

In this article the parts of the Persian letter are surveyed section by section, with comments on the general features, style, and stock formulas characteristic of each from early Islamic times to the present. The material is drawn from manuals of letter writing prepared by professional scribes and from anthologies of letters collected as ideal examples of the epistolary art. Such manuals and collections, though certainly based on the styles and practices current among the educated, represent an idealization; actual practice must often have fallen short of the standards of arrangement, literary style, and formalization inculcated in the manuals and summarized here.

The parts of a Persian letter are, first, a preamble (*maṭlaʿ*, *tašbīb*), including invocation (*taḥmīdīya*), superscription (*ḵeṭāb*), the name of the addressee and his titles (*alqāb*), a blessing (*doʿā*), greetings (*taqdīm-e ḵadamāt*), and expression of eagerness (*šarḥ-e eštīāq*); second, transition to the subject and body of the letter; and, third, the closing (*maqta*) including departure from the subject, offer of services, a request for correspondence, greetings to mutual

acquaintances, a prayer and salutation, and closing phrase and the signature (for a historical example, see Moʾayyed Ṭābetī, pp. 300-01).

Preamble

In the old epistolary style the formalities at the beginning of a letter were called *tašbīb* (Bağdādī, p. 213; Sanāʾī, n. 9), originally a term describing the beloved with which a *qaṣīda* may begin.

Invocation. Words of praise to God, usually in Arabic, traditionally begin a letter. The custom was first introduced by ʿAbd-al-Ḥamīd Kāteb (d. 132/749; Ṣafā, I, p. 182; cf. Meyhanī, p. 23). Sometimes different-colored inks are used for this invocation. Certain phrases are associated with letters written for particular purposes. Common formulas include *besmeʾllāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* (in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the phrase with which the chapters of the Qurʾān and most books also begin); in letters awarding honors *howaʾllāh sobḥānaho* (He is God, glorious is He) and *al-molk leʾllāh* (Sovereignty belongs to God); *naṣr men Allāh wa fatḥan qarīb, baššer al-moʾmenīn* (with the assistance of God victory is nigh, proclaim the glad tidings to the believers) in letters announcing victory; *Hū* (He, i.e., God) in Sufi letters. In the Pahlavi period, the use of Persian phrases like *be-nām-e Ḵodā* (In the name of God) became increasingly popular. But since the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79, the Arabic phrase *besmeh taʿālā* (In His Name, may He be exalted) has been used in official and other correspondence.

Superscription. The use of names and titles was governed by etiquette and protocol, as it still is, though now much simplified. “Address each person as his origin, ancestry, domain, authority, army, and treasury require” (*Čahār maqāla*, ed. Qazvīnī, p. 21). Appropriate forms and phrasing for addressing each class—rulers, officials, clergy, merchants, craftsmen, associates, and relatives—were composed and listed in books by correspondence experts. Ḵoʾī (15th century; *Rosūm*, pp. 2-15), after stating that only holders of high offices in government and the clergy deserve to be addressed honorifically, goes on to name thirty-two ranks in the first group and fifteen in the second, as well as one’s own relatives, giving appropriate forms of address for each. In Naḵjavānī’s *Dastūr al-kāteb* (I, pt. 1, pp. 159-334) there are samples of address for thirty-eight ranks of people, including state authorities, the clergy, and one’s own dependents. Typical forms used by various authors include *ḵodāvand-e ʿālam* (lord of the world), *solṭān-e banī ādam* (sovereign of mankind), *farmāndeh-e šarq o ḡarb* (ruler of the east and the west; used to

address the Saljuq sultan Sanjar, 11th century; Rašīd-al-Dīn Vaṭvāṭ, p. 6); *ḵodāygān-e jahān* (lord of the world) for major rulers; *ḵodāvand-e walī al-eṇʿām* (lord provider of good things) and *ḵadīv-e moʿaẓẓam* (exalted khedive) for minor kings; *mahd-e moʿallā* (exalted cradle) for the queen; *ḥażrat-e aʿlā*, *ḥażrat-e ʿolya* (highest presence), *janāb* (threshold), *amīr* (commander, prince), *sayyed* (chief), and the like for ministers, officials, and military officers, arranged from highest to lowest rank. These terms were usually followed by adjectives appropriate to the meaning of the nouns and the ranks of the addressees, such as *moʿaẓẓam* (glorified), *moʿallā* (exalted), *aʿlā* (highest), *ʿālī* (high), *sāmī*, *rafīʿ* (lofty), *šarīf* (noble), *karīm* (generous), *aʿazz* (dearest), and *ʿazīz* (dear). Typical terms used to address relatives include *ḵodāvandgār-e mošfeq* (benevolent lord), *wāled-e bozorgvār* (great father), *maḵdūm-e aʿẓam* (greatest master), and so on for father; *ʿazīz* (fem.

ʿazīza “dear”) for brothers, sisters, mothers, sons, and daughters; *mahd* (cradle), *ḵedr* (curtain), and *setr* (veil) for female relatives (Ḵoʾī, *Rosūm*, p. 15). These terms could be followed by adjectives such as *aʿlā*, *moʿaẓẓam*, *ʿālī*, *manīʿ* (inaccessible), *maʿṣūm* (chaste), *maḥrūs* (protected), *ʿazīz*, *ʿazīza*, *šarīf*, and so on.

As formulas became increasingly inflated and flattering, it came to be considered impolite to address powerful individuals such as kings directly. Thus, a letter to a king might address his courtiers (*molāzemān*, *bāryāftagān*), servants (*ḡolāmān*), threshold (*pīšgāh*, *dargāh*, *janāb*), or even the ground he walked on—an especially common device in Muslim India (see iv, below)—e.g., *be ʿarż-e bāryāftagan-e nowwāb-e ḵalīfat al-arż mīrasānad* (petitioning the courtiers among the deputies of the caliph of the earth; Saljuq period, 11th century; Ṯābetīān, pp. 27-28); *kamtarīn-e doʿāʾ gūyān-e ṣamīmī, Abu’l-Fażl . . . , zamīn-e adab būsīda be ʿarż-e ḵādemān-e qodsī-nešāṇ . . . mīrasānaḏ . . .* (Abul-Faźl, the least among those who sincerely pray for you, courteously kisses the ground, submitting to the sanctified servants thaṭ . . . ; India, 16th century; Abu’l-Faźl, p. 56); *be ʿarż-e ḵāk-e pāy-e jawāherāsā-ye mobārak mīrasānad* (petitioning the gem-like dust of the blessed footsteps; Qajar period, 19th century; for a list of principal designations used under Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, see Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, pp. 34, 310).

Nowadays the commonly used forms of address are *ḥażrat* (to a highly respected person) and *janāb* (replaced by *sarkār*, chief, in addressing women). A friend is usually addressed as *dūst* (friend) followed by one or two epithets such as *ʿazīz*, *gerāmī* (dear), *mehrbān* (kind), *arjmand* (valued), and the like. In

a very polite address, words such as *(be) pīšgāh-e* (to the court of), *hożūr-e* (to the presence of), or *ḵedmat-e* (in the service of), followed by epithets like *moḥtaram* (respected), *mobārak* (blessed), *bā-saʿādat* (fortunate), *gerāmī*, *arjmand*, and so on follow the above mentioned designations.

In intimate forms of address, however, only the first name is used, followed by an epithet denoting intimacy, such as (name)-*e ʿazīz* (dear —). Adding the pronoun *am* (my) to the epithet(s) following the addressee's name denotes a still higher degree of intimacy. In formal forms of addressing, both the first and family names, or only the family name, are mentioned.

Under the Islamic government of Persia it has become the fashion—and a prescription in official correspondence—to replace the complimentary epithets *āqā* (Mr.) and *ḵānom* (Miss, Mrs.) with *barādar* (brother) and *ḵᵛāhar* (sister) when addressing or referring to others in a letter or in conversation, a practice dating from the early Islamic era. Muslim mystics and theologians, when writing to equals, juniors, or disciples, used such phrases as *barādar-e aʿazz-rā baqā bād wa saʿādat* (May my very dear brother live long in prosperity; ʿAyn-al-Qożāt, no. 103). The tradition continued to be observed in social correspondence (*eḵwānīyāt*).

Name. The addressee's personal name usually follows the principal designations. Nowadays this includes the addressee's personal name, consisting of both first and family names; distinction of genealogy, such as *sayyed*, *mīr*; words of respect, such as *āqā* (Mr.), *ḵānom* (Miss, Mrs.), *bānū* (Mrs., replacing the old word *ḵātūn*); distinctions of social status, such as *ḥojjat-al-Eslām*, *sarhang* (colonel); pilgrimage titles; and academic titles. For example, a cleric who is a *sayyed*, has made the pilgrimage to Mecca and holds a Ph.D. degree is addressed as *hożūr-e mobārak-e janāb-e āqā-ye ḥojjat-al-Eslām doctor sayyeḍ . . .* (To the blessed presence of Rev. Dr. Sayyeḍ . . .).

Titles. Honorific titles were included in the preamble to the letter after the actual names and were mentioned in preference to personal names as a sign of respect. Such titles were normally bestowed by the state in recognition of rank and offices and proliferated greatly from the time of the Saljuqs up to the Qajar period. They were abolished in 1304 Š./1925 (see alqāb wa ʿanāwin ii).

Blessing. The custom of including a blessing for the addressee of a letter dates from pre-Islamic Persia. In Islamic Persia these blessings could be either in Arabic or Persian or both. Arabic blessings were common in Persian letters

until the end of the Qajar period (20th century) and were an almost indispensable part of Indian Muslim letters. Typical short Arabic blessings for various classes of addressee are *ḵallada Allāh molkah* (may God make his sovereignty everlasting), *naṣaraʾllāh lewāh* (may God make his banner victorious), and *aʿẓamaʾllāh solṭānah* (may God make his kingship mighty) for kings; *dāmat barakātoh* (may his blessings be prolonged), *dāmat efāżātoh* (may the outpourings of his grace continue), and *adāmaʾllah taʾyīdah* (may God continue his confirmations) for clergy of higher rank; *sallamahoʾllāh* (may God keep him healthy) for clergy of lower rank; *żāʿafaʾllāh qodratah wa jalālah* (may God add to his strength and glory), *dāma šawkatoh wa ḥešmatoh* (may his pomp and glory continue), *adāmaʾllāh eqbālah wa taʾyīdah* (may God extend his good fortune and confirmation), and *madda ẓelloh al-ʿālī* (may his exalted shadow be extended) for ministers and people of rank; *aʿẓamaʾllāh anṣārah*, (may God strengthen his helpers), *aḥsanaʾllāh aḥwālah* (may God improve his conditions), *aṭālaʾllāh baqāʾah* (may God prolong his life), and *adāmaʾllāh eqbālah* (may God extend his good fortune) for friends and relatives; and *akramahoʾllāh wa abqāh* (may God show him favor and extend his life) and *abqāhoʾllāh wa aḥsanaʾllāh aḥwālah* (may God extend his life and improve his conditions) for children and disciples. Some writers replaced the conventional Arabic blessings with more elegant expressions of their own. Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem Qāʾem-maqām (d.1251/1835) concluded the brief address formula with *rabb ešraḥ lī ṣadrī wa yasser lī amrī* (O God, make my heart rejoice and ease my affairs), replacing both the invocation and blessing.

If the blessing was in Persian, it usually expressed the writer's wish for the longevity and prosperity of the addressee. Moḥammad Ḡazālī wrote to a king: *Īzad taʿālā malek-e Eslām-rā az mamlakat-e donyā bar-ḵᵛordār konād wa āngāh dar āḵerat pādešāhī dehād ke pādešāhī-e rūy-e zamīn dar vey ḥaqīr wa moḵtaṣar gardad* (may God the Almighty make the king of the Muslim world prosper from his worldly kingdom, then bestow him a kingship in heaven to make his worldly realm as something small and circumscribed; no. 3). The most common formula, however, was *zendagānī-e — derāz bād* (may the life of — be prolonged). During the Qajar period (19th century) it was common to replace the blessing in letters to the shah and other dignitaries with a short phrase of devotion to the addressee in words literally meaning "Oh, could I but sacrifice myself for you" (*taṣaddoqat gardam*, *fedāyat šavam*, Arab. *jaʿalto fedāk*).

In Persian tradition it was taboo to refer to one's wife by name, so: "If they

have no child, this much would be enough to write as a blessing: “May (she) be blessed by God with endless prosperity.” A husband should never go on to express his affection or greetings, since this is not customary” (Koʾī, *Ḡonya*, p. 16).

Nowadays, words of well wishing for the addressee and his close relatives usually come at the beginning of the body of a letter, though clerics and adherents of the old literary style still write words of blessing. When blessings are used, they are less exaggerated.

Greetings and expressions of eagerness. Greetings and expressions of eagerness to meet the addressee showed the writer’s good manners, especially in private letters, and gave him the opportunity to exhibit his literary talent. Ḵāqānī (d. 595/1198) wrote: *kehtar salām wa ḵedmat wa ṭanā wa medḥat kamā ʿahd-e bar-dawām mīrasānad, wa ṣafaḥāt-e awqāt-rā be nafaḥāt-e ḏekr-e fāyeḥ moʿanbar mīdārad* (this junior sends greetings, salutation, praise, and eulogy as ever and makes the pages of his days fragrant by reciting the perfumed praise of you; p. 149). In letters written simply to inquire after a friend’s health, such expressions formed the main body of the letter.

In personal letters elements of the opening part were sometimes replaced by poetry, after the classical style of letter writing in Arabic. Lines of poetry were also used to express eagerness at the beginning of a letter or to make or support a point in its body. Poetry was occasionally seen even in letters exchanged between two courts (*solṭānīyāt*).

Transition to the subject

The most commonly used linking formulas were *ammā baʿd* (now then), *baʿd-e hāḏā* (after this . . .), *pūšīda nabāšad ke* (it should not be overlooked that), *be-maḥall-e enhāʾ rasānīda mīāyad ke* (by way of conveying information), *eʿlām mīravad ke* (it is hereby brought to your attention that), *moṭṭāleʿ sāzand ke* (one is made aware that), *makšūf-e ḵāṭer-e ʿālī bād ke* (it should be revealed to your lofty mind thaṭ . . .), *be ʿarż/be esteḥżār/be eṭṭelāʿ mīrasānad* (it is submitted thaṭ . . .), *bārī* (anyhow), etc. Kings or high-ranking officials in addressing their subordinates used such phrases as *bedānad ke* (Let it be known thaṭ . . .). Mystics used expressions like *ey dūst*, *ey yār* (O friend), *ey ʿazīz* (O dear one), *ey barādar* (O brother), and *javānmardā* (O gentleman).

In modern personal (*eḵwānī*) letters phrases used to enter to the subject are

rather short and familiar. *ʿArż mīkonad ke* (it is submitted thaṭ . . .) is one traditional example of such phrases still in use. More familiar phrases, such as those used in highly praised *eḵwānī* letters of Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem Qāʾem-maqām (d. 1251/1835), such as *mehrbān-e man* (my kind [friend]), *qorbānat šavam* (my beloved one), and *nūr-e čašmā* (my darling) are still preferred by many writers.

Closing

The end of a letter was also subject to strict rules of etiquette. It contained a phrase of departure from the subject, including a justification for sending the letter, an offer of services, a request for further correspondence, greetings to mutual acquaintances, prayers, and a closing phrase and signature.

Departure from the subject. The end of the body of the letter was indicated by a justification for writing, by apologizing for prolixity, or by announcing the end of the subject, e.g., *šarṭ-e bandagī būd īn ḥāl enhāʾ kardaṇ . . .* (as your humble servant, I had to inform you of this . . .) to superiors; *kehtar ḵᵛast ke az majārī-e īn ḥāl eʿlām dehaḍ . . . haṛča raʾy-e šarīf bīnad ṣawābtar* (I humbly wanted to report to you what was going on now . . . whatever your noble mind thinks, that is the best) to equals; *bāyad keh īn jomla taṣawwor konad wa jedd šenāsad* (you should consider this thoroughly and take it seriously; Meyhanī, pp. 54-55) to inferiors; *bāqī amr-e ʿālī moṭāʿ* (nothing remains but to obey your sublime command) to the shah and other dignitaries (Qajar period). Phrases such as *zīāda če ʿarż šavad* (what else could be submitted?), *zīāda zaḥmat namīdehad* (no more trouble should be given), and *bāqī baqāyat*, *zīāda salāmatī* (nothing remains but to pray for your longevity/health) are still in common use.

Offer of services. A king or dignitary writing to a subordinate or a father to his son would urge the recipient not to hesitate to ask for a favor. Offering assistance was especially common in friendly letters in Persia until the 17th century—*ḵedmat-ī keh bāšad farmāyand tā be ān efteḵār karda āyad* (let some service be ordered so that honor would come thereby; Montajab-al-Dīn Jovaynī) and *awāmer wa nawāhī-rā čašm-e enteẓār gošāda* (the eyes of expectation are open for commands and prohibitions; Wajīh-al-Dīn Nasafī to Homām-al-Dīn Tabrīzī, 14th century)—though it was less common in India. In Persia, offering one's services when concluding a friendly letter has again gained popularity, using less florid expressions.

Request for correspondence. These are addressed mainly to friends,

subordinates or junior family members to show one's concern. Historical letters provide many examples of elaborate phrases asking the addressee to "honor" the writer by keeping him informed and by answering his letter or writing regularly: *monṭaẓer-e ešārāt-e karīm wa maktūbāt-e ʿazīz ḵʷāhad būd* (awaiting your kind instructions and dear letters; Rašīd Vaṭvāṭ, p. 61); *motawaqqeʿ-am ke tašrīf-e mokātabāt motawālī farmāyand* (I await your honoring me with one letter after another; Bağdādī, p. 263).

Greetings to mutual acquaintances. The forms of these greetings have generally remained unchanged: *salām wa taḥīyāt-e mā be ḵod wa be farzandān o dūstān har ke āyad, ḵord o bozorg, berasānad* (our greetings to you, your children and those friends, younger or elder, whom you happen to see; Abū Saʿīd Abi'l-Ḵayr, in Ṣafā, III, p. 92); *salām be jomla-ye dūstān berasānad* (convey our greetings to all the friends; Aḥmad Ḡazālī to ʿAyn-al-Qożāt, no. 5). In phrasing the greetings, especially to the addressee's family members, complimentary epithets are usually added to their names, such as "your honorable father" (*wāled-e mokarram*), "your respected wife" (*hamsar-e moḥtaram*), and "your beloved son" (*farzand-e delband*).

Prayer and salutation. Prayer at the end of a letter traditionally consisted of two parts, Persian and Arabic respectively, and ended with the words "and greetings" (*wa'l-salām*) or "God willing" (*en šāʾ Allāh*). Closing prayers and praise, like those in the opening of a letter, have been elaborately formulated and generally observed since the 11th century. These might involve repeating the titles used at the beginning of the letter and adding words of praise for God and Moḥammad (Meyhanī, pp. 22-23). Fragments of these phrases still remain in use. Nowadays, writers of friendly letters simply express their wishes for the longevity, prosperity, health, happiness, and success of the other party: *zendagānī be-kām bād* (may life go on as you wish) or *bāqī baqāyat* (nothing to add but to pray for your longevity).

Closing phrase and signature. Ordinarily, *wa'l-salām* was the last word in a letter before the signature or seal. However, the clergy customarily wrote an expression of modesty before the signature: *al-aḥqar* (the humble), *aqall al-ʿebād* (least of the servants of God), and *al-dāʿī*, (the one who prays [for you]). Civilian and military officials, and even common people, made it a habit to sign "your devoted" or "humble servant" (*ḡolām-e jān-neṯār*, or *ḡolām-e bī-meqdār*) when writing to the king or the other people in power. In private letters, similar expressions were sometimes written before the signature. In present usage, different words showing deference are commonly used to close

a letter: *bā eḥterām*, *bā ʿarż-e adab* (respectfully) to superiors; *erādatmand* (yours sincerely) to equals; *qorbān-at* (your sacrifice) to intimates.

*Farmān*s (decrees) were an exception to the practice of closing letters with elaborate formalities and normally ended with a simple formula. Bagdādī (pp. 99-100) provided the following example from the time of the Ḵʷārazmšāhs (11th-13th centuries): *sabīl-e roʾasā wa aʿyān wa raʿāyā . . . wālī wa moqṭeʿ wa marjaʿ-e ḵʷīš folān-rā šenāsanḍ . . . , tā mostaḥaqq-e raʾfat wa mostawjeb-e dawām-e ʿāṭefat-e mā šavand* (all chiefs, notables, and subjects should submit to . . . , the governor, fief holder, and authority, so that they may deserve our kindness and lasting affection). An example from the Safavid period (16th-17th centuries) has the formula *dar ʿohda šenāsand* (they should consider it obligatory). The same rule was observed under the Qajars whose decrees were generally concluded with this phrase followed by "and greetings" (*wa'l-salām*). In decrees ending with good wishes, the closing phrase could often be *en šāʾ Allāh taʿālā ʿazīz* (may it please God Exalted), or *Allāh al-mostaʿān* (with the help of God).

Personal letters

Letters exchanged between friends and acquaintances were traditionally called *eḵwānīyāt* to distinguish them from official letters (*dīwānīyāt*) and diplomatic letters (*solṭānīyāt*). Collections of letters usually contain some personal letters. Works on letter writing advised writers to maintain good style and manners in their social correspondence and provided examples of appropriate forms. The style of such letters, however, is more casual, even with those writers who carried artificiality to excess in official letters. One example is Mīrzā Mahdī Khan Astarābādī who drafted some very prolix letters and decrees for Nāder Shah Afšār (r. 1148-68/1736-47) but used a more natural style in his personal letters. For example, he concluded his letters with short prayers like *ʿomrat az ḵāheš-e man afzūn bād* (may you live even longer than I could wish; Kalhor, p. 116).

The openings of personal letters were historically elaborate and long, whereas the closing part was brief, usually incorporating several elements of the close in a single phrase, such as *zendagānī dar šādī jāvedānī bād, en šāʾ Allāh taʿālā* (may you live forever in happiness, should God most high be willing). Some characteristics of the opening and the closing are examined here.

Opening of a personal letter. The forms of invocation, superscription, and

blessing differed in personal letters depending on the writer's relation to the addressee and his manner and style. These forms were generally more natural than those used in official correspondence. Long titles, for example, were usually replaced with a few words of prayer, eulogy, and greeting (see Bağdādī, chap. 3, *eḵwānīyāt*). The justification for writing was often the writer's concern and eagerness and his ardent desire to communicate regularly. The offering of services was also good manners in friendly letters.

Requests for further correspondence and to be kept informed, usually in more intimate forms in *eḵwānīyāt*, were addressed to juniors and equals. Though an expression of desire to be kept informed indicates one's concern for the addressee, it was traditionally considered impolite to ask for further correspondence when writing to a senior. A request for correspondence was sometimes replaced by an expression of anxiety, or rather a complaint, for having not received a letter from the addressee for a long time. This was written immediately after greeting and before going to the main topic. Phrases such as *bedānad ke čand nāma neveštam wa hīč yak-rā jawāb naḵᵛāndam* (notice that none of my many letters was replied to; *al-Moḵtārāt*, p. 219) still sound natural. Greetings to mutual acquaintances were expressed in a rather affectionate way, usually referring to all such acquaintances by name. The old forms have generally remained in use up to the present time.

Closings. Forms of prayer at the end of a friendly letter were simple. Forms such as *dawlat mostadām/jāvīd bād* (may good fortune last forever) given in Naḵjavānī (II, pp. 351-66) may still be used. In social correspondence the salutation before the signature depends on the relation and the degree of acquaintance between the parties. The more formal type of phrases and commonly used phrases include: *dūstddār[-e šomā]*, *bā maḥabbat*, *bā mawaddat* (affectionately yours) to juniors and equals; *bā [ʿarż-e] eḥterām* (respectfully) to equals and seniors; and *bā [ʿarż-e] erādat*, *erādatmand* (sincerely), and *qarbānat* (your sacrifice) to intimates. These forms have been prevalent since the Qajar period (19th century).

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