ABSINTHE

WORLD LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

The Islamicate in Translation

Edited by Jaideep Pandey and Razieh Araghi

31

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Rethinking the Islamicate Through Translation: Crossings and Currents

by Jaideep Pandey and Razieh Araghi

To step into the Islamicate literary world is to enter a river with many mouths and no fixed banks—braided, glinting, unruly. Here, currents of Persian, Arabic, Malayalam, Kurdish, and many more weave together and diverge, each channel carving new pathways through cultural landscapes. Each current carries its own sediment: memories of conquest and kinship, devotion and defiance, longing and home. These are not quiet waters. They erode and build, cut through stone, and overflow into new terrains. In this river, there are no pure sources, only crossings—moments where form and language touch, separate, and touch again.

The works collected in this issue are such crossings. Some arrive in translation, others as reflections on untranslatability. Some speak from the mother tongue, others from a language chosen, inherited, or imposed. Together, they map a world where the Islamicate is less a category than a pulse—felt in ghazals and sermons, lullabies and state decrees, etched into memory, sometimes even in the absence of script. To read these texts is to immerse oneself in a living river, one that invites us to rethink belonging, power, and voice in the ceaseless flow of history and culture. As we made our way through these unique entries that resonate with other places, times, peoples, and languages, instead of coherence we saw a playful porosity of boundaries and insistent desires of transformations of forms, genres, and spatio-temporal conceptions. The translations in this issue revel in this paradox that Mana Kia calls a "coherent contradiction"—that is, a multiplicity of meanings grounded in a singularity of vision.[1]

We take the Islamicate not as an externally demarcated entity that has well-defined geographical, political, demographic, or linguistic contours, but instead focus on situated negotiations with such boundaries from the inside out. This issue takes Shahzad Bashir's notion of the Islamic as "historically contingent self-understandings" as a starting point to explore a complex set of literary addresses to perceived boundaries within the Muslim world.[2] We think of boundaries not just as limitations to defining selves but also as enabling negotiations with different structures of meaning. That is to say, rather than thinking of the Islamicate as an already existing mode of being, each translation in this issue demonstrates the Islamicate as a way of imagining and writing selves and worlds from situatedness within a specific set of contextual factors. We use the term *Islamicate* over *Islamic* not to downplay the element of religion and render it into a sanitized, secular object fit for consumption in the West, but to expand the spheres of life experiences in which Islam plays a defining role. Thus, this issue tackles questions of linguistic, sectarian,

[1] See Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford University Press, 2020), 10.

[2] See Shahzad Bashir, "On Islamic Time: Rethinking Chronology in the Historiography of Muslim Societies," *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (December 2014): 531.

religious, and gender minoritization, as well as marginality of genres and media, to see the Islamicate as a germane ground to think about lives, literatures, and cultures.

We had set out to challenge the overdominance of specific languages as the cosmopolitan languages of Islam—Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, to name a few. This is reflected in the range of languages included in this issue, such as Punjabi, Assamese, Malayalam, Amazigh, Armeno-Turkish, and Dari. The earliest piece in the issue, Sunil Sharma's translation from the 16th-century *Karnama-yi Munir*, is a case in point. As a text written by a non-native speaker of Persian in order to stake a powerful claim to the long tradition of Persian poetry from the Mughal court, Sharma's translation demonstrates the crucial fault lines that the modern world inherited from the premodern. These fault lines around languages, nativeness, and literary heritage not only demonstrate boundaries that fractured the shifting landscapes of the Muslim world but also exist as ways of playing with generic conventions as well as claims to a malleable literary heritage. His case illustrates how Persian, as a cosmopolitan language, enabled a shared literary idiom that could unite native and non-native speakers across vast geographies. But it also reveals how linguistic and cultural hierarchies persisted even within this inclusive frame. Munir's text reveals the ambivalence of Persian's cosmopolitan promise: While it provided mobility across imperial and linguistic borders, it also imposed cultural hierarchies that excluded certain voices based on origin, accent, or regional affiliation.

If Munir's voice captures the ambivalent position of a marginalized poet in the heart of a premodern cosmopolitan empire, the latest entry in the issue, Ibrahim Badshah's translations of five ghazals from Malayalam from the early 21st century, offers a resonant counterpoint. These poems stand as a testament to the fundamental malleability of form, genre, and literary heritage in the Islamicate world. Badshah's translations of five brief ghazals allow us to see the centuries-long history of the genre through multiple languages and through its eventual, kaleidoscopic renditions in Malayalam. Beyond temporality, the geographical circulation of these genres also reimagines the boundaries of what is conventionally understood as the Muslim world.

The spatial arc in this issue moves beyond the subcontinent. "Three Islamicate Songs from Metro Detroit" transports us across the Atlantic Ocean to early 20th-century North America, where Turkish, Armenian, and Arab immigrants from the former Ottoman territories adapted Islamicate poetic forms within diasporic communities. Detroit, in this instance, becomes not a peripheral outpost, but a part of the Islamicate sphere of influence. As genres travel, they are also made anew, transforming the contours of social and cultural lives in both the place of origin and the destination. This issue embraces the ethos of movement where the genres redraw the contours of belonging, aesthetics, and memory in both their points of departure and arrival. As a collection conceptualized in the greater Detroit area, this issue seeks to think of its own location of production as a part of this history of moving genres, texts, languages, and literary predilections, through the infinite malleability of the literary and linguistic repertoire of the Islamicate.

Fragmented Persians

The three pieces from Persian demonstrate the malleability of even the so-called dominant languages. While Sharma's translation makes Persian speak to its South Asian entanglement, Tyler Fisher and Haidar Khezri's translation of the Kurdish writer and thinker Farzad Kamangar highlights a Persian mobilized to speak to the experiences of non-Shia Kurds, negotiating "boundaries of his stateless identity, [and] a minority by religious sect, ethnicity, and language," as Fisher and Khezri put it eloquently in their preface. His poetry, while linguistically Persian, resists Persianate hegemony by carrying the cadences and sensibilities of Kurdish life and struggle. Kamangar's poems thus extend the political valence of prison literature into the lyric mode while also gesturing to gendered dimensions of resistance. His voice speaks to the intertwined poetics of grief, endurance, and embodied dissent—resonant, too, with the ongoing reverberations of the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom."

Similarly, while Mostafa Abedinifard's translation of Sadeq Hedayat's *The Pearl Cannon* represents the mainstream literary

tradition of Persian, the text mounts a powerful attack on Iranian historiography and self-mythologizing. In doing so, it challenges the monolithic identities constructed through such narratives and fractures the coherence of Persian as a nationalistic literary vehicle. Abedinifard demonstrates how Hedayat mobilizes a wide spectrum of linguistic registers—from high literary to coarse colloquial—to create a deliberately dissonant and fragmented text. This multiplicity unsettles any fixed sense of language or identity and reveals the internal fractures of Persian itself. Hedayat's Persian is contradictory, irreverent, and politically charged—a potent reminder that even dominant languages harbor within them the capacity for resistance, rupture, and critique.

From Multilingualism to Multiformity

The same linguistic dissonance is also represented in texts belonging to hyphenated linguistic traditions—those that blur or bridge established language categories. Michael Pifer's translation "I Went into the Garden" from Armenian and Ihsan Ul-Ihthisam, Ameen Perumannil Sidhick, and Afeef Ahmed's translation of Muḥyuddīn's biography from Arabi-Malayalam both capture the mobility of language and literature in the Islamicate sphere, not just between cohesively identifiable languages, but across languages in the process of formation that were themselves transformed through these exchanges. These translations illuminate how literary multilingualism is not always a matter of discrete, stable tongues but often emerges through contact zones of script, sound, and genre. At the same time, both texts showcase migrations of genres, much like Ibrahim Badshah's translations of Malayalam ghazals. Muḥyuddīn's biography is a case study in the migration of a staple genre within the Islamicate—that is, *sīrah* or biography writing—and demonstrates that genres did not just migrate unidirectionally, but as genres like the *sīrah* moved from Arabic to Malayalam, their poetic and literary vocabulary and affective pull transformed the genre as well. A similar trend can be found in the biography of Prophet Muhammad, *Nabi*

Nāṇayam, translated from Malayalam by Musab Abdul Salam. Translations by Kristin Dickinson and Pifer, on the other hand, showcase the ghazal genre's peregrinations across the Ottoman Empire and then all the way to the Metro Detroit area in the early 20th century. At the same time, much like Tyler and Khezri's translation, Pifer's translation and its inclusion push the boundaries of who can and cannot make a literary address within the Islamicate ethos.

In these texts, whether composed in dominant, minority, or transitional languages, we see the same principle at work: the Islamicate as a space of multilingual, transhistorical, and transregional experimentation. Genres travel. Languages bend. Forms are rearticulated across political borders and cultural thresholds. And in every case, literature becomes a means of negotiating identity, affiliation, resistance, and belonging. Translation, then, is fundamental to this issue, not just as a method to bring together these diverse voices, but as a method of the Islamicate itself, which we see as borne out of endless translations.

This issue also features the work of a Muslim woman writer whose linguistic identity embodies the complex, layered affiliations and contradictions of late colonial and early postcolonial India. Writing primarily in Malayalam, her mother tongue, alongside Hindi—the language she embraced as emblematic of the emerging Indian nation—her literary expression navigates a multilingual landscape that shapes and reshapes Muslim womanhood. Notably, unlike many other contributors whose works center Arabic as a critical marker of Muslim identity, Arabic is largely absent here. This absence itself is telling, pointing to the diverse ways Muslim identities have been formed and articulated beyond the liturgical language of Islam. While other texts here engage deeply with genres such as the ghazal and languages such as Urdu, this author's work foregrounds the lived, embodied experience of identity formation within the intersections of language, gender, and nationalism. Through this lens, the issue broadens its exploration of Islamicate multilingualisms, emphasizing not only poetic and linguistic forms but also the varied modalities of Muslim womanhood and self-expression.

Translating Orality

The refusal of coherence extends beyond language to the very forms and media through which stories circulate. *The Legends of the Panjâb*—a collection of oral narratives rendered into written form—demonstrates the instability not only of language but of narrative itself. The story of Sarwan and Farijan, preserved in three different versions, exemplifies how oral traditions generate layered and divergent textual afterlives depending on who does the telling, the translating, and the recording. As the story moves from oral performance to print, it is shaped by the translator's choices, the sociolinguistic codes of the time, and the communities who received each version. Two of the variants, for instance, circulated among courtesans, complicating any clear boundary between elite and subaltern, sacred and profane, or canonical and marginal. Linguistically, the narrative's weaving of Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and Haryanvi dialects defies the rigid language classifications that emerged under colonial regimes and continue to dominate modern understandings of literary language. In this context, the text gestures toward an earlier, more fluid linguistic ecology of the Islamicate world—one in which dialect, register, and genre intermingled freely and in which the boundaries between speech and writing, folk and literary, sacred and secular remained porous.

This interplay between orality, authority, and affect is also central to "Reading the Letter," a quietly compelling story that stages the painful tension between languages of intimacy and those of power. Told from the perspective of a young Amazigh woman growing up in a Moroccan village where only Arabic is deemed worthy of script, the story reveals the deep psychic and political consequences of being unable to imagine one's mother tongue as a written language. Here, Arabic becomes the sanctioned language of religion and state, embodied by the village imam, while Amazigh, the language of the protagonist's mother and maternal affection, remains unwritten, domestic, and precariously positioned outside of legitimacy. Yet the narrative also charts a remarkable reversal: Through her eventual encounter with European linguistic infrastructures, the protagonist discovers Amazigh in written form abroad—an unsettling but

empowering moment that reframes colonialism not only as domination but also as a disruptive force within older hierarchies of the Global South.

The translators' labor in rendering this layered linguistic world into English speaks directly to the stakes of this issue. In choosing how to carry across affective nuance, cultural memory, and asymmetrical power dynamics embedded in the original, the translators of these works ask us to consider what is inevitably lost—and unexpectedly gained—when unwritten languages are made legible, both on the page and across borders.

Forugh Karimi, "Sepia Veils and White-Flowered Branches"

Translated by Anna Learn

Translator's Preface

Forugh Karimi was born in 1971 in Kabul, Afghanistan. She attended medical school in the capital until 1996, when she was forced to flee the country following the Taliban takeover. Karimi sought refuge in the Netherlands and has made a life for herself there as a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and acclaimed Dutch-language novelist, publishing three novels in just the last three years. However, her first foray into writing took place in Dari Persian, with the short story "Sepia Veils and White-Flowered Branches," which she published in 1989, at the age of 19, in the popular Persian-Pashto Afghan magazine *Zhwandūn* (meaning "life" in Pashto).[1]

The story is narrated by a young man in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan who is grappling with the lifelong absence of his father and the recent departure of his mother. Through childhood memories and feverish adult visions, the narrator comes to believe that everyday objects—a Chinese teacup, a painting of white flowers, a flowerpot—can stand in for those missing family members and can help him to make sense of his own identity. Slowly, we see the narrator disassociate from the grim, Soviet-style apartment building where he lives in Kabul and fall down a nightmarish rabbit hole, replete with disembodied voices, moving plants, and racing animals. In his delusional state, the narrator's sense of self shrinks, expands, and is ultimately shattered.

I was drawn to Karimi's story because her stylistic movement from somber realism to frenzied surreality is striking in the literary context of 1980s Afghanistan. In contrast to the socialist realism officially sanctioned by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) at this time,[2] Karimi's story is fiercely dreamlike and symbolic, focusing more on inner psychology than on collective revolutionary struggles. While translating, I was struck by the language

[1] This translation comes from the version of Karimi's text published in the multiple-author short story collection *Dāstān-e zanān-e Afghānistān* (Afghan women's stories), compiled and edited by Mohammad Hussain Mohammadi and published by Inteshārāt-e Tāk in Afghanistan in 2017.

[2] For more, see Nancy Dupree, "Socialist Realism in the Literature of Afghanistan," *Journal of South Asian Literature* 27, no. 2 (1992): 85–114.

the narrator uses to describe his adult life in Soviet-occupied, nominally socialist Afghanistan. He feels "sadness," "depression," and "loneliness"; he aches to be connected to his family but is alone, surrounded only by objects, dreary architecture, and the violence of war. His inability to firmly set down roots—within a family or a broader community—seems to be at the core of his psychological malaise.

At first glance, "Sepia Veils and White-Flowered Branches" seems to defy a classification within the framework of the Islamicate. The story does not focus on cultural or social practices associated with Islam, and the narrator appears to be isolated from any meaningful sense of community, Islamicate or otherwise. The young, male narrator is trying to find his way in the world and understand himself, but this process is made harder by the fact that he is surrounded by war, has very little control over his own future, and is cut off from his family. But even though "Sepia Veils and White-Flowered Branches" could not easily be called a religious story, it contains passing references to God, prayer, and religiously sanctioned dress, through which lingering traces of the Islamicate can be glimpsed. In this way, Karimi's story encourages us to think of the subtle ways in which the Islamicate manifested in late 1980s occupied Afghanistan, when modes of social and cultural cohesion and identity-making were dissolving and being recast in new forms.

Anna Learn would like to thank Forugh Karimi for her thoughtful notes and feedback throughout the story translation process.

The “Makrurian” apartment buildings. Credit to Kiyana Hayeri, Etilaat Roz newspaper.

"Sepia Veils and White-Flowered Branches"

The evening that my mother left, the clouds grew heavy; as the sky darkened, the clouds turned black. I was aimlessly pacing this way and that on the pavement outside our building. Snowflakes softly impressed little white dots on my black overcoat. A vague sadness hung over me, and I was depressed. Finally, I realized that I needed to go home. When I got near our block, I ran into one of the neighbors. He was a young man who lived with his family in the apartment above our own. When he saw me, he asked, "Doctor,[3] did she leave?"

"Yes, she left."

"You're all alone now, aren't you?"

". . ."

"How long will she stay abroad?"

"Six months."

"That's not too long."

He paused, then added, "Still, no matter what, a mother is a mother, and even one day away from her is hard."

And he slapped my shoulder a few times and grandly repeated, "Don't worry, we'll take care of you."

I was so tired and drained of life that it was hard for me to say "thank you," but I still croaked out my thanks. The neighbor didn't move on and said again, "Pray for your mother to get well soon and come back safely."

I managed a smile and used the intensifying snow as an excuse to free myself from his grasp and head home. Even though my mother was almost always working at the hospital and was rarely at home, her absence had a noticeable impact on the apartment's atmosphere. Every object I saw reminded me of her. My heart felt constricted and weighed down by sadness. Wherever my mother was, I was sure that she could sense me missing her at that moment. She would surely get upset, curtains of tears sweeping over her eyes. Her absence

[3] Forugh Karimi told me in our personal correspondence that, in Afghanistan, every medical student is addressed as "Doctor" from the first year onward, as a sign of respect. The narrator is still a medical student and not yet a certified doctor. He is possibly studying at the Kabul Medical Institute, just as Karimi herself was at the time of writing this story.

hit me hardest when I realized that I had to make food and tea for myself. I sat down without eating and found myself staring at a painting that my mother had always loved on the wall in front of me. It was an image of white flowers, framed in wood and covered with glass. The painting had been unremarkable to me up until then, but that night it suddenly seemed so unbearable to me that I had to turn my face away from it.

Right then, the place was quiet and calm. Only the sound of footsteps and the occasional shout came from the floor above. A family with a lot of children lived there. The sounds of their feet always shook our apartment. It seemed like they were perpetually wrestling, dancing, and jumping. At times, this family and their countless children disrupted my studying with their ruckus, and especially during the time that I was first joining the Faculty of Medicine, studying had become almost impossibly difficult for me. My mother would exclaim, "Good for them; they have fit one enormous family into three rooms. We are just two people, but these three rooms are like a prison or a tin can for us. If it weren't for necessity and loneliness, I would never bow my head and submit to these trials and tribulations. A village neighborhood at least gives a person life, but this place is like a prison."

When I recalled my mother's words, the apartment seemed more suffocating and prison-like than ever before. Of course, if it wasn't for the "problem of loneliness," my mother never would have agreed to live in this Makrurian[4] apartment complex with me. My mother loved nature. I remembered that when we lived with my grandfather's family in his large house, my mother would go around watering the gum arabic plants and trees and would cultivate white

[4] A calque on the Russian word "microcommunity," these "Makrurian" blocks of residential complexes were built in western Kabul by the Soviets, beginning in the 1950s and lasting well through the Soviet invasion. In our personal communication, Karimi told me that living in the Makrurian apartments was a childhood dream of hers, since it was understood that only the very wealthy and fashionable could ever dream of securing one of these apartments. However, when Karimi was 18 (right before she wrote this short story), her parents were selected from a pool of candidates to have the right to live in one of the apartments, and so they moved into a three-room Makrurian apartment. Only a short time later, however, the war in Kabul began. Although the Makrurian apartments were an aspirational, modern home for many, as the narrator shows in this story, the apartments were often small, dark, and overcrowded in reality.

flowers in small pots. When I was little, I imagined that the pots of white flowers resembled my father. When I was alone, I would secretly choose one of the pots and talk to it, confiding all of the things in the pot that I guessed I should say to my father. One time, when I was talking to the flowerpot, my cousins were hiding behind the wall, eavesdropping. They burst out laughing from behind the wall and repeated what I had said. I ran to our room, the room where my mother and I stayed, and cried and cried . . .

My cousins always played with one another, but they never let me into their games. Sometimes my grandfather would come over and scold them. He would take me by the hand and make them include me. But as soon as he left, they would make fun of me again, calling me a crybaby.

When we played hide and seek, they would cover my eyes with a blindfold, and everything would go dark. I ran toward their laughter, but I never caught anyone. I would fall down, run blindly, and fall again. A lump would rise in my throat, and finally I would sit down in the dirt and cry at the feet of one of the women in our family. Then all of them would laugh at me . . .

Back then, I hated everything. In that whole place, there were only three things I liked. My grandfather, my mother, and the pots of white flowers that my mother had put in the entryway. And that was because one day my mother had taken me to the children's branch of a public hospital to see a doctor. We had sat in an exam room together. A door opened, and a tall man entered, wearing white clothes, just like my mother would wear when she went to work. When his eyes fell on us, he immediately left the room. Then, for some reason I didn't understand, my mother left too. A while later, the same tall man came in, and knelt down in front of the bench that I was sitting on. I was too embarrassed to look at him and kept my head down. He said my name. I looked up at him. He gazed at me sadly, then asked, "Do you love your mother?"

I nodded my head. Smiling, he said, "Will you also become a doctor like your mother when you grow up?"

I blushed and lowered my head. He kissed my forehead and left. The last thing I remember about him was that he had strands of

white hair at his temples that stood out against his black hair. When I came home that day, it seemed to me that the white flowers in the pot that my mother had put in the entryway bore an uncanny resemblance to the doctor. I thought that if I had a father, he would be like that doctor. From then on, one of the white flowerpots would turn into my father. Every time I felt sad, I watered the flowerpot with my tears, and every time one of my aunts talked badly about my mother, I cried to the flowerpot.

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The sound of dripping water from the boiling tea brought me back to the present. I blew on the tea. For some reason, while I was sipping the tea, I thought of my grandfather. He had a bowl-like Chinese cup that he really liked, and he would never drink tea from any other cup. The cup was covered, inside and out, in designs of white-flowered branches. My grandfather would sit down cross-legged, cradling the cup in a particular way in his fingers, and would drink the tea in a few sips, as if the tea had a special taste when drunk from that particular cup. He gave a small *hm* of satisfaction after every sip. No matter how many cups of tea I drink, I have never found the satisfaction of my grandfather's *hm hm*s. Perhaps such a taste can only be found in my grandfather's Chinese cup. I was 10 when my grandfather died. One day, almost 10 years ago, I was coming home from school, and I saw that there were a lot of women gathered around our house. My grandfather was stretched out in the middle of the room. They had wound a white cloth around his head and had tied it in the back. The women were crying profusely. As hard as I tried, I couldn't get my tears to come, but when I saw that my cousins were crying, I rubbed my eyes and forced out some tears.

Up until that day, I had thought that I was an inconsequential presence to my mother and that I wasn't that important, but on the day of my grandfather's death, I heard my mother say, between sobs, "Oh, father! I am all alone; you left, I am all by myself."

The other women told her, "Don't be so self-centered! God kept your child alive; God has not left you without anyone."

After that, I felt like the man of the house. I had to support my mother; she was depending on me. The day that the Fatiha recitation for my grandfather ended, my uncles and their wives sat down together and all started talking at once. Everyone was saying something, so it was impossible to make out who was saying what. In the middle of all of this, I realized that my oldest aunt was talking about my grandfather's gold watch. But then my uncle and his wife said something to her that I couldn't quite make out, which made her slide her eyes to the edge of her chador and say, "Oh father, they won't give even one watch of yours; they won't allow me even one remembrance of you."

My youngest aunt then asked for my grandfather's gold ring, and the others asked for other things. Amid all of this, my mother was dozing off in a corner, quietly looking on at the others from time to time. She didn't ask for anything. I thought to myself that she must be suffering, and, for some reason, my thoughts drifted to my grandfather's Chinese cup. I went to the kitchen. There was no one there. Stealthily, I found the cup in the black, smoke-stained armoire and smuggled it away with me.

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Until now, my mother had kept the cup among her dearest things in the armoire in her room. I suddenly felt a powerful desire to drink from my grandfather's cup. I tried to convince myself that the idea was senseless. But I couldn't. This strange desire had taken root in me. I went to my mother's room. I knew in which part of the armoire she had put the cup, but when I went to pick it up, I caught sight of a photograph of my father with his gold watch resting among my mother's prized possessions, and it unsettled me; I closed my eyes so as not to see it.

I felt the photograph of my father looming over me as I drank the tea. I hated him. Some time ago, when I imagined that his spirit was hiding in the pots of white flowers, he had been like an impossible dream. Now I had nothing but hate to dedicate to him. One day after the death of my grandfather, I found out that my father had never died; rather, he had abandoned my mother and taken up with another woman. That day, my oldest uncle's wife had kicked

us out of the house that they inherited when my grandfather passed away. She called my mother a "divorced woman." After that, I figured everything out. My mother showed me the photograph of my father for the first time. His face seemed very familiar. Maybe he looked like me. Or maybe he was like that doctor that I had seen years earlier in the hospital, who had kissed my forehead. It was all very odd. Because while I had been imagining that my father was in the pots of white flowers, my mother had also been calling my father her "white flower." When we realized that we had both associated my father with white flowers, we cried together. Years passed. My mother's "white flower" stayed alive in her mind with the same whiteness and freshness, but my "white flower" withered.

***

And now the man's photograph that had been so beloved by my mother had become nauseating to me. I brought the cup of cold tea up to my mouth. Again, I thought I saw my father's image reflected in it. But no, it was my own reflection, strangely similar to his—even the pockmarks on my face looked like the pockmarks that stood out in his photograph. I quickly set down the cup and went to my room. I put myself to bed and covered my head with the quilt. I was upset, and I realized that silly things like a teacup wouldn't calm me down. I was up half the night, battling with myself. An unknown force was pulling me toward my grandfather's cup, which was still sitting on top of the kitchen table, full of tea. It was as if I needed to see my reflection in the tea one more time, or maybe it was that I wanted to observe the similarity between my father and I again. As hard as I tried to force myself to accept that this desire was absurd and senseless, I couldn't.

Although I don't know exactly how it happened, I suddenly realized that I was back in front of the painting of the white flowers. But this time, it didn't affect me. In my sleepy state, I stared at the painting. I sensed that a misty, sepia-colored veil was separating me from my reflection in the painting's glass. My image seemed to double. All of a sudden, I seemed to be drowning in a dream. I fell into the painting. My soul somehow transferred from me into the painting. The person who was sitting in the kitchen, bent over the cup of tea,

had become a body separate from me, a person who looked at me from inside of a wooden frame, from behind a sepia veil.

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Little by little, this other body grew larger in front of my eyes. I realized that it was I who had grown smaller. Small, like a drop of tea. I found myself in a dim, sepia space. It was as if a lamp was sending out a weak light into a dark night. Images of white-flowered branches appeared around me, images that maybe, until 10 years ago, had given that special taste to my grandfather's tea. The images came to life and began to move. The vision drew me in, and I instinctively stepped forward, but something beneath me pulled me straight to the ground, as if my feet were weighted down with heavy stones. The sound of mocking laughter rolled through the sepia space. I felt humiliated. I stood up. The laughter stopped.

I noticed the images again. The white-flowered branches had been replaced by faint images of animals. I wasn't surprised at all. I said, "Why am I not surprised?"

And then I laughed. The sound of my words and laughter echoed in the space and several times I heard "Why am I not surprised? Why am I not surprised? . . . Why?"

"I am so good, better than everyone else. The others are so hateful."

I shivered. Because the sound did not come from me, some unknown person was speaking, like a voice from the past. Then the unknown voice echoed in the space again: "Me! Me! Me! Oh, I am the most lovable!"

The echo of "Me! Me! Me! Oh, I am the most lovable!" blew through the space like a gust of wind. Suddenly the faint images of the animals took on life and started to move. I saw a cat chasing a mouse, a fox chasing the cat, and a great big panther running after the fox. I heard the sound of them panting. All of them were running in a circle. Their running had no end. Beetles and cockroaches were crushed and ground into powder beneath their feet. For a moment it seemed to me that only the mouse had no purpose. But, no, the mouse was running after the panther. For the first time, I was surprised. Invisible hands started to sweep brooms in the air, and the

brooms moved toward the animals. The broom that went in front of the panther, moved by an invisible hand, pushed the panther toward the fox, and the broom that was going in front of the fox pushed it toward the cat, and all of the other brooms pushed the cat toward the mouse, and the mouse toward the panther.

Once again, the cackling laughter filled the sepia space. I looked up. The face of the person on the other side of the veil filled the sepia sky, and brooms were hanging from his pockmarks. I was afraid. I looked down. There was no sign of the animals, and once again, the white-flowered branches appeared on the walls around me, which had, at one time, given my grandfather's tea its special taste.

The cackling fell silent. Terror enveloped me and chained my feet down. I couldn't turn around, for fear of falling. The ground all around me had transformed into large, broken rocks, and a deathly silence reigned, adding to my terror and fear. The thought of escape broke my chains of fear, and I stepped forward. I managed one step, two steps, three steps, but I fell on the fourth step, and my body crashed into the rocks. Mocking laughter once again resounded throughout the space. I felt humiliated. I tried to get up. The laughter stopped. But my heart had been wounded. Suddenly, I saw that the white-flowered branches that appeared on the walls had been overtaken by white wisps. A burnt, smokey smell reached my nose. I suspected that the white wisps around me were clouds or gunpowder and that the burning smell was smoke. Little by little, this mixed with the smell of rotten blood and the sound of my mother crying. The clouds mixed together with the sounds of sobbing. The clouds started to move around me. There were so many of them. They went this way and that, and, from a distance, I saw my mother crying among pots of white flowers as the clouds swirled around her. Then the clouds separated us. Or maybe it was smoke or gunpowder that came between us. An echo rang out in the sepia space: "Me! Me! . . . Oh, I am the most lovable!" mixing with the mocking laughter. My terror rose, but over time, the sounds became less frequent, and in the distance between them, I made out familiar words and sounds:

"Pots of white flowers."

"Oh, I am the most lovable."

"Beautiful, beautiful, I am beautiful."

"You are so ugly and clumsy!"

"Brooms . . . brooms!"

The echoes grew louder and became terrifying as they condensed. My surroundings began to shake. I ran in horror. I ran without a goal. But every time I stepped forward, I tripped on the rocks and fell down hard. Suddenly, the clouds combined with the billowing masses of smoke and gunpowder, and in that instant, a beautiful, fairytale-like body appeared, smiling entrancingly. Then there was a bolt of lightning, but its sound was just like thunder, like the sound of something breaking.

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I came to. My grandfather's teacup was in front of me. My reflection still wasn't clear in the tea. The painting of the white flowers had fallen from the wall in front of me, and the glass had shattered.

The Story of Sarwan and Farijan as told variously by the people of Punjab

Translated by Tara Dhaliwal

Translator's Preface

Sarwan and Farijan[1] tells the story of the murder of the British Resident to the Mughal court, William Fraser (Farijan/Faridan/Pharijan), and his improper conduct with an Indian woman, Sarwan. Although I choose to refer to it as improper conduct, during the colonial era, it was utterly normal for colonial officers to take on Indian wives and concubines, possibly against the women's will, as this tale suggests.[2] The Sarwan story, which has three different versions and forms (one short story and two songs), comes to us from oral accounts collected by another colonial British officer, Sir Richard Carnac Temple.[3] The short story explicitly mentions Fraser's murder that occurred in 1835, whereas the two songs focus on Farijan's forceful abduction of Sarwan. Temple transliterated and translated over 50 stories, including that of Sarwan and Farijan, into a three-volume collection he titled *The Legends of the Panjâb*.[4] The British Library in London houses the original manuscripts of these stories, and this translation draws

[1] The authorship is not clear for each one since they were told orally, but from the notes in the manuscript, we find that Richard Carnac Temple's *munshi* copied down the first version from the words of a farmer in Karnal (present-day India) on February 22, 1884. The second version is from Lala Ganeshi Lal, a banker from Ambala, who shared the song with Temple in 1883, although it is not clear if he is the author. The final version is from the Nawab of Loharu, Alauddin Ahmad Khan, who presented this version in 1872 to another colonial officer, J. G. Delmerick, who passed it on to Temple.

[2] There is also much evidence in scholarly literature that speaks to William Fraser's particular interest in "native" women and mentions one of his other mistresses, Amiban, with whom he had children as well. He chose to conceal this fact from his parents. For more information, see Mildred Archer and Toby Falk, *India Revealed: The Art and Adventures of James and William Fraser, 1801–35* (Cassell, 1989), 18. This page also includes a possible illustration of her.

[3] R. C. Temple was born in India to another colonial administrator, Sir Richard Temple (who was once governor of the Bombay Presidency.) R .C. Temple was posted as cantonment magistrate for the British Indian Army in the Punjab Province during the 1870s and 1880s and then moved to Burma. He was editor and manager of *The Indian Antiquary* journal among many other publications.

[4] The version I am consulting is Richard Carnac Temple, *The Legends of the Panjâb*, 3 vols. (Arno Press, 1977). The stories were first published between 1884 and 1900 by Education Society's Press (Bombay) and Trübner & Co. (London).

directly from these manuscripts, written down primarily by Temple's *munshi* or secretary, Chaina Mull, in the late 1800s.[5]

I am choosing to disregard Temple's translation since he foregrounds many of the stories with a specific, colonial contextualization and with British officers and Victorian audiences in mind.[6] The Sarwan and Farijan story, as well as the larger collection, representing folklore in 1800s Punjab, allows us to imagine a particular public sphere that was forming in colonial India, in which the British officers were becoming a part of the landscape along with other Indian characters, such that folklore and other tales began to incorporate them.

My intent here is to foreground the story that provides an alternative historical account, which stands in opposition to the colonial court inquiry and ruling around Fraser's murder, as well as Temple's introduction to the story. In the official record cited by Temple, the murder was found to be due to "personal spite" instigated by the Nawab of Loharu,[7] Shamsuddin Khan, on March 22, 1835, but undertaken by a hired assassin, Karim Khan.[8] However, these stories, especially version 1, which is narrated by a local farmer, tell us that the cause may have been Fraser's forceful abduction of Sarwan, who was already married to another man. Moreover, Temple disparagingly mentions that the songs from versions 2 and 3 were especially popular among courtesans and that they also sang in praise of Fraser's killer. This further speaks to the account popular with the masses,[9] especially women, whose opinions and histories are often overlooked, and we may not have had access to these voices without these tales. The folklore recorded here gives us access to these

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[5] Manuscript notes for Richard Carnac Temple's book *The Legends of the Panjâb* consisting of the original documents for volumes I and II as copied down chiefly in Punjabi (mostly in Persian script) and Urdu by clerks employed by Temple, 1800s, MSS Eur F98/4, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library.

[6] He writes, for example, about the utility of some of the stories for understanding and passing the language exams for British officials in the subcontinent.

[7] Loharu was a small princely state near Jind, in the Delhi Division.

[8] Both Shamsuddin and Karim Khan were executed for Fraser's murder. Temple, *Legends of the Panjâb*, 2:365.

[9] The title of version 1 specifically says it is "an account of the common people."

alternative voices and histories. All of this helps us imagine a rich Islamicate space in 19th-century North India that had various players and political powers, diversity of opinion, linguistic multiplicity, complex ties to religion, and so much more.

Oral storytelling[10] was a well-established mode of narration within India that entered the global market and discourse through print media. Translations of "indigenous" or "native" tales and/or religion and religious discourse were required reading for colonial officers who were either already in the subcontinent or were training to serve in South Asia, since they needed to understand the minds and practices of their subjects. There was also a need to classify and simplify diverse genres and languages into something easily digestible. For instance, Temple calls his collection the *The Legends of the Panjâb*, but a number of them are not in the Punjabi language and instead represent languages from across the territory administered as Punjab at the time, including Haryanvi, Baloch, Sirmori, Kyonthali, and so on. "Sarwan and Farijan" is primarily narrated in Urdu/Hindi and what could be understood as Haryanvi dialects of Punjabi, adding variety to the linguistic and social scene and highlighting differences between current conceptions of region and language (since Haryana was not formed until 1966) and the ones prevalent in the 19th-century pre-partition, colonial India.[11]

The Sarwan story reflects a unique cultural amalgamation that occurred in the Islamicate space of 19th-century North India. The songs mention that Fraser worshipped the five pirs/saints (*pānchon pīr manāye*). This is a common theme across various characters in different stories from folklore collections from the Punjab and refers to five Sufi saints who were popular in Punjab and North India.[12]

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[10] Kahani, Hikayat, Geet, Qissa, Waar, Swang, etc. are just some genres of storytelling mentioned in the manuscript.

[11] The present-day Indian state of Haryana was considered a part of Punjab at the time.

[12] According to Alauddin Ahmad Khan, the writer of version 3 who was a later Nawab of Loharu, they were "Qutbuddin [Bakhtiar Kaki], Muinuddin [Chisti], Nizamuddin [Auliya], Nasiruddin Shah [Hussain Shahi?], and Nasiruddin Mahmud, Son of Iltumish." Manuscript notes, 318. Generally, they are said to be Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, Muinuddin Chisti, Fariduddin Ganjshakar, Bahauddin Zakariya, and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (or sometimes Nizamuddin Auliya).

Moreover, accounts of Fraser during his post in Delhi mention that he had "gone native" because he kept a beard and was vegetarian.[13] Through these details from the stories and other personal accounts, readers can ascertain that Fraser may have believed in and adopted aspects of Islam or Hinduism (the Sufi saints were worshipped and venerated across the faiths), in addition to his Scottish Protestant beliefs.[14] Versions 2 and 3 also create a juxtaposition between Indian dress and customs and English ones by telling Sarwan to forget her previous customs and habits and adopt the Western ones. Version 2 even tells Faridan (Fraser) to take on Indian customs, which highlights the exchange between cultures and practices that resulted from the colonial encounter. In the translation, I chose to keep the original words for the dress—for example, *lehenga* or *dhoti*—with footnotes to denote what they mean to intentionally provide the reader with a feel for the original language.

There are countless other aspects and details that can be ascertained from the folkloric tales, but it is my hope that the three versions of this story allow for a glimpse into this complex Islamicate world and invite the reader to explore its various intricacies and intersections that defied strict boundaries.

[13] A British lady, Lady Nugent, is shocked "by their beards and the fact that they had given up eating pork or beef. She reproved them for being 'as much Hindoo as Christian' and reminded them of the 'religion they were brought up to.'" Archer and Falk, *India Revealed*, 16.

[14] French botanist Victor Jacquemont wrote, "He [William] has six or seven legitimate wives, but they all live together, some fifty leagues from Delhi and do as they like. He must have as many children as the King of Persia, but they are all Hindu or Moslems according to the religion of their mamas." Quoted in Archer and Falk, *India Revealed*, 18.

Translations

Version 1. The account of the murder of Farijan Saab as per the account of the common people

[*Orally told by Maan Singh, a zamindar (landholder/farmer) from Nighdu/Naghdu, in the district of Karnal*[15].]

Ami Chand, an extremely handsome landholder from the village of Ghughana,[16] in the Karnal district, had been imprisoned for some reason. In the year that the canal was being dug[17] in Karnal, Sahib Bahadur [Farijan] went to inspect the ongoing work. There he saw Ami Chand digging dirt [for the canals]. Upon seeing him, he called for the prison warden and said to him, "Look what a pity it is that such a beautiful young man has been arrested and is now digging dirt." As Sahib Bahadur mentioned his beauty a few times, the prison warden remarked, "Sir, his handsomeness is no match for his sister, who is extremely gorgeous." Sahib Bahadur then longed to see her. That night, Sahib Bahadur sent for Ami Chand and said to him, "I will release you from your imprisonment, appoint you to a good post, and will reward you, on the condition that you bring your sister to me." Ami Chand agreed to this, and Sahib Bahadur removed the chains from his feet. He gave him one of his horses and a servant, and Ami Chand went off on horseback to his village.

The villagers were surprised to see Ami Chand, and they questioned him about his presence since there was still much time left on his sentence. He did not disclose the whole picture and instead made up a loose tale about his valor and suggested he was released on account of it. Ami Chand went to his house and reunited with his mother but did not find his sister there. After staying there two days, he told his mother that he really wanted to see his sister, so his mother told him to go to her husband's house if he wanted to meet her.

Accordingly, he went there and told his sister that their mother was very unwell and was, in fact, close to dying. His sister said that it was not up to her own discretion to go; therefore, Ami Chand asked

[15] Present-day Haryana.

[16] Closer to Gurgaon/Delhi.

[17] The digging occurred between 1817 and 1830.

his brother-in-law, who refused to send his wife with him. In secret, Ami Chand told his sister that she should seize upon this one last opportunity to see her mother's face. His sister told him to go to a certain well nearby and that she would come there with the excuse of filling some water and would then go along with him to see her ailing mother. When she got to the well, she left the pot she had carried with her there, and the two of them climbed onto the horse and took off, but he did not take her to their mother's house. Instead, he took her to the spot where Sahib Bahadur was encamped instead.

When Ami Chand's brother-in-law came back to his house from the fields, he did not find his wife there, so he became suspicious that perhaps Sarwan had gone with her brother. He went to his in-laws' place and found his mother-in-law in good health and asked her about his wife's whereabouts. She said that neither Sarwan nor Ami Chand were there. Therefore, he searched extensively and finally found out from someone that Farijan Sahib Bahadur had become desirous of Sarwan and Ami Chand had taken her to him. When he heard this, he lost his senses and decided to return to his village. Once there, he gathered a group of a few men and went to Sahib Bahadur's encampment. He found the situation there to be exactly as he had been told. He petitioned Sahib Bahadur saying, "When you, as the ruler, do something like this, then your subjects will be destroyed." Sahib Bahadur dismissed them, and so they returned to their village. After a short time Sarwan's husband found the opportunity and murdered Sahib Bahadur.

Version 2. Song

Faridan came from faraway Calcutta, worshipping the Five Saints,
Old Faridan on his cropped-tailed horse went about looking for Sarwan.
He went to five places in Delhi, and the sixth in Gunghana[18] village.
His tent was pitched by the white well, the pegs securely fastened.

[18] Spelled variously across the versions.

The messengers searched street by street for Sarwan, but she was not found.
Ami Chand was captured while grazing the cattle, his arms tied behind him.
"Free my arms, O Faridan, and I will tell you where Sarwan is."
"She went out of the main street to the millet field by the smaller lane."
Sarwan was caught cutting the millet with her sickle by her side.
Her stool was perched on her head, her spinning wheel under her arm with a thread hanging down.
Her cup in her hand and her comb in her cup, she ran to the barber's wife,
"Braid my tangled hair, he is here to take me away."
"O my sisters, come and see your friend, for we shall not meet again."
He caught her hand and grabbed her by the waist and put her in the elephant carriage.
Sitting upon the elephant, Sarwan's tears slowly streamed down her face.
"May the city of Gunghana always be settled, but may you not be settled, O Ami Chand!
From midnight till dawn, she stayed up counting the stars forlornly.
Sweets were distributed to the armies[19] in the name of the Five *Pirs*/Saints.
"Leave behind wearing your *lehenga*,[20] my Sarwan, and embrace a skirt instead."
"Leave behind carrying your wicker basket, my Sarwan, and start loving a hat instead."
"Leave behind wearing your bodice, my Sarwan, and start loving a petticoat instead."
"Leave behind sitting on a stool, my Sarwan, and start loving a chair instead."
"Tearfully leave behind wearing a hat and tie on a turban instead."

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[19] The word here could be read differently to say "the good people."
[20] Indian traditional skirt.

"Tearfully leave behind wearing trousers and wear a *dhoti*[21] instead."
"Tearfully leave behind wearing a coat and wear a quilt instead,"
"Tearfully leave behind wearing boots and start loving Indian shoes/ *jutti* instead."
"Leave behind your frivolous speech, Faridan, and use plain speech instead."

Version 3. From the Nawab of Loharu, Alauddin Ahmad Khan: The Song of Sarwan

Pharijan left from faraway Calcutta, worshipping the Five Saints/ *Pirs*.
He searched five places in Delhi, and the sixth he went to Gangana village.
He pitched his tent by the white well, the pegs securely fastened.
Min Chand was apprehended while smoking his hookah, his hands chained up.
"You have one thing, Min Chand, that no one else has."
"If it is mine, I will give it, Pharijan, but I cannot give what is not mine."
God knows, dear, he worshipped the Five Pirs.[22]
"Tell me the secret of where Sarwan is hidden, and I will reward you with an elephant."
The turncoat[23] revealed the secret; Sarwan was in the millet field.
Upon his white horse went brown Pharijan, trampling through the millet field.
He found Sarwan cutting the millet, with her sickle by her side.
He grabbed her hands and sat her on her horse, weeping bitterly.
She had cut five sheaves of millet but could not cut the sixth.

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[21] A large piece of unstitched fabric usually fashioned into pants.

[22] Repeating refrain; the original text does not place it after every stanza as Temple does in his translation. I, instead, include it wherever Chaina Mull, the *munshi*, included it in his transcript of the original.

[23] The Original "text" mentions that it was someone from within the house, i.e., Ami Chand, here Min Chand.

"I will make your father a *Chaudhri*,[24] your brother a *thanedar*."[25]
"Go see your aunts [and say goodbye], but Min Chand you will not see."
Min Chand, if you want to see her, see her now, you will not see her after this.
A cup in her hand, a comb in the cup, she went to the barber's house.
God knows, dear, he worshipped the Five Pirs.
"Braid my tangled hair, O barber's wife, for this will be the last time."
He took her hand and seated her on the elephant carriage, weeping like a deer.
From midnight till the break of dawn, she stayed up forlornly counting the stars.
"Leave behind sitting on a stool, Sarwan, learn to sit on a chair."
God knows, dear, he worshipped the Five Pirs.
"Give up your *lehenga*, Sarwan, and learn to wear a skirt."
Sarwan went off in the midst of the goldsmiths and bangle-makers.
"I will make you a gold ornament of five gold pieces for your forehead."[26]
"I will make you a nose-ring of eighty gold pieces glittering with jewels."
"I will make you a skirt of eighty yards to cover yourself."
"You have insulted my five brothers,[27] and they will never regain their honor again."
The older brother agreed to giving her up; the younger would not have done so.
Five villages were within their control, but Min Chand could not be controlled.
Sarwan escaped from the small lane to the main street.

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[24] Headman.

[25] A police officer.

[26] The term in the original is *Mohr*, or gold coin.

[27] It literally says "pulled off the turbans," which is idiomatic but also shows the importance of clothes and outfits to the conceptions of identity, which is also seen throughout the songs.

The messengers searched through all the streets, and the police
searched every house for her.
All the way from Calcutta came Pharijan, worshipping the Five
Saints,
God knows, dear, he worshipped the Five Pirs.

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“Cries of Women, Dance of Flames:” Farzad Kamangar’s Letter from Prison on International Women’s Day

Translated by Tyler Fisher and Haidar Khezri

Translators' Preface

Farzad Kamangar, a Kurdish schoolteacher, poet, journalist, and activist, was born in the city of Kamyaran in the Kurdistan Province of western Iran. While imprisoned by the Islamic Republic of Iran for four years, and even after being sentenced to death, Kamangar continued to advocate for human rights, women's rights, and greater cultural and political self-determination for Iran's minority communities via highly poetic letters that he smuggled out of prison, sometimes in fragments. His letters display his dual commitment to beautiful literary expression and to unflinching documentation of human rights abuses in Iranian Kurdistan. After years of imprisonment and torture, Kamangar was executed, at age 35, along with four other political prisoners on May 9, 2010, in Iran's notorious Evin Prison on charges of *moharebeh* (waging war against God) and for undermining national security.

Prisons have proved to be extraordinarily fertile sources of literature across the history and geographies of the Middle East and Western Asia. At least a third of the Judeo-Christian Bible was penned in carceral contexts, most notably the Apostle Paul's four "Prison Epistles." In the Islamic world of the Middle Ages, Arabic verse composed in prison, *rūmīyāt*, gave rise to the genre of Persian poetry known as *habsīyāt*, which has significant repercussions in modern Kurdish literature. Even the Kurdish national anthem, "Ey Reqîb," was written in prison. Masterpieces of world literature more broadly, including *Don Quixote*, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Nelson Mandela's autobiography, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," had their genesis behind bars. The experience of imprisonment offers a context for the expression of heightened passions restrained, wherein the act of writing itself becomes a liberating outlet for repressed causes, lofty ideals, unbounded hope, and stark physicality cast in sharp relief. The physical restraints imposed on incarcerated authors (walls, gates, bars, razor wire) parallel and reinforce the limitations on written expression within that context (constraints on length, candor, choice of language, physical media). Such circumstances, along with the formal limits inherent in any literary discourse, can galvanize an intensely expressive, purposeful,

and meaningful text. Literature conceived in confinement has transcended carceral and geographical boundaries, achieving extraordinary depth and extramural resonance.

Within this tradition of "prison literature," Farzad Kamangar's letters from prison (more than a dozen extant letters) are especially poignant. The letter presented here, written on the occasion of International Women's Day 2008, merits special attention for how it connects the conditions of women in Iran (and globally) with the author's personal experience as a multiply marginalized Kurd in Iran. Although composed with reference to a particular occasion, the letter stretches beyond the particular to articulate a timeless, broadly encompassing vision. Writing his letter in Farsi, Kamangar, as a non-Shiʿa Kurd, negotiates the boundaries of his stateless identity, a minority by religious sect, ethnicity, and language. This letter poetically extends the consideration of the Kurdish plight to align with that of the letter's addressee. Kamangar addresses the letter "to the phoenixes of our land," a reference "to the high rate of self-immolation among the women of [his] city." While not presuming to understand Kurdish women's experience fully, Kamangar asserts an array of symmetries in his representation of their condition and his own, relegated to a lower tier of human rights and sociopolitical regard, actively targeted for not conforming fully to Iran's state-imposed cultural norms. The depiction of symmetries achieves not a conflation but an insightful, provocative comparison. The oppression of women is, the letter argues, not merely analogous to that of the Kurds in Iran but also an extension of it, rendering Kurdish women keenly vulnerable to persecution. Kamangar knew this all too well; a Kurdish woman, Shirin Alam Holi (1981–2010), was one of the four political prisoners later executed alongside him.

Although nearly two decades have passed since the letter's composition, it is timelier and more relevant than ever. Remarkably prescient, Kamangar's words portend the ongoing movement known as "Woman, Life, Freedom" (*Jin, Jîyan, Azadî*). Ignited by the death of a 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman, Jîna Mahsa Amini, who came from the same Kurdish province as Kamangar and died in police custody in 2022 after being detained by "morality police" for not properly covering her hair, this movement demonstrates peacefully

against Iran's "gender apartheid." At the time of translating this letter, Kurdish women Verisheh Moradi (Werîşe Mûradî) and Pakhshan Azizi remain on death row in the same prison where Kamangar was held, facing execution on charges of *moharebeh* under the same Revolutionary judges, as part of the state's repressive retaliations against the Woman, Life, Freedom movement.

This is as much a prose poem as a letter. Harnessing the potentials and tensions inherent in the epistolary form, Kamangar sets the collective addressee alongside invocations of an individual, imagined lover. The letter recognizes and articulates the commonalities across personal, individual experience and the shared conditions of Iran's minority communities. It suggests commonalities across time and place, at once intensely local or regional and also broadly global, bridging the past and the present. The technique invites readers to recognize universals in the particulars, collective patterns in the individual circumstances. To this end, Kamangar's letter includes references to specific poets and singers. He cites modern Persian and Kurdish poems and songs, by men and women, some renowned and others niche or lesser known: Forugh Farrokhzad, the most influential Persian woman poet of the 20th century; Hasan Golnaraghi, whose iconic renderings of classical and popular Persian songs evoke nostalgia; Abdullah Goran, who modernized Kurdish poetry and suffered imprisonment for his political and cultural activism; Hemin Mukriyani, the pen name of a "national poet" of the short-lived Republic of Kurdistan; and Qubadi Jali Zadeh, a contemporary poet from the Kurdish region of Iraq. Some of these references Kamangar explains in footnotes; others he leaves unexplained. However, it is not entirely necessary for a reader to recognize the references in order to appreciate the letter's intertextual depth and the overall effects it creates via these references. A common trait among all the authors the letter invokes is that their work represents resistance to state-imposed belief and state-sanctioned art. And a significant pattern emerges among the references: a geography of Kurdistan that encompasses Iraqi (Southern) Kurdistan and Iranian (Eastern) Kurdistan, creating an imagined, aspirational geography of the Kurdish homeland that transcends official, artificial nation-state borders. Yearning for the impossible beyond prison walls and political history,

Kamangar offers a kaleidoscopic impression of wide-ranging, multilingual breadth, liberating in its scope and variety across ethno-religious categories and time periods.

As part of a larger project that aims to translate into English all of Kamangar's letters from prison, we selected this letter to translate as an especially timely, representative specimen of that corpus. This particular letter, which has not been previously translated into English in full, gives voice to Kamangar's ethnolinguistic homeland while channeling the ironies of writing in a hegemonic language. His letter on International Women's Day offers a synthesis of solidarity with those who cannot yet exercise full, fundamental human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Our English translation seeks to preserve the letter's stylistic artistry and thematic interplay.

Farzad Kamangar with his students.

Kamangar's Letter from Prison on International Women's Day

To the phoenixes of our land,[1] March 2008:

Hello, my Darling! It is Women's Day, the day I always await for what seems like God's eternity.

On this day, instead of pressing my sprig of daffodils into your kind hands, I offer a gift to your imagination, which is more varied and capricious than your hair tossing free in the wind. Two years have passed since my hands have encountered the color of violets or the scent of jasmine. For two years, my eyes, restless, have sought a few tears of joy and happiness. You know as well as I, that I count the minutes every day of the year to this day, but today I ponder what gift for you is fitting for this day: the songs "Kiss Me"[2] or "Pasha's Garden,"[3] or a candle to kindle our memories? But, my Darling, you neither hear the sound of my song, nor can I light a candle for you. Here the warden of the walls also imprisons the candles, and as for poetry, I do not possess the finesse of that "wise lover who breathes the soul of love into the body of the wind so that it may caress your clothes."[4]

Nor can I compose for you a ghazal whose meter measures your thousand years of pain, whose rhyme mirrors the innocence of your gaze. Even if I could, you would not be able to sing in our native Kurdish; otherwise, like Hemin's lovelorn cry,[5] I would invite you to

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[1] A letter to an imaginary lover. [Except where indicated by square brackets, the footnotes are Kamangar's own.]
The letter's address refers to the high rate of self-immolation among women of my city, a heartbreaking pain that has burdened my mind since childhood.

[2] "Kiss Me" by Hasan Golnaraghi.

[3] "Baghche Pasha" is Abdullah Goran's poetic masterpiece, immortalized in Homer Dizayi's velvet voice. It is the story of a girl who longs for a flower, yellow and red. Her lover must enter the king's flower garden to find such a flower, and he brings her one, yellow and red, but the red is the color of the young man's blood, for he has been shot.

[4] A reference to the master Qubadi Jali Zadeh, the Sulaymani poet of delicate imagination, and one of his beautiful poems.

[5] [The original text has a superscript 5 here but lacks a corresponding footnote. The lovelorn cry, or *naleh*, by Hemin Mukriyani (1921–86) refers to a famous Kurdish poem that has been covered by many singers.]

be the guest of the moonlight every night. But I must, of necessity, write to you in the Persian of Forugh Farrokhzad so you will not say, "No one thinks of the flowers" or "My heart is heavy"; I write to say that I, too, "believe in the beginning of the year's 'Fifth Season.'"

But this is the secret of my restless pondering, which you know as clear as day: My budding Flower, I was born in a land whose women are like all the women of the world—not half of mankind, not half of this world, but half of the heavens. I cried the newborn's first cry in this land, in unison with the cries of women who, amid the dance of flames, taught the lesson of protest and not surrendering to fire.

The bud of a baby's first smile bloomed on my lips when the old oak trees envied the secret of the hardy resilience of the women of my land, and I set my life's first toddling steps on the same path that tulips had already cleansed with morning dew, where women of my land had set firm steps on the harshest, treacherous peaks of life and history.

Women still whisper the song of love and resistance in the ears of the walls. It is the lullaby of the children of my land, the same hymn that humans once whispered to Ashtoreth and Ishtar, the first gods of humanity.

So how can your day not be both Eid al-Adha, my Feast of Sacrifice, and Nowruz, my New Year's Day? Many like you have been waiting at the window for years for their loved ones to return, no matter when, perhaps with the first snow of winter, when they invite sparrows to a banquet of loneliness with a handful of wheat, or when they sweep the house for the sparrows' return, or perhaps when they invite God to their Iftar table. Wait for me, too, for such a day, with your dress the color of the sky and the softness of Osman's "Siya Chamane" songs[6] and wild silver sage[7] and a necklace of cloves, because cloves remind me of the scent of woman, the scent of my land, the scent of eternity—in a word, the scent of you. Until then, I entrust you to the Creator of dew and rain.

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[6] "Siya Chamane": a very beautiful genre of Kurdish song that features descriptions of nature and the beloved. Osman Hawrami is the undisputed, immortal master of this type of song.

[7] *barzarn*: a very fragrant, rare flower that grows on the heights of Mount Shaho.

Ghazals in Malayalam

Translated by Ibrahim Badshah

Translator's Preface

In my teenage years of living in Kerala, the southwest coast of the Indian subcontinent, the word *ghazal* for me was synonymous with the songs sung by Umbayee, the legendary Malayalam ghazal singer. In my imagination of ghazals, the performers always used a harmonium and tabla. They sat on the stage, wearing kurtas and sleeveless jackets with shawls around their necks, and sang melodies about love and longing. Any such performances of love songs in this style, sitting down and accompanied by the harmonium, became ghazals in my imagination. It was only after moving to Delhi in 2017 that I got to know the genre of ghazals up close, the expanse of their sensibilities, and their rich tradition in Urdu. I spent days and nights obsessing over the magical feel of singers such as Mehdi Hassan, Ghulam Ali, Jagjit Singh, Farida Khanum, and Abida Parveen. The city also gave me the occasional chance to listen to performances by popular singers such as Radhika Chopra, Shakeel Ahmad, and Sithara. I encountered numerous such singers and poets as I frequented literary festivals in Central Park and Urdu Ghar, such as the Jashn-e-Rekhta festival.

Yet it took me many more years to learn about the history of ghazals and the strict formal characteristics that Urdu poets followed, as well as the evolution of ghazals across the languages and literary traditions. Years later, taking a graduate seminar on medieval poetics at the University of Houston, I decided to connect all these dots—my decade-long interests in classical Arabic poetry, Urdu ghazals, and the Malayalam ghazal albums—and wrote a paper delineating the journey of ghazal. My translations here, therefore, were initially the results of that critical pursuit. The attempt to translate them is part of the activity of connecting the dots: an attempt to see the larger picture, to see these poems in relation to one another. Particularly from the vantage point of the world literature debate, this "peripheral" channel of literary circulation—which was "central" in the precolonial times—is indeed an interesting case. Such comparison, however, is not an attempt to privilege one form over the other or to pass judgment on which of these is real and which is imposter. Rather, I want to look at these distinct traditions on their own terms, which

are influencing and being influenced by adjacent traditions. To this end, it is generative to begin this inquiry from classical Arabic poetry.

Ghazal is believed to have derived from pre-Islamic Arabic qasida tradition. The classical qasida, a polythematic ode that can be traced back to circa 500 CE, started with a *nasib*, in which the poet would lament the loss of a beloved and recall his romantic adventures in an erotic manner, often recollecting their conversations. During the Umayyad period (seventh–eighth centuries CE), a major shift happened in this tradition. According to the literary historian Hanna Al-Fakhouri,[1] four major changes happened during this period: (a) The ghazal became a stand-alone genre, composed for its own sake, and called thus; (b) it became more meaningful compared to the nasib; (c) it became more vernacular, using layman's language; and (d) its rhythm became more sophisticated. Nasibs, which narrated the external realities of separation and the details of sexual encounters, gave way to ghazals, which are more emotional and reflect the poet's interiority in an everyday language. Notably, the ghazal did not have a distinct form besides the form of classical Arabic poetry.

This, however, changed when ghazal traveled to Persia. As Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth explain, the ghazal came to be defined "exclusively through formal criteria: five to twelve verses; continuous rhyme plus a double rhyme in the first verse; often echo rhyme (*radif*) as well as the mentioning of the poet's pen-name in the last verse (*takhallus*)."[2] In the Persian tradition, a couplet was called *sher*, the first couplet *matla*, and the concluding couplet *maqta*. As another major shift, the theme of love was often replaced by several other subjects, including wine, devotion, and panegyrics (composed by later poets, such as Jalaluddin Rumi in the 13th century and Hafiz Shirazi in the 14th century). These two new trends were instrumental in bringing about the understanding of the genre of ghazal based solely on form, rather than subject matter, especially as the genre

[1] See Hanna Al-Fakhouri, *Tarīkh al-Adab al-ʿArabi* (تاريخ الأدب العربي) (*The History of Arabic Literature*), (St. Paul Press, 1951), 247–52.

[2] Couplets in these ghazals end with the same word, which will be the *radif* of the ghazal. Right before the *radif*, there will be a rhyme, known as *qāfiya*. See Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth's introduction to *Ghazal as World Literature I: Transformations of a Literary Genre* (Ergon Verlag, 2005), 19.

traveled to the Indian subcontinent. As Anisur Rahman puts it, "It was in India that the ghazal found its most hospitable destination."[3] Ghazals in India were first written in Persian, then in Urdu starting in the 16th century, rigorously following the formal characteristics brought by the Persian tradition. A significant shift in Urdu tradition was an increase in musical adaptations of ghazals. From the mid-20th century, ghazal was closely associated with the performances by singers who specialized in this genre, gaining an unprecedented scale of fame and recognition arguably due to the prevalence of recording technology.

It is from this singing tradition or genre of music, rather than the age-old poetic tradition, that Malayalam ghazals took their inspiration. This history is crucial to understanding Malayalam ghazals. P. A. Ibrahim, known by his pseudonym Umbayee, popularized ghazals in Kerala, first by singing Urdu ghazals and later by producing Malayalam ghazal albums. However, the first album of ghazals that he produced in Kerala, titled *Aadaab* (1992), was in Urdu, a language the vast majority of the Kerala population did not understand. Malayalam ghazal had to wait a few more years to appear. It was Venu V. Desam who wrote the first known ghazals in Malayalam, and Umbayee rendered them and produced the album in 1998 titled *Pranamam*. This album set the trend for the ones to come, by inventing a unique style that blended nature and love, and by not adhering to the rules of Urdu ghazal form. That is not to say the album was denouncing the ghazal's characteristics. These compositions were mostly written as independent couplets, as was the case in all the preceding traditions, including the qasida tradition of Arabic. They also follow a meter and have rhymes; some of them have the echo rhyme at least in part, and some even include the poet's name in the final couplet. That was the beginning; the following years witnessed several ghazal albums appearing in Malayalam, in which the poets experimented with the form in varying degrees. The translations included here are representative of these various trends in Malayalam ghazals, and they make a fair attempt to show

[3] See Anisur Rahman, ed. and trans., *Hazaaron Khwahishein Aisi: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals* (HarperCollins Publishers India, 2019), 15.

the formal characteristics of these compositions, while also showing the thematic unity they have maintained.

Umbayee had a monopoly in Malayalam ghazal performances for over a decade and produced more than 20 albums of ghazals during his lifetime, collaborating with prominent poets such as ONV Kurup, K. Satchidanandan, and Yusufali Kechery. Sachidanandan's collection of ghazals, titled *Ghazalukal Geethangal* (2004), attempted to present the Malayalam ghazal as a unique form of its kind, which the author defined as something closer to Azad Ghazal (free ghazal) and Rabindra Sangeet (the songs by Rabindranath Tagore). Moreover, Satchidanandan expressed his skepticism toward bringing political themes into ghazals. His compositions centered on the themes of love, longing, nature, childhood, and nostalgia. ONV Kurup also wrote ghazals in a similar fashion—around the theme of love—and built the longest partnership with Umbayee. The latter's fame as the singer of love songs also defined ghazals, and despite the awareness of the question of form, these songs were daringly called ghazals. As the case of these poets shows, early compositions of Malayalam ghazals were defined thematically.

According to Shabeer Rarangoth,[4] the first Malayalam ghazal in the "true sense of the term" was Shahabaz Aman's "Sajini," included in a 2011 album with the same title. Sticking with the rules of *radif*, *qāfiya*, and *takhallus*, the poet challenged claims that the Malayalam language was inadequate to follow the rules of Urdu ghazal. Rafeeq Ahamed and Vijay Sursen also attempted to write ghazals in a similar fashion. Written in couplets, they included *radif* and *qāfiya*. Sursen included *takhallus* as well. Significantly, their compositions closely adhere to the poetic tradition of Malayalam, as they invoke several familiar images from nature and blend them with the theme of love. That is the main element that connects these compositions with their predecessors.

[4] Rarangoth's study of ghazals titled *Ghazal: Pranayaksharangalude Athmabhashanam* (Ghazal: A soliloquy of love letters) was immensely helpful in my research. While providing a history of ghazals alongside translations of Urdu ghazals in Malayalam, it also narrates the history of ghazal writing in Malayalam.

With the renewed interest in and critical engagement with the form, there came a new awareness of ghazals as a poetic genre in Kerala. However, there also came renewed questioning of the ghazal's status among early Malayalam compositions. Such an engagement proves counterproductive, as it comes at the cost of understanding the reality of the Malayalam ghazal. It is perhaps generative to diversify the definition of ghazal, using the Arabic tradition as a point of departure and invoking the foundational essence of the ghazal being a lyrical expression of love and longing. Otherwise, considering the history of Malayalam ghazal, a revival of formalism will necessarily be accompanied by a rigorous literary engagement, which will be capable of surpassing it both in quantity and quality. Yet the case of ghazal writing in Malayalam raises a number of questions: How do we account for the change that happens to a poetic form or genre when it travels across languages and literary traditions? What are the social, political, and cultural factors that influence the migration of a genre or form? What caused the late arrival of ghazals into Malayalam specifically? And do we have to essentialize a form based on the most prominent tradition, when there have been exceptions that were accepted—as is the case of ghazals in Arabic that did not have the separate formal rules and the case of the ghazals in Persian that did not follow the rule of *takhallus* for a long time—on this journey of the form?

In these translations of Malayalam ghazals, I have tried to retain the form and style of the original compositions as they appear in Malayalam. I have made an honest attempt to bring *radif* and *qāfiya*—two formal characteristics that are considered extremely relevant in any discussion of ghazals—into the translations. The couplets that have a *radif* in Malayalam include a translation of the same *radif* in English. When the lyrics are written in couplets, they appear in English as couplets. The style of these ghazals is peculiar with the invocation of images from nature, and the use of a flowery language that is not otherwise commonly used in contemporary Malayalam poetry. My English translations attempt to bring that peculiarity to the readers.

"Nin Mandahasam" (Your smile) (1998)

Venu V. Desam

I live on your memories now since I saw that smile on you
Humming a melancholy love song, I've been awaiting you

Upon seeing your face again, on a serene full moon night
I broke into a soulful ghazal of love, involuntarily, for you

Like a fledgling lost in the dark woods for many lifetimes
O angel, I have been wandering in your shadows, hopeless

The love song I long wanted to pour out afflicts my heart
Did you know such great sorrows brimmed over my soul?

"Madhurame" (Sweetness!) (2004)

Satchidanandan

Sweetness, your face, a wildflower-on-a-sunny-winter-morning like
Sweetness, your forehead, travelers-camping moony Nila banks like

Sweetness, your sharp gaze, fire and diamond pouring waterfall like
Sweetness, your lips, the morning and fruit in the singer's lyrics like

Sweetness, your pretty hands, honey and gold running springs like
Sweetness, your walk, a wind that blows right before the rain like

"Njanariyathen" (Without my knowledge) (2006)

ONV Kurup

O damsel, soul of my soul, who stole my heart
and fled, without my knowledge
What should I say you smell like, to the wind,
my messenger, out there looking for you?

Should I say, you smell of the fresh soil
sweating in the summer rain?
Or the intoxicating smell of the mango tree
blooming like jasmine at night in my backyard?
Is it the smell of the cooling oil on curly hair?
Or the smell of cardamom seeds on lips?

Is it the fresh smell of new clothes
Rubbed with the heavenly pandan flowers?
Or the fragrance of the golden elengi
that you pile on your lap?
The smell of jasmine in your hair?
Or the smell of the nectar of kadali on your lips?

"Sajini" (2011)

Shahabaz Aman

Sajini, the fate to live apart from you brings pain
To a thorn guarding roses, mockery becomes pain

Friends who long listened to my songs and wept
On the day of their leaving, our love hums pain

A path silvered by moonlight, stretching deep
My heart's desire to wander there plumbs pain

On the village road by the slender summer river
My solitary walk to your damp heart drums pain

Unbearable yearning, raag of unreadable desires,
Unfathomable prayers, Shahabaz, all that is pain!

"Manassin Marubhumiyil" (In the mind's desert) (2011)

Vijay Sursen

In my mind's desert, I wander seeking you, alone
Tossing burning sand futilely I search for you, alone

Did you not promise to come this way, some day?
Life after life, I am burning like a streetlamp, alone

Does the sun know of my shadowy heart, Sursen
Looking for my shadows at night, I get hurt, alone

“Ee Nilavil” (In the moonlight) (2016)

Rafeeq Ahamed

In the snow, fallen on a moonlit night, I heard your voice
On each of the strings of my memory, I played your voice

Days withered like wilted leaves; many nights passed by
In each trickling grain of sand, I remembered your voice

As the branches shivered, overwhelmed by a rain’s call
To the calm rustling sound of leaves, I added your voice

Saying goodbye on the grass carpet that the day spreads
Lonely, the scattering pearly raindrops imitated your voice

Abdul Jalal Zulqad Ali, *The Path of the Truth* (excerpts)

Translated by Bikash K Bhattacharya

Translator's Preface

Abdul Jalal Zulqad Ali (1796–1891) was born to a family of Persian interpreters in Sivasagar, the capital of the Ahom kingdom in the present-day Northeast Indian state of Assam. His grandfather served at the Ahom royal court as a Persian interpreter. The two principal kingdoms in the region, the Ahom and the Koch, patronized Islamicate learning in spite of their tribal kings adopting Hinduism. An Assamese Zikir song attributed to Azan Faqir, a Muslim preacher and saint from the 17th century, goes like this: "Gargāon nagarat Āhom rajār rājyat / Ārabir parā tarjamā hal asamiyā mātat // rajā hak sirajibi prajā hak dakhal / śil nupange māne lao nājāi māne tal // eghāra eśa dukuri nabisan hijiri ākou pās basar jāi / Śhāh Milāne ei jikir karile Qurān kitābat pāi" (In the city of Gargaon in the Ahom kingdom / [This Zikir] has been translated from Arabic into the Assamese tongue // May the king thrive forever and rule the subjects / as long as the stone does not float and the [dried] gourd does not sink // In the year 1125 Hijri / Shah Milan composed this Zikir based on the book of Qur'an).[1] Epigraphic evidence suggests that Ahom kings made land grants to Persian interpreters for their service at the court.[2] A Koch chronicle, *Darrang Rājvaṃsāvali*, states that under the patronage of King Naranarayan (r. 1554–87), Muslim court literati translated parts of the Qurʾan from Arabic to Persian.[3] Knowledge of Persian also became instrumental in regional courts for its increasing use in diplomatic communications with the imperial Mughal court. Within such a milieu, Ali's ancestors engaged in Persianate and Islamicate learning, often under the patronage of the royal court.

However, Ali grew up in a turbulent time when the Ahom kingdom was on its last legs, severely weakened by the popular Moamoria rebellion (1769–1805), only to be followed by years of Burmese occupation (1821–25) before the kingdom's final annexation by the

[1] Khetradhar Borgohain, "Āzān Faqirar Asamiyā Geet (2)" [Azan Faqir's Assamese songs (2)], *Abāhan* 4 (1932): 97–103.

[2] Maheswar Neog, ed., *Prāchya Śāsanavalī* [*Prāchya Śāsanavalī: An Anthology of Royal Charters*] (Assam Prakashan Parishad, 1974), 68–69.

[3] Dimbeswar Neog, *Introduction to Assam* (Vora & Co. Publishers, 1947), 96.

British in 1826. During the Burmese occupation, Ali's family relocated to Gauhati, and he went for his studies first to Dhaka and then to Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh, where he became a disciple of Maulana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, a Muslim social reformer and founder of the Taiyuni movement.

The manuscript of the present text, titled *Tāriq-ul-Haq-Fi-Bayān-e-Noor-ul-Haq* (*The Path of the Truth in the Description of the Light of the Truth*), an Islamic advice manual written in the Assamese language but in the Arabic script, was handed down by the author to his son Yakub Ali, who in turn left it to the custody of his son Mohammad Saleh Kazim, who rendered the text into the Assamese script, edited the text, and had it published in 1967 with the Assamese title *Satyar Path* (*The Path of the Truth*). Kazim states in his editorial note to *Satyar Path* that the text was composed by his grandfather before or around the year 1830. This dating makes the text the earliest known Islamic advice manual written in Assamese and perhaps the earliest text of this genre in northeastern India. Commenting on Ali's choice of the Arabic script for an Assamese language text, Mohammad Amin Khan, a scholar of Arabic, wrote, "Sufi Sahab [Zulqad Ali] chose the Arabic script as he found it difficult to write in the Kaitheli [Assamese] script. When I was a school student in Dhubri [a district in western Assam adjacent to Bengal], one day I found a piece of newspaper carrying Arabic letters. I was left wondering who might read an Arabic newspaper here. As I read, I realized that it was in fact a Bengali newspaper written in the Arabic script. It was published from Chottogram in Bengal. But it is astonishing that such a book has now been written in Assam."[4] Thibaut d'Hubert (2020) has shown that the use of the Arabic script to write Bangla in a range of texts from the 17th century through to the second half of the 19th century was a more common practice than has been acknowledged in the regional literary historiography. In Assam, however, we do not know of any vernacular work that has used the Arabic script other than this text by Zulqad Ali.

[4] Abdul Jalal Zulqad Ali, *Satyar Path* [*The Path of the Truth*], ed. Mohammad Saleh Kazim (Mohammad Saleh Kazim, 1967).

This text is a unique instance of multilingualism in Indo-Islamic expression that involves the transposition of Qurʾanic matter into Assamese, a language loaded with Hindu baggage by centuries of use in Vaishnavism, but in a script firmly grounded in the Arabic episteme. Kazim mentions in the editorial note that he has not altered any words from the original and has provided colloquial Assamese words in brackets for the unfamiliar Arabic and Persian terms. The Muslim Assamese linguistic register, peppered with Perso-Arabic words, is somewhat different from what is often projected as standard Assamese. An Assamese Muslim poet Mosleh Uddin Ahmed poignantly captures the sense of tension associated with Assamese Muslim subjectivity vis-à-vis the inherently multilingual nature of the Islamic register of the Assamese language. He wrote, "Jātit āmi Asamiyā kintu māt he khisiri / Urdu, Fārsi, Asamiyāre purāo kathāśāri" (We are Assamese by nationality, but our tongue is a mixture of Urdu, Persian, and Assamese).[5] A section of the Assamese Hindu literati drew a filial connection between Sanskrit and Assamese given that the latter is an Indo-Aryan language.[6] Consequently, Perso-Arabic words were sometimes designated as words of *bideśi* (foreign) origin, whereas Sanskrit *tatsama* loanwords in Assamese were considered a "natural" component of the vernacular lexicon. It is often overlooked that although there are natural equivalents for a large number of words found in the Muslim Assamese register, these terms are not quite fitting to convey the concepts and events specific to Islamic religious thought and history. For example, Ali uses the word *ḥaqīqat* (حقیقة)—adopted in the Muslim Assamese linguistic register via Urdu—on multiple occasions in the text to denote a higher level of spiritual reality specific to a Sufi context rather than simply to mean reality, as in the everyday usage of the word. Had he used *satya*, the conventional word for truth or reality in Assamese, that would not have conveyed his intended meaning.

[5] Jogendra Narayan Bhuyan, "Mosleh Uddin Ahmed Āru Tekhetar Sāhitya Karma" [Mosleh Uddin Ahmed and his literary works], *Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā* 3 (1976): 17–23.

[6] Anandachandra Agarwalla, "Asam Sāhitya Sabhār Sabhāpatir Abhibhāsan" [Asam Sahitya Sabha president's speech], *Abāhan* 6 (1933): 345–64.

The Path of the Truth meanders through multiple themes ranging from Qurʾanic creation stories and instructions on how to perform Salah to the Islamic soteriological possibility of Assam's tribes. In his autobiography, Nazar Ali Pandit, an Assamese Muslim author, vividly narrates witnessing Zulqad Ali's relentless preaching campaigns in the second half of the 19th century in Assamese villages where people were only nominally Muslims, with strong syncretic and folk traditions.[7] In all likelihood, Ali used this text as an instruction manual to introduce everyday practices of Islam to his listeners during these preaching tours.

I have rendered the preface, where the author talks about the linguistic landscape of his time and what motivated him to compose the text, and two select sections that deal with the issue of linguistic representation of Allah and his messenger, Muhammad. The first section discusses the shape of some of the names used to refer to Prophet Muhammad in the Arabic script, their symbolic meanings, and calligraphic possibilities. In what seems to be an attempt to create a visual mnemonic device for his listeners, many of them neophytes, Ali ingeniously describes the appearances of two Arabic words, *Muhammad* (مُحَمَّد) and *Ahmad* (أحمد), names of the prophet, as visual representations of the human body and the various postures of mandatory Islamic prayers.

The second section is about naming and defining Allah—how to call Allah and what kind of utterances are impermissible (*haram*) for Muslims. Ali also provides a list of utterances related to metapersons of folk and Hindu beliefs and local spirits associated with places that he suggests Muslims should avoid. Notwithstanding Ali's assertion that the names of God must be established by evidence and direct reference in the Qurʾan and hadiths, later Assamese Muslim writers continued to creatively engage in naming and defining the divine. Chand Mohammad Choudhury, a 20th-century Assamese Muslim writer, for instance, introduced a transliterated neologism, *biśvapati-pākrab*, to describe Allah, which bound the Sanskrit loanword *biśvapati* (Sanskrit: विश्वपति lit. "lord of the universe"; also a name

[7] Nazar Ali Pandit, *Mor Jivanar Kisu Kathā* [*Some Vignettes of My Life*] (Sahitya Akademi, 2004).

for Vishnu) with Perso-Arabic *pak* (Arabic: پاک lit. "pure") and *rabb* (Arabic: رب lit. "lord").[8] This is just one instance of the multilingual sensibility evolved in a shared cultural space that runs deep in the vernacular expressions of Islam in Assam.

In creating an English translation of a text written in unstandardized grammar and syntax, often riddled with repetitions, I have added punctuation marks, separated paragraphs into sentences, and, On occasion. Inserted words within square brackets for clarity. Footnotes are added where the meaning of a sentence is unclear, and the suggestions made in footnotes are my interpretation.

[8] Chand Mohammad Choudhury, "Sātri Banām Abhibhāvak" [Schoolgirl versus guardian], *Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā* 3 (1932): 86–91.

The Path of the Truth

by Abdul Jalal Zulqad Ali

Preface

O believers, what led to the composition of this book? The average person in this country does not understand Arabic, Farsi, or Hindi, and they do not even understand Bengali. So they cannot grasp the essence of Sharīʿah. And they are not familiar with the book *Moulood Shareef* that guides one like a Pir guides his disciples; therefore, by translating [works] from Arabic, Farsi, and Hindi, this book has been composed in the native tongue of the Assamese. Now those who do not listen [to the message in this book], they will become sinners. Because only evil beings run away from acts of spiritual merit and good deeds. Running away from acts of spiritual merit without any valid reason is a sin. It is like not attending to a call from the judge or the governor. Hazrat Nabī is the owner of the two worlds. We are his slaves, servants of servants. If we do not attend to him, we are guilty. Know full well!

The Shape of the Words "Muhammad" and "Ahmad" Written in Arabic

From the four letters that make the name of Hazrat (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam), the four rightly guided friends were created as the owners of Muhammad's house of religion.[9] The holy and pure word that is || Muhammad || all the beings are created [in its likeness]: [the Arabic letter] Mim is the head, Ḥā is the torso, the other Mim is the waist, and the Dal is the pair of legs. In this world, believers and disbelievers all get the physique of [the shape of the word] Muhammad. After death, the disbelievers are transformed into the shape of a pig and thrown into hell. Believers, although they are sinners and die without performing repentance, may be forgiven and saved by

[9] This is a word-to-word translation. The author, however, may mean that the four Arabic letters in the word *Muhammad* refer to the four Rashiduns—or, just like there are four letters in the word, there are four Rashiduns—rather than them being "created" from the four letters.

Allah. Because, for the believers, Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) has the right to decide, and only his name is brought forth by the word || Ahmad ||.[10] Alif represents the act of standing facing toward Mecca; Ḥā stands for the act of bending the body at the waist, placing the hands on the knees in performing rukūʿ; the Mim denotes kneeling and bowing in front of Allah until the forehead and nose, along with two hands on the two knees, touch the ground in performing sajdah; Dal signifies the act of qadah by placing the two hands on the knees, sitting on the two feet pointing toward Mecca. (p. 7)

The Description of Utterances That Make a Muslim a Disbeliever (Kafir)

A Muslim becomes a kafir (disbeliever) if he utters phrases meant for Allah in the language of Hindu disbelievers. For example, if [a Muslim] seeks blessings of wealth, protection, and liberation by uttering the names of Bhagavān, Rāmkrishna, Isvar, Bhagavati, Maa Lakshmi, he turns into a kafir.[11] While crossing the river with a Hindu kafir, if you say [following your companion], "O Brahmaputra baba, Bhagirathi maa, please safeguard us," you will become a kafir. "The healer saved me;" "when one catches pox, it is not cured if offerings and prayers are not made to the goddess of smallpox;" "this man has been killed by a spirit, not by Allah's will"—saying these will certainly turn a Muslim into a kafir. If someone says "Barmai Bisahari, Baliyā Bābā and Samun Devatā can bless one with wealth, can take and give life," one will become a kafir.[12] If someone

[10] The awkward structure of the sentence makes it difficult to retrieve a clear meaning. But taking cue from the sentences that follow, one might assume that the author wanted to underscore how the visual form of the word represents acts of Salah, one of the five pillars of Islam.

[11] Nazar Ali Pandit writes in his autobiography that until the early 20th century not only did many Assamese Muslims actively partake in Assamese Hindu and folk practices that worship various deities, some Muslims themselves organized such worships and acted in the role of priests and performers, especially in the worship of Manasa, the snake goddess. Pandit, *Mor Jivanar Kisu Kathā*.

[12] These folk spirits are appeased by rural communities across Assam. Notwithstanding injunctions by Islamic preachers such as Zulqad Ali, these practices continue, albeit to a lesser extent, among the Assamese Muslim communities even today.

says “Allah is above and you are down here,” “only your efforts will help in the fruition of an action and earn wealth,” “how can Allah give you wealth?” he will also become a kafir. (pp. 65–67)

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Abu'l Barakat "Munir" Lahori, *Karnama-yi Munir* (excerpts)

Translated by Sunil Sharma

Translator's Preface: *Munir, A Punjabi Persian Poet in Mughal Bengal*

Abu'l Barakat "Munir" Lahori (1610–44) was a Persian-language poet who was active during the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58). The courts of the early Mughal rulers attracted dozens of émigré Persian poets, artists, and scholars from the larger Persianate world, especially Iran and Central Asia, due to their generous patronage. There were a number of non-native speakers in imperial service as well, especially Punjabis from Lahore such as Munir. In a short career, Munir mainly served under his patron Mirza Safi Saif Khan, who was related to the imperial family, and accompanied Saif Khan when he was appointed as governor of Bengal. Munir also lived in Agra, where he died. Munir's collected poetry encompasses *masnavi*s, ghazals, and qasidas. The extracts from his works include one from a short prose treatise on literary criticism, *Karnama-yi Munir*, in which he denounces the preference for the fresh-style (*tazago*) poetics in the ghazal, which were marked by unusual metaphors and new verbal constructions. He describes the difficult situation of being a young poet of Indian origin in a literary culture that was dominated by Iranian émigré poets who were thought to have better credentials as native speakers of the language. The second extract is from a verse travel account of a boat trip to Bengal along with his patron. Munir describes traveling by boat down the river Ganga as an exhilarating voyage of discovery. Inspired by the Mughal literary fad of writing *masnavi* praise poems about Kashmir and other imperial places, Munir focuses on the natural landscape of Bengal and the journey itself. His style is a mixture of poetic-ethnography with traditional Persian imagery. He includes lists of the special flora and fauna of Bengal, the landscape, and the monsoon season, along with the pesky mosquitoes.

Karnama-yi Munir (Munir's commentary)

In the past, if you were a young master poet, you would be considered old by virtue of your intelligence and wisdom. If you were poor, you would be reckoned a rich man by virtue of the wealth of your poetic skills. If you were shy, you would be considered famous by virtue of your renowned verses. And if you were not Iranian, you would be considered noble by virtue of your good temperament. These days if you do not possess those four qualifications, you are considered to be nothing and your poetry valued as useless. As for being noble, especially in this age, unless a poet's birthplace is in Iran, his poetry will not be ranked high. Since I, a sun-worshipper, have risen like the full moon (*munir*) in the city of Lahore, and have obtained the right temperament and a brilliant mind from the bounty of the eternal sun, I have raised the star of meaning to the heavens. I have mastered the art of poetry, but like the deceptive sun, I am forced to lie before the ones with dark minds, claiming that I am from Khurasan so that my poetry and prose can find buyers.

Mazhar-i gul (Manifestation of the rose)

At the command of the king of the seven climes,
my lord who appreciates poetry and is intelligent
left Agra under a favorable horoscope,
with young fortune as his companion.
I was one of his servants, ready to wait on him.
I went, in short, with a hundred joys,
traversing the way swiftly and with haste.

When I reached Patna with a joyous heart
I became eager to get on the boat.
When the Ganga showed its face to me,
I prepared to become its slave (*hindu*).

The Ganga is pregnant with a hundred seas,
and heaven is lost in it like a drop of water.
No one knows it from shore to shore,
its middle is non-existent like the beloved's waist.
No one thinks of putting a bridge over it,
its water has seen nothing but a bridge of fishes.

Like a pleasure-seeker, I joined the party on the boat,
and we set off on the water as if by magic.
At night dark clouds arose and there was eerie darkness.
Dark night was dark water's comrade; the river was tyrannical.
Suddenly there was a disturbance in the water,
the wave's curls were disheveled by the wind.
When a strong wind impeded our progress,
the river curled up like a scroll.
The wind brought great turbulence over the clouds,
its tyranny became a ball and the waves a polo stick.

Wind and water were twisted together in such a way
like the sighs and tears of lovers on the day of parting.
Everyone was prostrated in all directions, with their faces facing
a *mihrāb*.
The bodies of people were like toys for the wind,
everyone was unhappy about its cruelty.
Everyone was drenched by the favors of the water,
drowned from head to toe.

On the river I suffered from the tyranny of worry
when I saw boatloads of mosquitoes there.
They were masters in drawing blood—
Why would anyone need a bloodletter?!
They buzzed around people's ears
not saying anything but words that flayed the skin.
The mosquitoes became so familiar with my blood
that my hands were fated to be the color of henna.
Where was my savior from this sorrow?
Someone to extract blood price from the mosquitoes.

When I reached Bengal by the almighty's blessing,
in search of pleasure, I saw
a paradise full of lovely flowers,
a garden like the face of *hourīs* in spring.
Its settlement was like the narcissus eye's kohl,
a flower's body was sensitive in the breeze there.
Everywhere that I went in this land
I saw nothing but hyacinths and basil.
This place is so full of greenery,
the Green City is embarrassed before it.

In the countryside there is verdure everywhere,
the earth has washed its face with emerald water.

The pearly dew became emerald
from the profusion of greenery of that felicitous land.
One had a vision of the greenery not yet sprung from the ground
with the clarity of the eye of perception.
The land is all green fields; indeed, spring is foremost here.

Thousands of flowers grow like the tail of a peacock
from the seeds that this ground kisses.
It has become weak from the burden of flowers,
no one here even knows what autumn is.
Wherever you look there is greenery:
It is spring, it is spring, it is spring!
Due to this, Bengal is a perpetual paradise,
the pleasure place of Saif Khan.

From the miraculous air there is greenery on the walls
like the down on the beloved's face.
The moisture in the air made its home here
where a fan is more like a washbasin!
The earth is watered to such an extent
that footsteps in the ground appear as a stream of water;
from the devotion of ascetics, dryness has vanished.

There are clouds here all the time,
but for six months especially there is the monsoon.
Earth, water, air—everything is rain clouds,
wherever you look, it is all water.
With so much water everywhere
the inhabitants play games in it.
Constantly beset with a flood of water,
they are like birds nesting in trees.

I heard from a wise old man that
in this land such violent winds have arisen before,
enough to uproot one village to another.
Therefore, agriculture is a losing occupation.

When it is the season of seditious fires, which flare up stormily,
it is so hot then that even water hides in shame.
Fire follows the course of the water,
which becomes fiery like wine.
When the fire turns to the garden, saplings burn like candles,
and every tree branch becomes a burning log with sparks.
Anyone who is a native of this land,
their body is like a burning candle.

Bengal is a marvelous country that
amazes the heart of a wise person.
How well the poet, worthy to address Saif Khan, has said:
This land abounds with three elements: water, fire, and wind.

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Sanaullah Makti Thangal, *Nabi Nāṇayam* (Prophet's Coin) (excerpt)

Translated by Musab Abdul Salam

Translator's Preface

Sanaullah Makti Thangal (1847–1912) was a religious scholar, intellectual, polemicist, and printer-publisher from the Mappila community of the South Indian state of Kerala. While conventional readings eulogize Thangal's interventions as having initiated a religiously inspired reform within the community, recent scholarship adopts a more skeptical approach, often reading Thangal as a product of colonial modernity. Thangal's *Makti Manakleśam*, *Kadorakudāram*, *Nārinarābhichāri*, and *Muslimgalum Vidyābhyāsavum* have received some renewed scholarly attention in the last decade. My interest in *Nabi Nāṇayam*, an important yet overlooked part of his oeuvre, emerges from how it complicates the "tradition versus reform" framework often employed in the study of Thangal's work. Thangal's efforts to publish his work, along with the various discursive moves employed in *Nabi Nāṇayam*, reveal how a section of Mappila scholars engaged with material and discursive shifts attendant to colonial modernity. The novelty of Thangal's endeavor suggests less a rupture from the tradition of history writing in Arabi-Malayalam at the time, as represented by the works of scholars such as Shujai Moidu Musliyar, than an attempt to broaden the horizon of Mappila textual engagement into the emergent Malayalam print public.

Nabi Nāṇayam can be translated as "Prophet's coin." As Thangal explains in the preface to the text, Nabi Naanayam was the name of the daily collection that helped him finance the publication of his work. Thangal's decision to honor the collection by titling the prophetic biography with the same name indicates the creative way in which he sought to overcome the financial struggles associated with his endeavors. In *Nabi Nāṇayam*, Thangal mobilizes the life of the Prophet as a heuristic site for the putative Muslim readers and as a medium to engage critically with missionary and orientalist polemics. Taking an innovative approach toward prophetic biography, the text draws from traditional sources of the *sīrah* tradition, such as Ibn Hisham and Ibn Athir, in addition to modern orientalist biographies of the Prophet, such as the works of John Davenport, Edward Gibbon, Godfrey Higgins, and William Muir. *Nabi Nāṇayam* also initiates a conversation with the Malayalam biographies of

the Prophet, produced within the missionary milieu, such as Hermann Gundert's *Muḥammadu Caritram* (The history of Muhammad). While *Muḥammadu Caritram* portrays the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad and the rise of Arabs as God's punishment for Christians who had strayed from their religion, Thangal makes use of the discursive authority of Western scholarship sympathetic to the Prophet, such as Davenport's *An Apology for Mohammed and the Koran*, Gibbon's *Life of Mahomet*, and Higgins's *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious*, to provide an alternate picture of the prophetic life in Malayalam. In making a case for the valor and dignity of Arabs, Thangal draws from the authority of Christian apologetical literature such as *Kashf al-āthār fi qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā' Banī Isrā'īl*, a Persian translation of Alexander Keith's *Evidence of Prophecy*. The range of languages and genres *Nabi Nāṇayam* draws from is suggestive of Thangal's resourcefulness in bringing together a diverse archive for what is likely the first extant biography of the Prophet by a Muslim in Malayalam.

The text begins with a geographical description of Arabia, along with a concise social and religious history of pre-Islamic Arabs. The descriptive language employed here resonates with works such as *Life of Mahomet* as well as missionary publications in Malayalam such as *Pashchimodayam*. It then turns to the genealogy of the Prophet and responds to some of the criticisms raised by the missionaries through a detailed engagement with the Gospels. Drawing from the Islamic *munazarah* (debate) tradition of North India, which often employed exegesis of Puranas (Hindu scriptures) in making a case for Islam, the text also interprets passages from the Puranas like Bhavishya Purana as predicting the emergence of a Prophet in *Kali Yuga* (Age of darkness). Finally, the work turns to the Prophet's life, narrating key events from birth to age 40, referencing traditional and modern sources.

The choice of the script, as well as the various linguistic registers employed by *Nabi Nāṇayam*, reflect broader shifts in the language ideology occasioned by the advent of print modernity in colonial India. While the majority of works in the Mappila textual tradition at the time were composed in Arabi-Malayalam, including

many of Thangal's own works, *Nabi Nāṇayam* is self-consciously written in "simple" Malayalam prose using modern Malayalam script. Thangal notes that the language employed in the work is aimed at making the text accessible to "Malayali Muslims" who do not regularly interact with "standard" Malayalam, which was assuming its modern shape in the 19th century. The use of a mix of Sanskritic and missionary vocabulary along with the self-consciously accessible language renders the text an interesting heteroglossic site that foreshadows the importance modern Malayalam would come to assume in Mappila Muslim life.

The preface to *Nabi Nāṇayam*, which is translated below, sheds light on textual production, methodology, and linguistic choices, as well as the intended readership of the text. Even though parts of the preface, such as the long and elaborate sentence structure of the supplicatory preface (the complexity of which I have sought to retain), might seem to contradict Thangal's own claim about the accessibility of the text, they draw our attention to the layered nature of a work that blends rhetorical registers shaped within the Sanskritic-missionary milieu with the Islamic textual conventions. While Thangal was able to complete only the first part of the biography, covering pre-Islamic Arabia to the beginning of the Prophet's mission, *Nabi Nāṇayam* offers valuable insights into a transitional moment in the history of Mappila textual culture.

Preface to *Nabi Nāṇayam* (Prophet's coin) by Sayyid Sanaullah Makti Thangal

Most Exalted Lord! As the continuous assistance in the efforts to elevate scripture and establish the Truth, undertaken without assistance from anyone, and upon the faith that there is no service beyond service to You and no refuge beyond Your refuge, happened to bring contentment to those weak in faith, oh Lord! I sing your praise with a joyful heart.

Dear Lord! Upon seeing the dearth of works revealing the honor You bestowed on the most beloved of the beloved, Prophet Muhammad, in the language of Kerala, wherein dwell many a follower and countless adversaries, and owing to the unbearable sadness on witnessing how the Muslims of Kerala, due to the lack of the spread of education, were wanting not only in the effort to establish the truth crucial to the revival of scripture but also in self-respecting thought, leaving them drained of strength and assailed and overcome by opponents, O Foundation of All Existence! Taking you as the sole Anchor, I embarked as the champion of truth-seeking debate and achieved success. Even though I have longed for and persevered in producing a book titled *History of Prophet Muhammad*, public frustration has brought the initiative to a farcical demise.

Oh Lord, who aids the Truth! Because of the love You have for Your beloved, the Muhammadiyya Press was revived with the help of the enthusiasm of the public of Alappuzha, and through the support of daily collection from the petty traders of Kochi by the name of *Nabi Nāṇayam* (Prophet's coin) I begin this virtuous work on the history of Prophet Muhammad. Dear Lord, bestow your blessings on *Nabi Nāṇayam* to not be interrupted till its completion! Ameen.

Readers, since the reason for this work of history lies in the daily collection called Nabi Naanayam, and considering that title to be auspicious, the work will also be called *Nabi Nāṇayam*. Do not assume that this is an ordinary work of history. This work contains testimonies from European historians and responses to the criticisms from the followers of other faiths. The right to establish the truthfulness of the Prophet, my grandfather, has been completely

fulfilled. Since this publication relies on a daily collection called Nabi Naanayam, which is in its infant stage and weakened as a child suffering from illness due to the lack of affection from the affluent who are supposed to support *Nabi Nāṇayam*. Since the tract is being published weekly, it is impossible to publish the history as a book in one go or combine one or two forms weekly. One copy in eight parts, printed in half-sheet forms, will be delivered fortnightly to regular patrons, and they shall store it safely and later compile it into a book. I believe that sufficient contributions will arrive by the end of the week.

Since only a few interact with Malayalam language in Malayalam Islam, only terms that they understand will be used, though. It will not be without ornamentations appropriate for the time. It is hoped that the readers will not entirely overlook the difficult parts that may exceed 60 in number.

Those requesting a copy of the historical work, regardless of who they are or where they are from, are kindly informed that they must join the *Nabi Nāṇayam* fund. The payment should be made directly to the Muhammadiyya Press and must be done in advance, as has been the practice with *Nabi Nāṇayam*. It is hereby confirmed that this rule does not apply to followers of other faiths.

Thankamma Malik, "Horse-Cart Rider"

Translated by Ziyana Fazal

Translator's Preface

Thankamma Malik (1917–2001) was a pioneering bilingual writer and translator from Kerala, India, whose literary contributions bridged Malayalam and Hindi traditions. Born into a Christian family, her life took a transformative turn after hearing a speech by Mahatma Gandhi during the Indian freedom movement. Deeply moved, she committed herself to learning Hindi, pursuing formal education at Shradhanand Hindi College in Kottayam and later at Prayag Mahila Vidyapeeth in Allahabad, where she studied under the renowned Hindi poet Mahadevi Varma. Malik's literary career included short stories, poetry, and translations, many of which appeared in Malayalam periodicals such as *Al-Manar* and *Muslim Review*. Her marriage to Malik Muhammed, editor of the Malayalam monthly *Mithram*, marked another turning point in her life; she then embraced Islam and adopted the name Thankamma Malik. Her writing, shaped by Gandhian ideals and a deep sense of social justice, played a vital role in shaping 20th-century Malayalam literature.

Malik's short story "Ṭāṃgāvālā" (translated here as "Horse-Cart Rider," 1954) exemplifies Malik's commitment to ethical transformation and social critique. It tells the story of Mothi Lal, an upper-caste Hindu man who falls in love with Sarojam, a Dalit girl working as a maid in his household. Inspired by Gandhian principles, Mothi educates Sarojam in Hindi, defies his Zamindar father, and ultimately renounces his caste privileges. Choosing love and justice over social conformity, he marries Sarojam and begins a new life as a horse-cart driver.

Historically, Muslims in Kerala developed a rich tradition of literary and journalistic expression that negotiated between Arabic, Persian, and Malayalam linguistic registers, reflecting both their diverse heritage and the sociopolitical pressures of colonial modernity. By the early 20th century, Māppiḷa Muslim women contributed to this evolving print culture through writings in both Arabi-Malayalam and Malayalam periodicals, engaging with reformist debates and secular national discourses. Thankamma Malik was one of the few 20th-century Muslim women writers from Kerala whose work transcended literary and geographical boundaries. Her writings

appeared in an array of periodicals, from Muslim reformist journals such as *Adhunika Vanitha* and *Ansari* to mainstream nationalist platforms such as *Mathrubhumi* and *Malayalarajyam*. Unlike many of her contemporaries, who wrote within the bounds of clearly demarcated ideological affiliations, Malik traversed religious, political, and linguistic borders in her literary practice. Her literary oeuvre elucidates the heterogeneity of the Māppila Muslim print public, challenging reductive frameworks that delimit Muslim women's writing within static communal or linguistic identities.

Translating Malik's work prompts a rethinking of dominant notions of the Islamicate as a primarily Arabic-inflected literary and cultural domain. I chose to translate "Ṭāṃgāvālā" because it foregrounds the intertwined questions of gender, language, and identity, while importantly situating caste not only as a structure of social hierarchy but also as a dynamic site of negotiation and resistance—a dimension frequently overlooked in Islamicate contexts. I first encountered Malik's writing in 2018 while conducting archival research in Kerala, and I was struck by two features: the remarkable multilingual range of her literary production, particularly her use of Malayalam and Hindi, and the conspicuous absence of Arabic. This absence is critical given Malik's identity as a Muslim woman from a region where Arabic historically shaped religious and intellectual life. Writing outside Arabic's orbit, a characteristic often associated with Muslim writings in postcolonial India, she crafted a voice attuned to the secular idioms of postcolonial India while also engaging with both national and transregional concerns.

Malik's literary corpus, often shifting between regional and national languages, unsettles the rigid mapping of Urdu, Persian, and Hindi to the North, and Arabic, Malayalam, and English to the South. Her choice to write and translate across linguistic domains resists these geographical and ideological boundaries. This transgression is particularly significant given Malik's roots in Kerala, where Islam followed a distinctive historical trajectory: Arabic supplanted Persian as the language of scholarship; the Shāfiʿī school predominated over the Ḥanafī; and the emergence of Arabi-Malayalam, a register that rendered Malayalam in Arabic script, was central to

Muslim textual practices. Malik's embrace of Hindi, along with her native language, Malayalam, challenges this inherited tradition and signals an alternative vision of literary and religious belonging—one that resists containment within both the linguistic hierarchies of the nation-state and the cultural expectations tied to her identity as a Muslim within the global umma.

The story "Ṭāṃgāvālā" constitutes not only a nuanced meditation on love, caste, and gender-inflected identity in postcolonial India but also a critical reflection on Muslim women's linguistic interventions within a fragmented and multilingual sociopolitical landscape. At a time when Muslim women's writing was often interpreted through pietistic or juridical frameworks, this story—with its Hindi vocabulary, Allahabad setting, and multivocal style—stands out for its nationalist undertones, narrative experimentation, and attention to linguistic plurality. Malik's prose moves fluidly across registers, incorporating elements of spoken Hindi, formal Malayalam, and occasional English—mirroring the multilingual world she inhabited and imagined.

This linguistic hybridity shaped not only the narrative texture of "Ṭāṃgāvālā" but also the process of translating it. Malayalam is my native language and the one I know most intimately; Hindi is a language I can read and engage with, though not fluently, and English is the language in which I write and theorize. Translating Malik into English thus became an interpretive act shaped by both proximity and distance, requiring a balance between fidelity to the source and the affective, social resonances it carries. The story's title is in Hindi, and it opens with dialogue—*jaldī* (hurry), *haṭo* (move)—that immediately asserts a linguistic and spatial setting distinct from the Malayalam-dominated narratives of her region. These shifts in language, tone, and register—reflecting class, regional, and emotional differences—are not ornamental but structural, shaping the story's emotional and social realism. In the process of translation, English, with its more limited capacity for conveying such distinctions, often demanded approximation rather than direct equivalence. This translation, then, is a gesture toward the complexity of Malik's literary world, an effort to preserve its layered textures even as parts of it necessarily resist translation.

Horse-Cart Rider

"Tr r-r– hurry, hurry–move aside–move aside." Do you know what that sound is? It is the sound of Babu's horse cart. Though it does not quite go r-r-r, Babu's Raman can outrun the horses of any other carts. "This one is of Arabic lineage," Babu says, patting the horse proudly on its back. Babu carries himself with the same proud bearing, holding his head high, much like how the horse keeps its head raised. Around 30 years old, he is strong and well-built, good-looking, with elegantly combed hair. Pajama, kurta, layered with a sweater. A wristwatch, shoes, all of it, completes the attire of this rider. You might wonder, "Is he really a rider?" Yes, he is. He must provide for himself, his wife, and two children with the earnings from his horse cart.

No traveler arriving at Allahabad railway station fails to be drawn to Babu. But even when he is seated in the vehicle, no one would suspect him to be the rider. As soon as he meets people, he immediately guesses where they are from. Most of the time, the guess does not go wrong. Why, then, do others feel disappointed when most people admire that horse-cart rider who skillfully handles languages like Hindi, Urdu, English, and Bengali? Other riders in the city looked at him with a mix of fear and jealousy. The rickshaw pullers and other riders called him Babu. It was a feeling anyone who met Babu shared. And for that reason, everyone respected him.

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There was none in Banaras who had not heard of Zamindar Ramesh Babu. Mothi Lal is the eldest of his two sons. The incident took place when Mothi Lal was pursuing his BA. Upon hearing about it, not only the family, but also the villagers were taken aback.

Mothi is the beloved son of parents who embodied orthodoxy. But Gandhiji's Harijan movement and Swadeshi movement all deeply attracted Mothi. It was only that he did not get involved in public activities out of fear for his father.

Many poor families depended on Mothi's household. Among them, the gardener Ganesh held a special place. Although they were Harijans, Ganesh, his wife, and their daughter, Sarojam, were granted a certain degree of freedom within the Zamindar's

household. As a slightly older boy, Mothi often watched his younger brother Taranadhan play with Saroja in the garden. He was never bored of observing Saroja's radiant face and thick, curly hair. Mothi stepped into his 18th year. Desires innate to adolescence began to blossom within him, even without him realizing it.

One evening, Mothi was strolling through the garden. Hearing a scream, he looked around. Sarojam was standing amid the spread of rose bushes. Thorns entangled her hair and blouse. Mothi kept looking at her for a few moments. Would the 12-year-old girl, who did not yet know what shyness was, understand the secret behind that gaze?

"Babuji, please take the tie out of my hair," she begged.

"What will you give me if I take it off?" he asked.

"All the flowers in the basket."

"Oho! Such generosity! Do I need you to give me flowers from my own garden?"

"Then what should I give?"

"Will you give me what I ask for?"

"I will."

"Don't go back on your word."

"No."

He approached her. He pretended as if he were struggling to remove the thorns.

"Make it quick, Babuji. It is time for your mother's pooja. She will be angry."

"Let the pooja be late today. Why should my mother, who doesn't even touch you, perform pooja using the flowers you have touched? Does that not make them impure, Saro?"

"Whatever, I don't know."

"Where is Taranadhan today?"

"He went for his studies."

"Don't you want to study?"

"Would Harijans, especially women, pursue education, Babuji?"

"Who said they won't?"

"Mother said. Isn't that why I am not sent to school?"

"Should I teach you?"

"What?" She turned around and looked.

"Yes, I mean to teach you. Didn't you say you would obey what I say? Starting tomorrow, you should come to this place when Tara goes to study. I will bring a slate and a book."

"Isn't it shameful if someone gets to know about it?"

"I will take care of all that."

In six months, that intelligent girl learned to write and read Hindi reasonably well. Mothi was gratified. One day, Sarojam said, "From tomorrow on, I won't study. My mother is unwell. Father said I should do the sweeping work."

"Who will collect the flowers then?"

"Father will take care of it himself."

"There is no need to study. It suffices that you don't forget the lessons you have already learned," the guru advised.

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"Hey, mopping lady, please come and clean my reading room," Mothi called out. She entered the room with a broom in hand. He felt as if her body had become fuller and more developed. Mothi sensed a slight warmth in his blood at the sight of her. His heart longed to touch her once. But he faltered in courage!

One evening, Mothi was reading. Sarojam entered with a broom. She had a leaf packet with her.

"Why did you come so late?"

"There were some chores."

"What chores?"

"Look at this," she continued, pulling a garland from the banana leaf—"Father gave me many flowers since mother was not around today. I was late tying this flower garland. I never gave you dakshina[1] for teaching me letters. Here is my dakshina," she said, placing the wrapped packet on the table.

"You remembered about dakshina just today?"

"Today, I read the monologue Babuji gave me last week. Is it not because Ekalavya was downtrodden like me that the Brahmin guru expelled him, and the princes taunted him? Did not that

[1] *Dakshina* is a traditional gift offered to a teacher or priest, rooted in Vedic rituals where it was given as a token of gratitude after receiving instruction or performing a sacred rite.

egoistic guru and the others later come to the forest and ask for guru dakshina once he mastered science? Babuji, are these upper-caste people really that cruel? The guru asked for the poor hunter boy's thumb, didn't he? And what courage! He just chopped it off and gave it to him. Likewise." She looked at Mothi with a smile.

"You learned all this from reading that book? You really are an intelligent girl. Why did you stop, then? So, you decided to give some wilted flowers in the name of dakshina before I could ask for your thumb or something, right? Smart girl." Mothi also began to laugh.

"What are you saying, Babuji? If you don't like the flowers, return them. Let me go."

"Wait, don't leave. Don't you want to clean the room? If you don't give me the dakshina that I ask for, you will forget all the lessons you have learned," he said, feigning seriousness.

"Really?" the simple-minded girl asked.

"Why else? Is it because of that fear that Ekalavya chopped off his thumb and gave it?" he said, trying to stifle his laughter.

"Please, tell me what I should give?" she asked.

"You don't need to give anything. Please take that garland and put it around my neck," he said, stretching his head out.

"That's nice, a fair dakshina," Sarojam said, laughing loudly as she began to run away. But Mothi grabbed her. He forced her onto his lap and whispered in her ears, "Crazy girl, don't laugh. Either today or tomorrow, it will happen. You are mine for sure." He held her close, swayed by his desires. The young girl, on the brink of crossing the final stage of adolescence, began to feel breathless and shivered through her whole body. She somehow managed to break free from his grasp and ran away.

After that incident, Mothi saw Sarojam very rarely. He felt that she was intentionally keeping out of his sight. Whenever they did cross paths, she would quickly run away, her captivating smile disappearing as she fled. These days, it is Sarojam's mother who comes to clean the room. Another six to seven months passed. It has been many days since he met Sarojam. Losing his patience, Mothi once asked Sarojam's mother about her. She replied: "Can the girl always afford to play around, child? She has grown up now. Your mother told me not to bring her for chores anymore. If only I could die after

finding a man for her and entrusting her to him. I have been sick this whole time, haven't I?"

***

A grown-up girl and a youthful man! The girl is Harijan, and the young man is of the gentry. Especially when it involves the beloved child of a wealthy man, imagine the situation if that union cannot even bear the sight of the Zamindar!

Mothi is standing in front of his father, bowing his head. The Zamindar yelled: "Idiot! Such a disgrace to the whole clan! Was there truly no woman in the village that you would stoop to pursue an untouchable beggar? You must marry Kamala next month."

"It is not possible, father! I have made my decision. It was not decided today or yesterday. It was decided three years ago. I won't marry anyone other than that Harijan girl," Mothi said in a decisive tone.

"What? You decided? No one has ever dared to confront me in this manner until this day. If you don't obey what I say, you will end up begging."

"I would not hesitate to do that either. Wasn't it to reform the Harijans that the universally revered Bapu gave up his silk mattress and opted to live like an ascetic? Then, I would only be proud to marry a Harijan woman." The son did not back down.

"Damn your Bapu! He is the Fakir who has misled you and people like you. Boy, he is a learned thief. It's all just speeches. If he were truly genuine, why didn't he marry each of his children to women from the Tōṭṭi or Paṟacci castes?[2] One of his sons married the daughter of Rajagopalachari, who is from a higher caste than his own. Ptuie, what spirit!"

"In any case, I have decided."

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[2] "Tōṭṭi" refers to a historically marginalized caste traditionally associated with manual scavenging in Kerala. "Paṟacci" is a derogatory term used to refer to women from the Paraiyar (Pariah) caste, a Dalit community historically subjected to systemic discrimination and social exclusion. Both terms illustrate deeply entrenched caste hierarchies and are used here to highlight the social realities depicted in the story.

"If that's the case, I, too, have decided. You won't have any claims in my house or property from today onwards. You must beg," Father said in rage.

"No, father, I will not beg. But I know how to make ends meet by doing some job."

"'Job,' yes, you will get a job. Someone might give you a job if you go around taking my name. But . . ."

"I know what you are thinking, father. I will not walk around begging for a job by using your name or claiming to be the son of a Zamindar. We can leave this village entirely. I will go to another village and earn a living by carrying luggage or driving vehicles. What is demeaning about doing jobs? What sin exists in that? I prefer a small hut over this bungalow, built by squeezing and brewing the blood of the poor. It is there that I will find both prosperity and peace."

***

Thus, Mothi Lal became a cart rider. A golden waist thread and a golden watch were his only possessions. He sold the waist thread to buy his horse cart. Sarojam is now a flower seller. She delivers beautifully tied flower garlands to houses. Every evening, the horse-cart rider returns to his small hut with a deep sense of peace and mental tranquility.

Ibrāhīmkuṭṭi Musliyār's Muḥyuddīn mawlūdinṟe tarjuma

Translated by Ihsan Ul-Ihthisam, Ameen Perumannil Sidhick, and Afeef Ahmed

Translators' Preface: Translating the Translated

This translation work introduces an important yet underexplored textual genre of prose translation from Malabar's rich Arabi-Malayalam literary culture.[1] Our work presents selected excerpts from *Muḥyuddīn mawlūdin̲re tarjuma* (The translation of Muḥyuddīn's hagiography), authored in 1887 by the eminent Islamic scholar Koṅṅaṇaṃvīṭṭil Ibrāhīmkuṭṭi Musliyār̲ (1849–1905). Musliyār̲'s translation, or *tarjuma*, holds a significant value as one of the earliest prose compositions in modern Arabi-Malayalam, a still extant Muslim vernacular literary language that is prevalent among the Muslims of Malabar.[2]

The *tarjuma* is a commentarial translation of the Arabic prosimetric panegyric work *Muḥyuddīn mawlid*, composed by Tamil Muslim scholar Maḥmūd Ṭībī (d. 1727).[3] Ṭībī's original text celebrates the spiritual life and miraculous feats (*karāmāt*) of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Q̲ādir al-Jīlanī (d. 1166), a revered 12th-century Baghdadi Sufi saint. Musliyār̲'s translation of the original text into Arabi-Malayalam prose highlights an outmoded mode of translation, which is translation as an act of commentary. In this pursuit of translating a translation, we direct our readers' attention to the nuances of the translation process itself, particularly the matter of what is and what is not translated in the Arabi-Malayalam translation. We ask readers to pay close attention to the unique ways in which Arabic vocabularies are retained in Arabi-Malayalam. This is well portrayed in Musliyār̲'s commentarial translation from Arabic to Arabi-Malayalam as well as reflected in our own translation of the *tarjuma* for Anglophone

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[1] We have used a lithographic print of the text from a private collection. See Koṅṅaṇaṃvīṭṭil Ibrāhīmkuṭṭi Musliyār̲, *Muḥyuddīn mawlūdin̲re tarjuma* (Maḥḍar al-ʿUlūm Press, 1889).

[2] For some state-of-the-art discussion about Arabi-Malayalam, see P. K. Yasser Arafath, "Polyglossic Malabar: Arabi-Malayalam and the Muhiyuddinmala in the Age of Transition (1600s–1750s)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, no. 3 (2020): 517–39; and Ihsan Ul-Ihthisan and Simi K. Salim, "Persianate Malabar: Muhammad Shah's *Takiyya* and the Composition of an Arabi-Malayalam Sufi Romance-*mathnawī* in Southern India," *Postmedieval* 15 (2024): 875–902.

[3] Tayka Shuʿayb ʿĀlim, *Arabic, Arwi, and Persian in Sarandib and Tamil Nadu: A Study of the Contributions of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu to Arabic, Arwi, Persian, and Urdu Languages, Literature, and Education* (Imam-ul-Arus Trust, 1993), 489–90.

readers. To help readers take note of sections that were not translated, we place our translations of the lines Musliyār did not translate in parentheses.

The concept of *tarjuma* here transcends the standard model of translation, which typically focuses on verbatim equivalence between source and target language vocabularies. Drawing on the perspectives of Thibaut d'Hubert and Torsten Tschacher on translations within South Asian Muslim vernaculars, our translation also highlights how premodern Muslim authors understood translation as more than just replacing words. Instead, they saw it as a complex stylistic process of trans-reproduction that involved creative literary and exegetical work.[4] In Arabu-Tamil and Arabi-Malayalam literary culture, translation often took the form of a commentary, where Arabic/Persian and the vernacular languages (Tamil/Malayalam) played complementary, not substitutive, roles of meaning-making. Translation here involved significant creative reworking of formalistic and aesthetic elements. As Tschacher suggests, it also compels us to reflect on the modes of "translatedness" that were lost with the emergence of the notion of "literal translation" in the early 20th century.[5] The practice of seamlessly weaving prose and verse allows Musliyār to shift fluidly between scholastic and non-scholastic styles, thereby employing the strategies of both narrative forms.

To showcase the devotional, aesthetic, and formalistic qualities of the *tarjuma*, we present two carefully chosen sections from the text that reflect distinct dimensions of its structure and intent. The introductory section (pages 1–6), including the colophon, functions as a translator's preface by Musliyār, addressed both to the ritual readers and to the scholars among them. At the beginning of the *mawlid*, Musliyār expounds on the divine names of God,

[4] Thibaut d'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Alaol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 219–23; and Torsten Tschacher, "Islam and Sanskritic *imaginaires* in Southern Asia: Mount Meru in Arabia," in *Routledge Handbook on Islam in Asia*, ed. Chiara Formichi (Routledge, 2021), 60–61.

[5] Torsten Tschacher, "Commenting Translation: Concepts and Practices of Translation in Islamic Tamil Literature," in *Translation in Asia: Theories, Practices, Histories*, ed. Ronit Ricci and Jan van der Putten (St. Jerome Publishing, 2011), 27–44.

the significance of praise, and the devotional logic behind invoking specific names. This opening is not merely formalistic; rather, it serves as a doctrinal initiation, embedding the *mawlid* within a Sufi cosmological framework for both scholarly and ritual readers. Musliyār's theological reflections on the unknowability of God's names, along with his classification of divine praise into four types, exemplify how translation in this context becomes a gateway to scholastic discourse. It also tells us that the act of reading/recitation and the pursuit of translation is a devotional practice. The latter section of our translation (pages 92–95) shifts to a different section of the *tarjuma* with hagiographic poems narrativizing the exalted status of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī, his biography, and the wider reception of his miracles. The embodied divination of the friend of God (*walī*) is conveyed through widespread reports of mystical experiences and miraculous interventions, as promised to the readers of hagiographical works such as the *tarjuma/mawlid* under discussion. Musliyār then explicitly seeks to promote Jīlānī's Sufi order, of which he is a part, promising rapid spiritual advancement and the fulfillment of desires.

In a notable passage (p. 94), Musliyār openly reflects on the labor of his commentarial translation, inviting readers to offer corrections or further insights, particularly in relation to the interpretation of poems. Our translation retains certain key Arabic terms in transliterated form to allow readers with knowledge of Arabic a sample appreciation of the original text. This approach follows Musliyār's own practice in the Arabi-Malayalam translation, where some Arabic lexicons, phrases, and prayers are preserved without translation for both scholastic and devotional purposes. To help readers identify the sections that were not translated by Musliyār, we have placed our own translations of those lines within square brackets. This allows readers to sense the importance of Arabic as a language of liturgy and scholarly engagements in Islamic Southern Asia. Through our translation and annotation, we provide readers with other cases to better understand the diverse ways in which multilingual textual practices have taken shape—both ideologically and stylistically—across South Asian languages and literary traditions.

From *Muḥyuddīn mawlūdinṟe tarjuma* by Koṅṅaṇaṃvīṭṭil Ibrāhīmkuṭṭi Musliyāṟ

Colophon

This is the translation of *Muḥyi al-Dīn Mawlūd*, which contains eight poems that are both marvelous and magnificent.

Page 1

With the name of Allah, the most merciful and compassionate.

All praise is due to God, the Sustainer. May Allah's peace and grace be upon our master Muḥammad, his family, and all his contemporaneous companions. With that said, what follows is my translation of the *Mawlūd* of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī—my helper, my supporter, my master—that is recited in his praise, consists of eight poems imbued with profound metaphysical depth. In some places, I have occasionally included brief but important glosses.

I have not produced anything here aside from the original text.

To facilitate the personal acquisition of sacred knowledge; to discern spiritual truths; to comprehend the states and ranks of the friends of God (*awliyāʾ*); to reflect on the marvels of their miracles (*karāmāt*); to encounter the experiential love directed toward them and understand the lived reality of affiliation with their Sufi orders; to help one receive the full—rather than partial—spiritual rewards associated with reciting and encouraging the recitation of this text; to become aware of the proper etiquette and boundaries to be observed during its recitation; to cultivate reverence and humility in the heart; and finally, to contemplate whether such experiences are limited to those who recite the text with an understanding of its meanings.

Page 2

Therefore, by acquiring knowledge through its recitation and by living in accordance with the principles it sets forth, one may be rewarded in both this world and the hereafter, and may also be moved to offer prayers for good on behalf of this humble translator, by the grace of the saint Muḥyī al-Dīn. Yours sincerely, Ibrāhīm al-Funnānī. Peace be upon us and upon you. Written in the year 1304 after the Hijra of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

Notice [publisher's note, the note and the poem below are originally in Arabic]:

May God reward the one who edited this [book]; nothing in it is from me except the corrections

This is a great translation about the Great Succor
The secrets and the fruits of that is illuminating
O' God, reward the author of the *Quṭbiyya*[6]
a lofty position of victory befitting his station[7]
supplicating with this [work] the dezired Mīrān
of the Vaññanakkāṭ country, for his [endeavor]

Page 3

bismillāh al-raḥmāni al-raḥīm. This blessed name [Allāh] is revealed to creation as a means of supplication. All virtues and good deeds are brought forth, afflictions are warded off, and desires are realized to the prophets—Ādam,

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[6] *Quṭbiyya* is a well-known prayer manual compiled by Koṅṅaṇaṃ Vīṭṭil Ibrāhīm Musliyār, widely received in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Sri Lanka, and the Lakshadweep Islands. The lion's share of the manual consists of the poem *Qaṣīdat al-Quṭbiyya* (praise poetry about Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī) composed by the renowned Tamil Qādirī scholar Shaykh Ṣadaqatullāh al-Qāhirī (d. 1703), who was also the teacher of Maḥmūd Ṭībī. See Koṅṅaṇaṃ Vīṭṭil Ibrāhīm Musliyār, ed., *Qaṣīdat l-quṭbiyya enna bayt* (ʿĀmir l-Islām Power Press, 1982).

[7] We extend our gratitude to Thufail M. for his help with the translation of this Arabic poem.

Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsa, Sulaymān, ʿĪsā (peace be upon them)—and our Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) through this name. As an aid for those who recite this *mawlūd* to fulfill their desires, this name [Allāh] is placed at the very beginning. (*al-ḥamdu lil-llāh*) All kinds of praise making are related to God (*al-ʿAlīyy*) He is the Most Exalted (*al-ʿAẓīm*) He is the Mighty (*al-Walīyy*) He is the Guardian (*al-Karīm*) He is the Generous. In order to receive what you have asked from God in abundance, praise is invoked before the supplication.

Page 4

Praise making is of four types: those based on the Creator's (God's) being, qualities, nature, and name. To encompass the above-mentioned praise within these four categories, the *mawlūd* includes phrases such as *lil-llāh*, *al-ʿAlīyy al-ʿAẓīm*, *al-Walīyy al-Karīm*, and *al-ladhī lā yudraku ilā ākhirati*. This categorization is based on the hidden and manifest elements in the Creator's qualities and nature, and thus two names are provided for each of these qualities. The four terms of praise mentioned here convey the message that God will bestow an abundance of generosity upon those who follow the path of the man of this *mawlūd* and upon those who achieve that path through the followers of his Sufi order. Remarkably, since this *mawlūd* contains verses derived from three Prophetic sayings (*ḥadīths*) related to esoteric knowledge,

Page 5

If we analyze the praises from the perspective of the people of esoteric wisdom, the name *al-ʿAlīyy* of God invokes the meaning of His power to bless with nobility; *al-ʿAẓīm* invokes His power to bless with greatness; *al-Walīyy* invokes His power to bestow the status of a "friend of God"; and *al-Karīm* invokes His power to empower with miracles. (*al-ladhī*) He is someone (*lā yudraku*) It is impossible to reach (*li-asmāʾihi*) in his name (*nihāyatun*) exhaustion. Indeed, it is impossible for anyone to count or fully comprehend the number of God's names. The names He has assigned to Himself, as revealed in His scriptures and through His chosen messengers and divine knowledge, are beyond enumeration. It is impossible for anyone to know the full extent of these names until their ultimate limit is reached. Prophet (peace be upon him) says: *Bi-l-ismi al-ladhī sammayta bi-hi nafsak aw anzaltahu fī kitābik aw ʿallamtahu aḥadan min khalqik istaʾtharta bihi fī ʿilm al-ghaybi ʿindak* ([I

supplicate] by the name with which you named yourself, or revealed in your book, or taught to one of your creatures, or the selected ones [with] the hidden knowledge from you).

Page 6

From the above reference and other supplications, it is evident that no one knows all of his names, and that some names remain unrevealed in his hidden knowledge. While certain sources mention that God has 99 or even 1,001 names, these numbers are not definitive or exhaustive. God says: (*wa-li-llāhi al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*). Allah has the most beautiful names.[8] (*wa-lā yablughu*). Can not be reached. (*lahā*). To those names. (*ghāyatun*). It is impossible to fully comprehend or exhaust the esoteric meanings of God's names. While some qualities associated with these names can be known, the vast metaphysical knowledge embedded within them remains beyond human grasp. Just as His essence, attributes, and nature cannot be entirely known, neither can His names be fully enumerated or understood in their totality. The four categories of praise have been outlined above. This *mawlūd* now turns to a friend of God (*walī*) known as the Great Succor (*Ghawth al-Aʿẓam*). All that occurs in this world unfolds in accordance with the divine laws and patterns revealed through the names of God. Since the reality of the *walī* is likewise governed by these divine principles, the specific names of God that align with the manifestations, attributes, and functions of the *walī* are invoked at the outset of this *mawlūd* to guide the reader.

Page 92 fa-qaddara minhu lahū nuwwuban | li-baʿḍin khuṣūṣin li-baʿḍin ʿumūmin ||

(*fa-qaddara*) He has appointed, (*minhu*) from the Prophet's being (*lahu)* for the Prophet (*nuwwuban*) as deputies (*li-baʿḍin khuṣūṣin*) some special ones and (*li-baʿḍin ʿumūmin*) some for all. That is to say, while prophets (*anbiyāʾ*) were sent to specific communities, the friends of God (*awliyāʾ*) are appointed for all people, and they all serve as deputies of the Prophet Muḥammad and are created from his radiant light.

[8] Excerpt from the 180th verse of Surah Al-Aʿrāf (7:180) in the Qurʾan.

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Apart from the Prophet Muḥammad, other prophets and messengers were not sent to all of humankind. However, since the friends of God possess an omnipresent status, it may be said that they are appointed for the guidance of all humanity.

wa-ba ʿḍun atā qabla irsālihi | wa-ba ʿḍun badā ba ʿdahu musṭaqīmun ||

(*wa-ba ʿḍun*) Some [people] are (*atā*) they came (*qabla irsālihi*) before sending of the Prophet [Muḥammad] (*wa-ba ʿḍun*) some people are (*badā*) they have appeared (*ba ʿdahu*) after the Prophet (*musṭaqīmun*) they are on right path. That is to say, among the deputies, some came before and some after the Prophet Muḥammad, those who came before were prophets, and those who came after are the friends of God, and all of them remain within the bounds of the straight path.

Page 94

ajall al-ʾulā ba ʿdahu shiblu shāh | abī ṣāliḥin turjamāni al-kalīmi ||

(*ajall al-ʾulā ba ʿdahu*) One who is most exalted after the Prophet is (*shiblu shah abī ṣāliḥin*) the dear child of the great Khwāja Abī Ṣāliḥ (*turjamāni al-kalīmi*) [who] speaks the language of prophet Mūsā, the Kalīm (one who spoke to God).[9] It can also be the [in the intention of] one who spoke to the God, the Kalīm. It seems like a reference to the Sultan of saints, Shaykh [Jīlānī] or his father, or both of them. Any useful information related to this can be added here in writing.

wa-dhāka al-waliyy al-ladhī qad fashat | karāmātuhu kulla quṭrin ʿamīmin ||

(*wa-dhāka*) That great being is (*al-waliyyu*) the friend of the true and almighty God,

[9] To us, the reference to Kalīm appears to be a symbolic allusion to the name Mūsa (derived from the prophet Mūsā, known as Kalīm [the one who spoke with God]), thus completing the name Abū Ṣāliḥ Mūsa Jangī Dōst.

(*al-ladhī*) he is a man (*qad fashat*) has spread widely (*karāmātuhu*) his miracles (*kulla quṭrin ʿamīmin*) in all regions extensively. That is to say, there are many who acknowledge that there is no one greater than our master Muḥyi al-Dīn. His miracles, which are remarkable enough to amplify his renown, have spread across nations. Especially when we examine some of the spiritual and mystical practices distinctive to his name, qualities, and praises—such as invocations, chants, prayers, and the physical gestures associated with them—it becomes clear that they prompt profound mystical experiences. Many mystical elements found within the Sufi orders of other masters can also be found in the Sufi order of Jīlānī. To accommodate followers with diverse temperaments, capacities, and levels of spiritual strength, his order offers a variety of loud and silent chants, prayers, and litanies. When practiced correctly, these spiritual exercises swiftly fulfill the desires of the soul. What followers of other Suif orders attain at the end of their spiritual journey, followers of this order reach at the very beginning. In this regard, many individuals from various corners of the world have reported miraculous experiences related to both worldly affairs and the Hereafter.

Essafi Moumen Ali, “Reading the Letter”

Translated by Ali Abdeddine and Adeli Block

Translators' Preface: Why Wasn't the Letter Written in Tamazight? Translating Linguistic Hegemony in Morocco

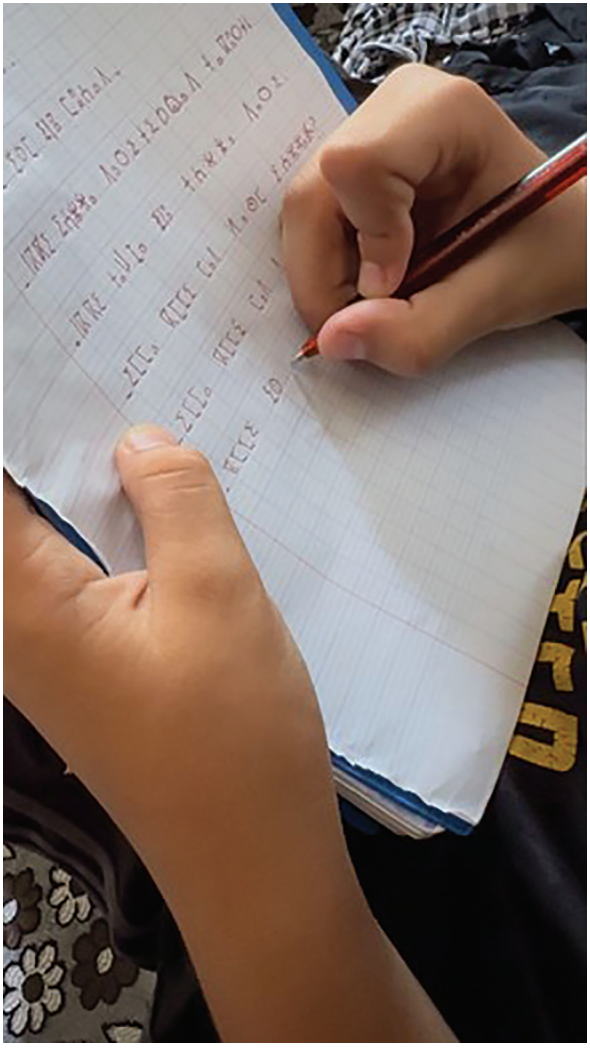
Essafi Moumen Ali's story "Reading the Letter" provides English-speaking readers with a rare glimpse into the complex linguistic landscape of rural Morocco, a setting closely resembling the Amazigh community where Ali, the co-translator, grew up. Tamazight sources, as this novella powerfully illustrates, possess inherent value and deserve wider recognition. As co-translators, we adopted an ethnographically grounded approach, drawing on our extensive experiences in rural Morocco. Linguistically, we utilized our full semiotic repertoires (Standard Tamazight, Tashelhit, Standard Arabic, Moroccan Darija, French, and English) in a translingual manner to render the Tashelhit into English. Because Ali's mother tongue is Tashelhit and Adeli's first language is English, we often used Darija—our most mutually understood language variety, despite it being less dominant for us—to communicate as co-translators in order to bring the English translation as close as we could to the original Tashelhit's meaning. While the meaning of Essafi Moumen Ali's story is deep and profound, the language employed is relatively straightforward and simple. This sometimes presents challenges while trying to adequately convey both the simplicity and depth of the original text while also preserving the intricacies of Amazigh lifeways. Our palimpsestic process mirrors our own personal layered histories, languages, and contexts, which we drew upon to bridge the gap between these disparate Amazigh and American social contexts.

The narrative follows Lalla Fadma, an aging mother waiting for news from her long-absent migrant son. When a letter finally arrives, written in Arabic, it becomes a powerful symbol of exclusion. No one in the village can read it. The unreadable letter highlights a broader sociolinguistic struggle: the hegemony of Arabic (the language of state, religion, and formal education) over Tamazight, the villagers' mother tongue. Thus, this story illuminates the political economy of language, linguistic oppression, and the deliberate erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems.

The story poses a fundamental question through the innocent voice of a child: Why wasn't the letter written in Tamazight? This question underscores the persistent gap between official language policy and lived experiences. Although Tamazight was declared an official language in Morocco's 2011 constitution alongside Arabic, its marginalization continues in many spheres of life. The child, Ali, despite learning Arabic in the mosque, fails to understand the letter, revealing the disjuncture between imposed linguistic systems and everyday linguistic practices.

The story critiques the illusion of individual salvation. The son's return as a circus leader brings joy and spectacle, yet this moment of entertainment may be a distraction from ongoing structural issues. The circus—imported, westernized, and alien—may symbolize how dominant powers exploit folklore and iconography to obscure fundamental struggles around infrastructure and linguistic justice. Rather than labeling villages as "cut off" and "isolated," we must consider how the state has made them so.

The letter remains an unopened text, a metaphor for unresolved tensions between identity and assimilation. "Reading the Letter" ultimately argues that power lies not in possessing the truth, but in narrating it and making it accessible to those silenced by linguistic exclusion. We hope this translation contributes to a broader understanding of Amazigh thought and literature and prompts critical reflection of the following question: Who is teaching you that your language cannot be written, and why?



Mouad's letter in Tamazight script. Credit to Ali Abdeddine.

"Reading the Letter"

Bihi stepped down from a heavily loaded mule and knocked on the decrepit door of a small house, calling out, "Lalla Fadma . . . Oh, Lalla Fadma!"

An elderly woman appeared, and he handed her the few goods he had brought from the market along with a letter.

Bihi was one of the few men who remained in the village of *Tazaoult*, nestled atop the peaks of the Anti-Atlas. Only the elderly men and women, along with a few young children, remained in the village. Many homes stood abandoned, their inhabitants having migrated to the cities to work in trade.

Whenever Bihi went to the market, he shopped not only for his own household but also for some of the village women whose husbands had migrated. It was socially inappropriate for them to go shopping themselves.

Lalla Fadma took the goods and the letter, offering prayers for Bihi. Then she asked, "Is it from Touda or Zayna?"

She asked because she was accustomed to receiving letters from her two daughters. Touda was married and living in Rabat, while Zayna had settled in Casablanca with her husband. They were the ones who sent her the little money that she lived on.

Bihi smiled and replied, "The letter is not from them."

Lalla Fadma was taken aback. "Then from whom? Please tell me!"

Bihi's smile lingered as he said, "You won't believe it, Lalla Fadma. Congratulations! The letter is from your son, Hamo. The Moqaddem[1] gave it to me at the market."

A mixture of astonishment and joy shook Lalla Fadma. Her body trembled. She never expected a letter from Hamo—her son who had left for France over 25 years ago and had since vanished, leaving no trace of whether he was alive or dead.

For years, she had asked anyone returning from France about him, in every village and town nearby, but no one knew anything.

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[1] This refers to the man who acts as the local arm of the state.

Although she could not read, she eagerly tore open the envelope, pulling out the letter and staring at it as if searching for him within its lines. Tears welled up in her eyes, and she sighed deeply.

Bihi, seeing her distress, tried to distract her and forced a smile, "Lalla Fadma, you should neither smile nor cry. Just thank Allah, for He has returned your lost son to you."

Her face brightened at his words, and deep wrinkles appeared as she smiled, chasing away the sorrow in her eyes. "Praise be to Allah! I thank Him that my son is still alive!"

She recalled the words of people who had told her time and again, "Don't hold onto hope, Lalla Fadma. Your son Hamo is probably dead. Maybe someone killed him and hid his body, or maybe he drowned in the river."

She tucked the letter close to her chest and rushed toward the mosque, saying, "I'll go now and ask the Imam to read it for me!"

But Bihi, still smiling, stopped her, "Where are you rushing to? The Imam hasn't returned yet from his hometown. Did you forget? He is from the Sous Valley, not our village. He visits his family once a year and will return tomorrow."

Lalla Fadma stopped in her tracks. She pulled the letter from her chest and stared at it in frustration, mourning her inability to read it.

Bihi reassured her with another smile, "Don't worry, Lalla Fadma. It's not hard to guess what your son wrote. He greets you, tells you he is well, and says he only lacks the joy of seeing you. He hopes you and his wife are well too."

Lalla Fadma sensed that Bihi was merely trying to comfort her, so she replied hesitantly, "I hope that's true . . ."

Bihi, noticing her doubt, insisted, "I promise you, Lalla Fadma, this is what he wrote. In fact, I can swear he even mentioned that he would return to the village in the coming days or next week!"

Ever since Bihi received the letter from the *Moqaddem*, he had been telling everyone at the market, "Hamo Ait Lshkar is alive! He sent a letter! He's coming back to the village soon!"

Not only did the villagers hear his words, but so did the mountains, rivers, and trees along the road to the market. The valleys echoed the news as he spread it on his way back home.

He had repeated the words so much that, to him, they had become an undeniable truth.

Lalla Fadma looked at him and asked, "How do you know my son Hamo is coming in the next few days? Who told you that?"

Bihi confidently replied, "The Moqaddem told me the letter came from Rabat."

"And who told him that?" she interrupted.

Smiling, Bihi pointed at the postal stamp on the envelope and explained, "Look at this postal mark. It's from Rabat's post office. This means Hamo returned from France and is now in Rabat. That's where he sent the letter from."

Left with no choice but to believe him, Lalla Fadma's mouth fell slightly open as she listened.

Bihi continued, "The Moqaddem also told me Hamo sent this letter via express mail."

"What is express mail?" she asked.

"It means the message was sent quickly and should have arrived on the same day."

He added with certainty, "This proves that Hamo is indeed in Rabat and sent this message to let you know to prepare for his arrival."

Hearing this, Lalla Fadma rushed into the house and climbed the poorly lit staircase to the kitchen, where her daughter-in-law, Aicha, was baking bread for dinner.

"Aicha! Hamo is coming home!"

Her worries of 25 years had finally ended. She and Aicha were overcome with joy.

That night felt endlessly long for Aicha. Unable to sleep, she left the room she had shared with Lalla Fadma since her husband left. She went into her own small room, lit a candle, and stared at herself in the mirror, hesitant, almost afraid of what she might see.

Twenty-five years had passed, and she had rarely looked at herself in the mirror. Since her husband left, beauty had meant nothing to her. Instead, she had devoted herself to hard work—plowing, harvesting, gathering herbs for the cow and donkey, watering the garden, grinding grain—just to keep herself and her mother-in-law from going hungry.

Now, as she gazed at her reflection, fear enveloped her. The glow of youth was gone. She touched her face and found her skin no longer soft, no longer radiant. A tear slipped down her cheek.

She dreaded the thought: *Would her husband still care for her when he returned?*

The next evening, the women of the village gathered at Lalla Fadma's house to help prepare for Hamo's return. They roasted almonds and prepared argan oil and *amlou*.

Bihi arrived with two other men, carrying three large sacks of flour ground at the watermill near the river.

Lalla Fadma returned from the mosque for the third time that day, her grandson, Ali, Bihi's son, trailing behind her. She was breathless as she announced, "It's past Asr prayer, and the Imam hasn't arrived yet!"

Everyone fell silent. The anticipation was unbearable. They exchanged glances, unable to say anything.

Bihi broke the silence. "Lalla Fadma, why don't you let my son, Ali, read the letter? He's a student at the mosque and knows how to sound out words."

Ali took the letter, his hands trembling. Under the expectant gazes of everyone in the room, and he slowly sounded out the words. When he finished, he lifted his eyes to his father.

Bihi urged, "Keep reading."

Ali hesitated, "I'm done. I've read it all."

His father frowned, "You're lying. You didn't say 'And peace.' All letters end with 'And peace.'"

Ali swore he had read every word and that there was no "And peace" at the end.

The villagers burst into laughter, assuming he couldn't read.

Bihi wanted the laughter to continue, so he turned to his son and said, "Well then, my son, since you say you've read the whole letter, tell us what it says and explain it to us."

The boy, with a quiet sadness, replied, "I don't know."

The father asked, surprised, "Why not? Didn't you say you read it?"

He answered, "I can't explain it . . . because I don't understand Arabic."

When the people heard this, they burst into laughter once again, mocking him. The boy felt disappointed. He hadn't lied to them, and he couldn't understand why they laughed at him without reason. He began to cry and ran away, overwhelmed.

When night fell that day, everyone regretted what had happened, for little Ali had not returned home, and no one knew where he had gone.

The entire village mobilized to search for him. People carried lanterns and torches, searching through homes, ruins, and even checking the well—without success. Bihi and some of the men went as far as Tamjlousht, his aunt's village at the end of the river, but no one there had seen him. Fear paralyzed them, worried that something terrible might have happened.

Lalla Fadma was the most remorseful, knowing that her letter was the reason for everything that had unfolded.

The villagers' greatest fear was that Ali would encounter wild wolves in the forest—and that was exactly what happened. Had it not been for a passing group of French tourists, the wolves would have devoured him. These French travelers visited the Sous Mountains every year, enjoying the breathtaking landscapes and picturesque villages. That night, they rescued Ali from death, fed him, and sheltered him from the cold in their tent.

The mockery Ali had endured had driven him to leave the village, intending to reach his aunt's house in Tamjlousht. He deliberately chose to walk through the forest rather than take the usual path, fearing his father would find him and bring him back.

The next morning, Ali had breakfast with the caravan. One of the travelers, who was familiar with the area and spoke Tamazight, offered to take him to Tamjlousht, as Ali had told them his destination.

As they walked through the forest, the Frenchman shared stories of the places he had visited in Sous and the adventures he had experienced. Ali, fascinated by his words, asked, "You're French, yet you speak Tamazight! Where did you learn it?"

The man smiled and answered, "In France, my homeland."

Ali's eyes widened in surprise. "France?! Are the French Amazigh people too?"

The Frenchman chuckled. “No, they are not Amazigh.”

Ali pressed further. “Then how did you learn to speak Tamazight?”

“I studied it.”

Ali was even more astonished. “You studied it? Does that mean Tamazight is taught?”

“Yes, there are schools that teach it.”

Ali lowered his head, puzzled. “I never imagined this. . . . I never thought Tamazight could be written!”

He fell silent, lost in thought, before asking, “Can we write Tamazight on a board and read it?”

The Frenchman found Ali’s innocence endearing and smiled. “Of course, anyone can do that.”

“Even me?” Ali asked hesitantly.

“Even you!” the man assured him.

Bending down, the Frenchman picked up a small stick from the ground and handed it to Ali.“Do you know how to write?”

“Yes, I do,” Ali responded.

“Then let’s try something,” the man said. “Write down what I dictate to you on the ground with this stick.”

Ali nodded as the man slowly dictated, “Little . . . white . . . gazelle . . . , do not wander . . . too far into the wilderness. . . . Beware of the wolves.”

When Ali finished writing, the Frenchman urged, “Now, read what you wrote.”

Ali focused, struggling a bit, but eventually read the words aloud.

“Do you understand what you just read?” the Frenchman asked.

“Yes, I do,” Ali replied.

The man smiled warmly. “Well then, you have written and read in Tamazight, little white gazelle!”

Ali blushed and lowered his head, realizing how he had underestimated his own language, likening it to a little white lost gazelle.

They continued walking, Ali deep in thought. He told himself, *If the letter had been written in Tamazight, I would have understood it, and no one would have mocked me.*

Not long after, they encountered Ali’s father and some men searching for him in the forest.

The next day, Lalla Fadma went to the mosque again, but the Imam was still absent. Her worry grew.

She met a villager who had just finished his prayers, and he reassured her: "Tomorrow is market day. By Allah's will, your son Hamo will come, and he will read you the letter himself—no need for the Imam."

Hope flickered in her heart.

The following day, as the men went to the market, Lalla Fadma's house was filled with the voices of village women who had come to help her prepare for Hamo's return. As the day passed and the men returned, her heart pounded with anticipation. But there was no news of Hamo.

When she asked them, they all shook their heads. "We saw no one, and we heard nothing about him."

Pain squeezed her chest. She and Aicha sat in silence, waiting. Dinner time came and went, and still, Hamo did not arrive.

Aicha, unable to sit still, entered her room. The air was thick with the scent of incense and perfume—fragrances she had sprinkled on the bed she had prepared for her husband's return that night.

She glanced at her reflection in the mirror. The radiant glow had returned to her face, but a lump of sorrow dulled the sparkle in her kohl-lined eyes.

She left her room, carrying her sadness into Lalla Fadma's room. Neither woman ate dinner that night. Neither spoke. They simply sat in silence, lost in thought.

Outside, the wind howled, swirling up dust, breaking dry, brittle twigs. Hours passed, and the small oil lamp flickered out, darkness swallowing the room.

Suddenly, Aicha leaped to her feet. "I heard a car!"

Lalla Fadma, startled, replied, "I heard something too . . . but I thought it was just the wind."

Aicha rushed to the rooftop, braving the swirling dust to get a better view of the road leading to the market. Lalla Fadma followed closely behind.

They spotted the distant glow of headlights cutting through the night, inching closer to the village.

Their hearts pounded with joy. It must be Hamo!

But just as quickly as their hope had flared, it was extinguished. The car did not stop. It passed through the village without slowing down.

Disheartened, they climbed down from the rooftop, dragging their disappointment behind them, and returned to their silent, waiting room.

The next morning, the sun rose hidden behind black clouds. The wind kept blowing without pause. The day passed, and the Imam didn't come. Anxiety settled in Lalla Fadma's heart. She could no longer bear the wait for someone to read the letter. She entered the room and found Aicha praying. Without waiting for a reply, she said:

"I will go to the village of Tamjlousht so that their Imam can read me the letter."

She went down the stairs to the barn, placed the saddle on the donkey's back, and struggled to mount it. Then she set out on the road. As soon as Aicha finished her prayer, she hurried after her, catching up with her just outside the village as she braved the dust storms stirred up by the strong winds. She begged her to return and warned her of the wind and the violent gusts. But Lalla Fadma was determined and paid no attention to any of it. She urged the donkey to keep going.

Aicha realized she would not be able to stop her, so she stood watching her with fearful eyes until she disappeared into the whirlwinds of dust.

Moments later, the rain began to fall. Thunder rumbled, followed by flashes of lightning, and the rain plummeted from the sky. The rivers overflowed, but Lalla Fadma paid no attention. She kept urging the donkey forward. Aicha feared something bad might happen to her, so she headed to Bihi's house to inform him. He quickly mounted his mule and went after her to bring her back.

Lalla Fadma reached the river. It was overflowing, so she stood there staring at its waves that were sweeping everything in their path. The river hadn't seen such a flood in years. It hadn't rained like that in a long time.

Tears mixed with rain on Lalla Fadma's face. She was helpless, unable to cross the river to reach Tamjlousht, which lay on the other

side. Bihi found her standing still by the river and eventually managed to convince her to return to the village. She mounted his mule, and he rode the donkey back.

Between Maghrib and Isha prayers, the men gathered around the fire in a room inside the mosque, warming themselves and discussing Lalla Fadma's problem. They were all sympathetic, but none had a solution. A brief silence fell before one of them stood and said: "How can we call ourselves men when we are unable to read a simple letter?"

Another rubbed his head in shame and said, "It's a disgrace . . . truly, every man should know how to read his own letter and not have to let the Imam see its contents, so that only the sender and the receiver know what it says."

Another man added, "Our ancestors were right when they said, 'Whoever doesn't cook his own food, sew his own clothes, and read his own letter—his death is better than his life.'"

A week passed with nonstop rain, day and night. The roof of Lalla Fadma's house started leaking. She and Aicha tried to fix it to no avail. They filled the cracks with mud and used soil to plug the leaks, but it was no use—the house was falling apart. The villagers were trapped. No one could cross the turbulent river to go to the market for essential items.

One night, Lalla Fadma fell into a deep sleep and dreamt that her son, Hamo, had become ill in France. She saw him lying in a hospital bed. Afraid he might die far from his family, he returned to Morocco. When he arrived in Rabat, his condition worsened, and he was taken to a hospital. Upon waking up, he asked a nurse to write a letter to his mother, asking her to come visit him. He had something important to tell her before he died.

Lalla Fadma awoke from the dream in terror. She sat up thinking about her son and told Aicha about it the next morning. They spent the whole day deeply worried, afraid the dream might be reality—that Hamo might die without seeing them or telling them what he needed to say.

That evening, they decided to travel to Rabat in search of the hospital where Hamo was staying.

The rain finally stopped after three days. The river's water level dropped. On the evening of their planned departure to Rabat, Aicha noticed that Lalla Fadma looked pale from sorrow and worry about her son. She sat next to her to console her and then revealed a long-hidden secret—something that had weighed on her heart for a long time.

She told her about her life with her husband, Hamo, and how, despite not being a wealthy trader, they had lived happily.

Hamo had been a performer with the Sidi Hmad Ou Moussa circus troupe. The money he earned from shows in Marrakech's Jemaa El-Fnaa square and elsewhere was enough for them. Aicha was the only woman in the village who spent extended time with her husband. Most other women only saw their husbands once a year since they worked in faraway cities. But Aicha's husband visited her five times a year, often bringing gifts when he had made good money.

This went on for years until, one day, Aicha wore a new dress her husband had gifted her. Some women saw her, and one of them, with a sarcastic smile, hurled a cruel remark, "I didn't know beggars made enough to buy such a dress for their wives."

The words hurt Aicha deeply. It pained her that people saw her husband as a beggar.

From that day on, whenever her husband visited, she tried to convince him to change his work, without telling him why. When all her attempts failed, she finally begged him to stop "begging."

When he heard her words, he defended himself and his profession, trying to convince her that his work was not begging. But she held firm and said sadly, "From now on, don't bring me gifts bought with money from begging."

She left the room, leaving him to ponder. At first, Hamo didn't take her words seriously. But one day, during a performance, it was his turn to collect donations from the audience. Something inside him echoed his wife's words. He felt too ashamed to stretch out his hand. Sweat covered his body. He lowered his eyes and froze in place. His colleagues thought he was sick and ended the show early.

On that day, Hamo quit his job. With the money he had left, he obtained a passport and migrated to France in search of work. Then his news stopped.

When Aicha finished telling the story, she bit her lip in regret, bowed her head, and sobbed, "Forgive me . . . forgive me . . . it's my fault. If I hadn't said anything, Hamo wouldn't have left for France."

Lalla Fadma answered her gently, "Don't burden yourself, my daughter. . . . You haven't done anything wrong. You only did what you thought was best for your husband."

She paused for a moment, then continued, sighing deeply as if speaking to herself, "Perhaps it was my fate not to live my life with my son . . ."

Aicha understood why Lalla Fadma had said those words—because she had spent only a few days with her son. There had always been something keeping her away from him. She said what she said because the very first thing that separated her from her son was the death of her first husband, whom she had loved and who had loved her until he died from the fever that struck the village at that time. He had left her with their son Hamo and two daughters, Touda and Zayna, all still very young.

Later, her father married her off to another man, much older. When her new husband brought her to his village, Tazaoult, Hamo was only three years old. When her son turned five, her new husband woke her up one night and said, "I dreamed that Sidi Hmad Ou Moussa asked me for Hamo."

Her heart trembled at his words because she understood what he meant. He wanted to take her son away and send him to Sidi Hmad Ou Moussa to be handed over to one of the circus trainers to follow the path of the children of Sidi Hmad Ou Moussa.

She refused, which led to several days of conflict between them. Afraid, she fled with her children to her father's house and told him what her husband intended to do. But her father told her that her husband was right and warned her about the curse of Sidi Hamad Ou Moussa if she didn't comply. He returned her to her husband's home.

Days passed without her husband mentioning Hamo again . . . until one morning, she discovered he was gone. She

checked and found the donkey was missing too, and she knew then that her husband had taken her son far away without her permission. She ran like a madwoman through the streets, searching for them in vain. Exhausted, she sat under a large argan tree, sighing in deep sorrow.

Meanwhile, her husband had taken Hamo to Tazerwalt, where he handed him over to a circus trainer and returned to the village. When he got home, he found his wife pale and thin, traumatized by what had happened.

Poor Hamo had fallen into the hands of a cruel trainer. He suffered greatly, enduring abuse, and only learned circus arts after much hardship.

Later, Lalla Fadma's husband regretted what he had done and went to bring Hamo back. But when he arrived in Tazerwalt, the trainer, upon learning he had come, sent his students to tell him, "The trainer and Hamo are not here—they left with a group for Marrakech." He returned home with no success. For over three years, he kept going back to Tazerwalt but never found Hamo or the trainer. Each time, they lied to him. When he died, Lalla Fadma lost all hope of her son's return. She didn't even know the name of the trainer who had taken him.

Fifteen years passed without her seeing or hearing any news of her son, until one day he returned, handsome and strong, and she was overjoyed. He then married Aicha, and they lived happily together. But less than two years later, he immigrated to France to find work, and they were separated once again . . .

All of this played in Lalla Fadma's and Aicha's minds like a film reel that sleepless night. They were waiting for morning to go to Rabat. Outside, heavy rain pounded the earth, and they were worried the road might be blocked off by the flooding river. Each lay curled up with her thoughts, listening to the raindrops falling into buckets and pots from the leaking roof. From time to time, Aicha would get up to empty the containers into the drain so the room wouldn't flood.

As soon as morning came, they began preparing to leave, but suddenly, a deafening sound shook the house. Part of it had collapsed. Fortunately, the section they were in was still standing.

Though Aicha was terrified it might fall too, she composed herself and helped Lalla Fadma down the stairs and past the rubble. Once outside, they stood in the strong wind, watching in disbelief as the rest of the house crumbled before their eyes into a pile of stones.

The villagers comforted them, and Bihi took them to his home where they spent the day and the night. He tried to dissuade them from traveling and asked them to postpone the trip to Rabat, but they insisted. They said their goodbyes to Bihi and his family, then passed by other homes to bid farewell to the villagers. But they found no one, as everyone had gone to watch the circus that had arrived in the area.

Everyone was eager to see the circus, especially the exotic animals—lions, leopards, and elephants—in large cages pulled by trucks. On Aicha's and Lalla Fadma's way through the village, they stopped near the pile of stones that had once been their home and stood there, eyes filled with tears, gazing at the ruins.

Aicha and Lalla Fadma began sifting through the rubble, hoping to find something of their belongings. A man from the circus, wearing western clothing, stood nearby watching the scene with a heavy heart. When they saw him, they covered their faces, as women in the area usually do, and waited for him to leave so they could continue searching in privacy. But he remained standing, watching sadly.

After a moment, he approached and asked, "Excuse me, ladies, when did this house collapse?"

Hearing him speak Tamazight surprised them. They had thought he was a foreigner just passing through.

Lalla Fadma replied, "It collapsed just yesterday."

He gasped in shock and said, "Yesterday?!"

Then he added, "Do you know where the women who lived here went?"

Lalla Fadma answered, "We are the ones who lived here."

She had barely finished her sentence when he exclaimed joyfully, "Mother . . . Mother . . . I'm Hamo!"

As soon as they heard that, they uncovered their faces, staring at him in shock and joy. They couldn't believe they were seeing Hamo, alive and smiling.

The whole village soon knew that Hamo had returned—and that he was now the director of the circus. They welcomed him warmly and were proud of his return. Everyone gathered in Bihi's house, drinking tea while Hamo told them about what had happened during his time abroad.

He said when he first arrived in France, he was unemployed for a long time and was too ashamed to return home. Eventually, he met someone who got him a job with a big circus, and he began traveling with them around the world—to Europe, America, Canada, Japan . . .

He added that he had gained great experience there, performing flips and acrobatics in the tradition of Sidi Hmad Ou Moussa's troupe. He learned to work with wild animals—lions, leopards—and mastered tightrope walking and clown acts. He said, "I made a fortune from this work, and I used it to buy shares in the circus until I became the sole owner."

He didn't mention the hardship, hunger, and illness he had endured before finding that circus job. Back then, he lived off coins tossed to him by drunkards outside cafés, where he performed acrobatics.

Even that desperate work was difficult. He was often chased away and beaten by café owners or their guards, treated like a stray dog.

He lived in a tiny room with an old Algerian man from Kabylia who had spent over 40 years in France, jobless, drinking, gambling, and never once writing to his family or returning home.

One day, Hamo fell seriously ill, bedridden for days without food or care. The Algerian only came back at night. When the illness worsened, the man called a doctor, afraid Hamo would die in the room. The doctor insisted he be taken to a hospital immediately.

But the Algerian was terrified of getting in trouble for housing an undocumented immigrant—Hamo's residency papers had expired. Unsure of what to do, and fearing more trouble if Hamo died there, he consulted friends who advised him to drive Hamo to a hospital at night and leave him at the door.

He borrowed an old car, dropped Hamo off at the hospital, and drove away. A nurse found Hamo, and after consulting doctors, they admitted him and provided him proper care until he recovered.

As soon as he felt better, Hamo fled the hospital, afraid he'd be deported once he fully recovered.

He went back to performing his old acrobatics outside cafés and bars. One day, a circus owner spotted him and, impressed by his talent, offered him a job . . .

Everyone sipped tea and nibbled almonds while listening in awe to Hamo's strange adventures across the world. But when he spoke about the dream that led him to return home, everything else faded. Some villagers' eyes filled with tears as he recounted, "One night, as I slept, I dreamed that I was out in the forest with my mother collecting firewood. I left her behind, gathering what I had chopped. Suddenly, a massive, beautiful bird appeared beside me. Before I could react, it grabbed me with its powerful claws and flew high into the sky . . .

"I wasn't afraid—I actually enjoyed soaring through the vast skies, breathing in fresh air I had never known.

"The bird flew toward a place glowing with colorful sunlight. Just as we approached it, I looked down and saw my mother on the ground, mad with grief, barefoot, wearing tattered clothes, dragging her dirty feet, and calling out, 'Hamo . . . Where are you, my son . . . ?'

"My heart broke. I began shouting for her until I lost my voice, but she couldn't hear me. I looked up and begged the bird to take me back, but it wouldn't. I struggled with all my might to free myself. I took my axe and struck the bird's leg like it was a tree trunk. Blood gushed everywhere, but still, I could not break free . . ."

Just as the bird was about to carry him into that radiant world, Hamo managed to cut its leg with his axe. He plummeted rapidly toward the ground, and there, he woke up from his dream, drenched in sweat.

When he finished telling his story, someone among the listeners turned to him and said, "That dream was a call from Lalla Fadma. The poor woman has suffered so much. You came back just in time. Had you delayed any longer, she might have wandered off aimlessly, lost after her house was destroyed . . ."

Upon hearing this, Ali, the son of Bihi, remembered what had happened to him and turned to Hamo, saying, "Why didn't you write the letter in Tamazight?"

As soon as the others heard that, they all burst into continuous laughter. Then Lalla Fadma stood up, pulled the letter from her clothes, handed it to Ali, and said, "Take the letter, my son . . . read it aloud to everyone once more. Now that Hamo is here, he can confirm that you really can read."

Lalla Fadma insisted on saying that because Ali had once come to her, swearing that he had truly read the letter. She had answered him gently, "I know, my son, that you read it . . ."

He was surprised by her certainty and asked, "How did you know I really read it?"

She told him kindly that she had seen it in his beautiful eyes.

Then Ali stood up and read the letter in front of everyone. When he finished, he turned to Hamo, waiting for his reaction. Hamo smiled, applauded him, and said, "Well done, my boy . . . you read the letter—you CAN read."

The people looked at each other in astonishment, wondering, *Did that really just happen? Did Ali actually read the letter?*

Then Ali turned to Hamo and said, "But even though I read it . . . I didn't understand it."

Hamo smiled and said, "It only said that we're doing well, that I send greetings to my mother, my family, and the people of the village, and that I've arrived in Rabat and will be home soon."

At that point, Ali turned to him with a stern voice, "If you had written all that in Tamazight, everyone in the village would have understood it easily when I read it to them. Without any trouble!"

As soon as the crowd heard that, they burst into laughter once again. Before evening fell that day, on Hamo's orders, the circus workers prepared a large tent and invited all the villagers to dinner.

That night, joy filled the village as the glittering lights of the circus lit everything up. People shared a meal and enjoyed performances they had never seen before. They danced until dawn, as if celebrating a grand wedding.

Sadeq Hedayat, *The Pearl Cannon* (excerpt)

Translated by Mostafa Abedinifard

Translator's Preface

In the final six years of his life, Sadeq Hedayat (1903–51) maintained an intense correspondence with his close friend, Hassan Shahid-Nura'i. These letters, brimming with relentless grievances about the status quo—particularly everything related to Iran—lay bare his growing estrangement from a country he saw as irredeemable, steeped in corruption and hypocrisy. Nowhere is his fury more distilled than in a letter where he declares: "Honestly, the sheer brazenness and depravity in this land know no bounds! What a damned, rotten, and wretched place, swarming with spiteful, infernal creatures!"

In a letter from earlier that same year, he had already outlined a final act of defiance, a literary onslaught against the myths, institutions, and ideologies he saw as corrosive—whether religious, nationalistic, or imperialistic: "I intend to create something obscene and outrageous—something that will be a spit in the face of everyone. Maybe I won't be able to publish it, but that doesn't matter. This is my last weapon—at the very least, I don't want them thinking to themselves, 'That fool got taken for a ride!'"

This "last weapon" became *The Pearl Cannon* (*Toop-e Morvari*, 1947), perhaps the most incendiary work of Hedayat's career. Written in his final years, it is both a satire and a reckoning, a book that refuses deference as much as it defies categorization. If *The Pearl Cannon* is an assault on nationalism, religion, and self-mythologizing, it is also a testament to Hedayat's own refusal to reconcile with a world he found intolerable.

At its core, *The Pearl Cannon* is framed around the legend of a weather-worn cannon—an actual historical artifact—but this is a pretext for Hedayat's scathing critique of Iranian society, its myths, and its institutions. Wielding the cannon like a literary weapon, he dismantles nationalistic and religious dogma while rewriting world history as grotesque satire, exposing the absurdities of empire, colonialism, and the narratives that sustain them.

More than anything, *The Pearl Cannon* is an act of literary subversion, refusing containment—linguistically, historically, and ideologically. Hedayat distorts Persian historiographical traditions, exposing how national myths, colonial narratives, and religious dogma are

assembled and manipulated. What emerges is an absurd meditation on history as invention, where classical Perso-Arabic historiography collides with European colonial discourse, and neither escapes unscathed.

His linguistic play is just as radical. Hedayat moves across Persian registers, veering from the grandiosity of classical historiography to the deadening bureaucracy of officialdom to the raw immediacy of street vernacular. He revels in the bloated pomposity of Arabic-infused religious rhetoric, only to puncture it moments later. Yet his linguistic shifts are not merely stylistic; they are political. Arabic appears most frequently, often through untranslated Qur'anic references asserting their own authority. Meanwhile, Azeri, Gilaki, and other languages surface briefly but deliberately, unsettling the reader and critiquing the nationalist impulse to impose Persian as Iran's sole literary medium. What makes this even more striking is that Persian—the official language—is relegated to the footnotes, reversing the usual hierarchy of linguistic authority and challenging Iran's monolingual myth.

Hedayat is equally merciless in his treatment of nationalist historiography. With biting humor, he assigns improbable modern national identities to premodern poets, skewering the tendency to retroactively conscript literary figures into nationalist pantheons. These poets belonged to the fluid, borderless Persianate world, not to modern nation-states, and Hedayat exploits this anachronism to lay bare the absurdity of rewriting history to fit contemporary political imperatives.

Just as its themes are unstable, so too is its form. *The Pearl Cannon* blends the modern novella and speculative fiction with *maqāma*-style prose, epic traditions, grotesque satire, and travelogue. Yet rather than a mere pastiche, Hedayat's approach reflects the destabilizing effects of print modernity on Persianate genres. He weaponizes classical Persian literary forms, turning *madh* (praise) into *hajw* (invective), hijacking the language of eulogy to deliver his most lacerating critiques—not only against nationalistic myth-making but also against religious dogma. The satirical excess of *The Pearl Cannon* unsettles rigid boundaries between the "secular" and the "religious," revealing both as ideological constructs rather than fixed categories.

For all its satirical brilliance, however, *The Pearl Cannon* does not escape the charge of Islamophobia. While Hedayat attributes much of the anti-Islamic rhetoric to his characters, his letters leave little doubt about his disdain for the Shiʿa clergy and the ways religion was wielded as a tool of power and corruption in Iran. Yet to reduce his critique to outright rejection of Islam would be misleading. His deep engagement with Qurʾanic references, Islamic history, and religious folklore suggests not dismissal but an enduring preoccupation—one shaped as much by his hostility toward its practitioners as by the institution itself.

Reading *The Pearl Cannon* through the lens of translation—not as mere accessibility but as a critical act of negotiation—raises broader questions about linguistic and cultural transmission. Hedayat's engagement with translation, from his playful insertion of borrowed words to his subversion of historical discourse, reflects an acute awareness of how texts and ideas transform as they move across linguistic and ideological boundaries. Rather than a fixed artifact, his work resists containment, demanding to be read as a dynamic, evolving act of subversion—one that continually unsettles meaning, disrupts hierarchies, and exposes the fluidity of history, language, and identity.

Even in its most scathing moments, *The Pearl Cannon* is the product of a mind that saw writing as an absurd, unpredictable process governed as much by chance as by intent. This is perhaps best captured in a letter to Shahid-Nura'i, where Hedayat, struck by his friend's use of the German word *Verzweiflung* ("despair"), declares that he must "stuff it somewhere into *The Pearl Cannon* so that it stays—what a waste it would be to let it be forgotten."[1] And so he does. The word finds its way into the novella, not as some grand literary statement, but as a casual, almost accidental relic of their correspondence—an inside joke against oblivion.

[1] The three references to Hedayat's letters in my preface are from letters number 34 (1947), 27 (1947), and 51 (1948), as published in Sadeq Hedayat, *82 Nameh beh Hassan Shahid-Nura'i* [82 letters to Hassan Shahid-Nura'i], ed. Naser Pakdaman (Ketab-e Chashm-Andaz, 1379 [2000]).

In the end, *The Pearl Cannon* is more than a critique of history or ideology; it is a rejection of imposed meaning altogether. Language, plundered from different sources and smuggled into the text, becomes part of his defiant game. His last weapon was not merely satire but the refusal to impose coherence on an incoherent world—his *Verzweiflung*, smuggled into literature, ensuring that even in its absurdity, it would not be forgotten.

Although the novella was completed in Hedayat's lifetime, *The Pearl Cannon* remained unpublished in full until after his death. On April 9, 1951, Hedayat ended his life in Paris, unaware that Shahid-Nura'i would die shortly later. The coincidence is haunting, yet *The Pearl Cannon* stands apart from biography. With its linguistic irreverence, genre-bending form, and dismantling of nationalist and colonial mythologies, it remains as unsettling today as when it was first written.

Cover of the 2008 edition of Hedayat's controversial and satirical work, accompanied by critical commentary by Mahjoub. Photo credit to Arash Publishers & House of Art and Literature, Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden, 2008.

From *The Pearl Cannon*, by Sadeq Hedayat

Captain Columbus set off at the auspicious day and hour.[2] [. . .] The warship *Carthagena* sailed for two or three months, like a drunken reveler, lurching from side to side. Yet, contrary to all expectations, there was no sign of the Arabian Peninsula, nor any news to be heard. Meanwhile, in its struggle against opposing winds, the *Carthagena* retraced its path two or three times, exhausting all the provisions aboard. [. . .] As the warship reached the shore, Captain Columbus noticed the natives gathered around a thick pipe resting on two wheels, engaged in various rituals and ceremonies. Some of them wore masks, rhythmically tapping the bottoms of water sprayers as they swayed and chanted, "Since the world was made, we've sung and swayed." Women climbed up and down the pipe, singing songs of joy and laughter. Meanwhile, young men with bald vulture feathers perched on their heads thoughtfully puffed on marijuana cigarettes. With knives in hand, they swayed in a coquettish manner around the pipe, moving to the rhythm of samba, rumba, and conga, as if caught in a frenzy of Amok.[3]

Upon witnessing this scene, Columbus was filled with astonishment. Suddenly, he noticed that, aside from the seven individuals who appeared to be the special attendants of this pipe and were likely receiving some extraordinary bonus, everyone else scattered. One of the attendants approached, ignited the end of the pipe, and immediately a deafening roar filled the air. A cloud of smoke and flames erupted from the pipe's mouth, and the wheels reversed, crushing the seven special attendants beneath them.

At the sight of this spectacle, Columbus was overwhelmed with awe. He immediately fell to his knees in prostration and cried out,

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[2] Unless otherwise indicated, the notes are by the translator. Some entries have been adapted or expanded from the commentary by Mohammad Jaʿfar Mahjoub in the Persian edition, *Toop-e Morvari* (Arash Publishers & House of Art and Literature, 2008).

[3] "Amok" (from Malay) entered European languages by the 19th century; its frenzied connotation was popularized by Stefan Zweig's novella *Amok* (1922), later translated into Persian by Hedayat's relative, Rahmat Elahi.

"Glory be to God! What wondrous tale is this?" Then, as he lifted his head from the ground, he saw that 77 of the ship's crew had been so shaken by the terrifying sound that they had departed for the eternal abode, while the rest were all struck with explosive diarrhea. Columbus himself was on the verge of resigning his life, or at the very least, preparing to change his trousers (don't get me wrong; he fully intended to send them to the Museum of Andalusia as part of their collection of ancient and national relics).

Captain Columbus, upon reflection, believed this to be one of the tactical tricks of the Arabs. Accordingly, he prepared to surrender unconditionally, taking with him a single cross and a white flag, along with several crates of spoils he had collected from the treasures of Arab civilization—such as the water jug, sandals, tents, knives, cloaks, headscarves, prayer *turbah*, prayer beads, sickness prayers, a few water skins of Arab buttermilk, some barrels of depilatory powder, and cans of preserved rat and lizard meat. Accompanied by a Jew who spoke Arabic fluently, he disembarked at the shore.

Contrary to expectations, the natives, with cheerful faces and drums and tambourines, rushed to greet them. They gently patted the heads of the newly arrived guests and, on behalf of their "Red Dragon" enterprise, distributed some *Paregoric Elixir* and *Laudanum* among the seasick crew members. They promptly sent a lengthy list, amounting to several million *bare-headed sovereigns*, to the Red Indians' Ancestral Bureau of Blunders.[4]

The newly arrived guests, having regained their strength from this tender care, started mumbling and flailing about, trying to communicate.

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[4] The "'Red Dragon' enterprise" may satirically reference organizations such as the Red Cross, the Red Lion and Sun Society (precursor to the Iranian Red Crescent), or the Green Crescent, all known for their humanitarian work. Paregoric elixir is an outdated medicinal preparation containing opium, commonly used in the 19th and early 20th centuries to treat diarrhea and alleviate minor pain. Laudanum is a tincture of opium dissolved in alcohol, historically used as a painkiller and sedative. It was widely used before its addictive properties became well-known. "Bare-headed sovereigns" likely references British coins with bare-headed monarchs, such as those from George IV (r. 1820–30) or Edward VII (r. 1901–10). Though anachronistic, it humorously plays with historical symbols for satirical effect. (Some details in this note are informed by the late Professor Mohammad-Ja'far Mahjub's edition and commentary on *The Pearl Cannon*.)

Then, the chief of the Indigenous people, speaking in the eloquent Aztec language—the semi-official and courtly tongue of the region—addressed Columbus, saying, "Well now, welcome, welcome! What a joy to see you! Where do you come from, and where are you headed?"

Columbus, who had yet to finish *The Beginner's Book in Aztec*, became flustered and stammered in response, saying, "Well, by your blessed crown, I embarked on this journey from my beloved homeland with the intention of exploring both the outer and inner worlds. As per the noble verse of 'So [Prophet] fight in God's way. You are accountable only for yourself,' I had planned to carry out a great slaughter in the name of God and strike a heavy blow to the Bedouin Arabs. But now, I see I've arrived in a friendly and neighboring land. Therefore, I am ready to submit unconditionally."[5]

The chief of the Native Americans gave a warm smile and said:

"Well, well, young man, you've made a little mistake. What do you mean by unconditional surrender? Don't worry, my dear, take a load off. This place? Oh, this isn't Arabia! This land is called Costa Rica by those in the West. In Turkish, 'Yeni' means 'new,' and since we couldn't pronounce it properly, we called it 'Yankee.' And in your language, it became 'Yenge.' So, you've arrived in a new land, which will later be known as America, and we mean you no harm. As you can see, we are also busy worshipping and praising the phallus, and this tube here symbolizes the male organ. What choice do we have? We have no strong belief in the Vatican, the Pope, or the Inquisition specialists who deny the sphericity of the Earth, and this whole belief in worshipping shameful organs . . ."

Columbus, who was out of the loop, interrupted him and asked, "Well now, what did you say?"

The chief of the natives, adjusting the bald vulture feather that hung from his head, straightened it in the pocket mirror he carried, painted his lips with red lipstick, swallowed his spit, and replied:

"By that, I mean the worship of the lower body and licentiousness. This practice of venerating the shameful organs has been a tradition here from time immemorial. Thanks to this, our population

[5] The quotation "So [Prophet] . . ." is from the Qur'an, 4:84.

grows daily, and the prospects for our daughters' marriages improve as well. I grant you permission, should you have any secrets or desires, to share them with the cannon, for it is highly effective. Moreover, your prayers at the shrine of His Holiness Tláloc (PBUH) will be answered. Now, as our population has been growing at an ever-increasing rate, we passed a law decreeing that we celebrate only once a year—on the last Wednesday of the year. On this day, the women use this cannon to seek their desires. As luck would have it, your arrival coincides with this day. We're honestly tired of war, conflict, strong-arming, colonialism, exploitation, holy verses, and all these tricks of the trade. If our 'worship of the shameful organs' unsettles you, that is no fault of ours, and we offer our sincerest apologies. You are free to come and go as you wish, but please respect our sovereignty, both earthly and celestial. In return, we will serve as your bridge of victory.[6] And we are particularly pleased that you arrived unannounced and discovered us. Because of this fortunate event, we hereby decree that the historic celebration, representing our patriotism and national unity, will last for seven days and nights."

Then, he presented Columbus with a huge basket filled with rhubarb, pineapples, madder root, bananas, walnuts, Brazilian almonds, a few bags of Istanbul potatoes, a box of Philip Morris cigarettes, several bottles of Coca-Cola, a few kilograms of colorful, silky ice cream, a dozen packs of chewing gum, and some gold and silver bars, along with a tank of aviation fuel. Afterward, he lit his silver-tipped pipe with the finest tobacco, took a puff, and handed it to Columbus. Columbus, in turn, took a few deep, satisfying puffs himself.

The chief of the Native Americans grinned and said, "Now we are sworn brothers. Come, let me show you some prehistoric Aztec relics that'll blow your mind."

The gleam of gold and silver dazzled the azure eyes of Captain Columbus, and to himself, he thought, "Well, well, I'll give you such a hard time that you'll scream for mercy!"

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[6] The "bridge of victory" evokes the Veresk Bridge, built in 1934–35 during Reza Shah's reign and named "Pol-e Piroozi" during World War II for its strategic role in transporting Allied supplies to the Soviet Union.

In reality, he realized he was facing defeat, so with the white flag—the symbol of surrender—he wiped his nose and triumphantly tucked it into the depths of his pocket. Then, he furrowed his brow in frustration and took out a colored boiled egg from the fringe of his shawl and offered it to the Chief of the Native Americans.

The Chief of the Native Americans, struck with astonishment, exclaimed: "How did a simple white cloth from your shawl transform into this vibrant, colorful fruit?"

Columbus replied, "First of all, this is not a fruit, but a hen fruit. And second, if you are able to set it upright on the table, I shall kiss your shoulder, overlook any malicious colonial intentions, and take my leave. Otherwise, you will henceforth be subjects of the just Sultan of our realm, who rules over half of the inhabited world."

The Chief of the Native Americans agreed, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't solve the problem.

Columbus, overjoyed, slammed the bottom of the egg onto the table, and it stood upright on its broken end, like a well-behaved child.

Then, twirling his mustache, he said:

"Well, well, you are a wild and misguided people, completely bereft of the glories of Western civilization, liberty, and democracy. Therefore, as long as the world endures, you must bear the yoke of our servitude and continuously pay us tribute, taxes, and dues, while your women will remain forbidden to you, and your blood will be ours to spill. As for this phallic symbol, which led to the brutal death of 77 noble-born, gentlemanly Andalusians, it shall be taken from you. In exchange, we will appoint a few veteran Jesuit priests, seasoned in the arts of religious torture, to oversee you, ensuring that anyone who does not believe in the Trinity and our Father in the heavens receives their just due. Moreover, all the gold dust, silver nuggets, iron ore, coal, oil, money, and jewels you possess are now, from this moment on, the property of Sultan Ibn Sultan and Khagan Ibn Khagan, Dos Turdalinos Ibn Dos Torero Ibn Dos Toreador Ibn Dos Matador Ibn Dos Picador Ibn Dos Banderillero Ibn Dos Merinos."

The Chief of the Native Americans looked sheepish and said:

"Well, since you're our honored, uninvited guest, what can we do? This goddess of debauchery—which, frankly, we might as well

have tossed to the dogs—shall be handed over to the Queen of Andalusia. But, if you'll excuse me, our women won't give it up so easily. And if, God forbid, you take it by force, I fear that faith and belief will be lost, and the people will stray from the True Faith. So, by the souls of Tláloc and Tezcatlipoca, at least leave us this cross you hold, which, truth be told, resembles a dildo, so that our women will remain under the everlasting shadow of the eternal state and begin sending their prayers to it."[7]

At this audacious suggestion, Columbus suppressed the fiery anger within him and responded with calm resolve: "Now, what is this insolence? Have you reached the point where you dare disrespect our deity? It seems you've forgotten that you are the defeated, enslaved, and subjugated people under our rule! But I am not as you think, cruel and ungrateful."

He then reached into the pocket of his undergarment and pulled out a small box containing dried golden bee and wasp flies. He handed it to the Chief of the Tribe and said, "Instead, take this cantharidin and go back under the protection of His Royal Majesty, as you were before, and continue in your ignorance."

He then dismissed them.

[7] "Talian and Tsimatlan" in the original have been replaced with Tláloc and Tezcatlipoca, two Mesoamerican deities, as the original names appear to be unclear or invented.

Three Islamicate Songs from Metro Detroit

Translated by Graham Liddell, Kristin Dickinson, Michael Pifer

Translators' Preface

When different refugees and immigrants fled the crumbling Ottoman Empire for a multitude of reasons in the early 20th century, they brought their entangled musical cultures with them to their new homes in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. Many of these established and emerging diasporic communities settled in Metro Detroit, drawn not only by promises of labor at Ford factories, but also by an infrastructure that ranged from coffee shops—where post-Ottoman immigrants gathered, smoking and drinking until the wee hours of the morning—to newly established churches, synagogues, and mosques, and to the seemingly neutral territory of Greektown, where something like a post-Ottoman musical culture thrived in a variety of tongues. So, too, did diverse performers circulate through the nightclubs, concert halls, and coffee shops of Metro Detroit, on their way westward to Chicago or eastward to New Jersey and New York. Other performers came from farther abroad, from the newly established Republic of Turkey or the Middle East, stopping in Detroit while on international tours. Material culture also circulated between these diasporic communities—pamphlets, records, lyrics, catalogs—moving sometimes not only within the United States but also between Detroit and the formerly Ottoman territories.

The following three songs all had different presences in the multilingual performance cultures and nightlife scene of Metro Detroit. The first, "Gondola on the Nile," was recorded by Louis Wardini as the second single on his label, Wardatone. Having migrated from Beirut to New York as a child around 1904, Wardini lived in numerous cities with Syrian Lebanese communities before moving to Detroit in the late 1920s. Even when he relocated to Indiana in 1938, Detroit remained an important place of reference for Wardini throughout his many travels across the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. In addition to performing in Detroit establishments such as Saint Maron Hall in the 1940s, Wardini also founded Wardatone as a Detroit-based recording label in 1951. Replete with references to wine and the oud, "Gondola on the Nile" evokes a sense of conviviality typical of Islamicate poetry, while its emphasis on both love and abandonment plays on the key themes of the ghazal's poetic

form. Words such as شوق (*shawq*, meaning longing or yearning), بعد (*buʿd*, meaning distance and translated here as "absence"), هجران (*hijrān*, meaning abandonment or separation), and أسحار (*asḥār*, meaning sorceries or, in this context, the charms of a beloved, translated in the lyrics as "enchantment") demonstrate a connection between love and separation but also distance and travel, allowing for a metaphorical connection between the beloved and longing for home. With its Egyptian willows and titular reference to the Nile, the song is clearly located in the Islamicate world, even as the image of the gondola introduces a more generic cosmopolitan reference to Venice as a symbol of romance. Wardini's song thus captures a number of tropes central to the experience of diaspora, all while creating a unique blend of sounds, themes, and worlds that were listened to in Detroit.

The second song, "I Went into the Garden," in dialectal Armenian, is quite different. According to a pamphlet printed in Detroit, it was performed by a local vocalist in Palmer Park on Sunday, July 22, 1928. Unlike the recording by Wardini, which reaches for a kind of cosmopolitanism that stretches from the recording studios of Metro Detroit to the lagoons of Venice and the Nile of Egypt, the cosmopolitanism of "I Went into the Garden" is harder to read. Like many Armenian (and, more broadly, Middle Eastern) songs and poetry, the song also evokes the searing agony of being separated from one's beloved. Armenians, of course, have long participated in shaping Islamicate and Persianate musical cultures, drawing on the available constellations of themes, styles, tropes, and sometimes even plain words across many languages, and recasting them for an Armenian (and sometimes Christian) sensibility. This song is no different. It describes the quintessential meeting place for the lovestruck—the garden (or, Palmer Park, if one prefers)—as a forlorn lover wanders bereft of his/her beloved, haunted by an absent rose. The words s/he uses to describe the beloved (*yar*, *aziz yar*), common to many Armenian songs from the period, are not Armenian at all; rather, they formed a stock vocabulary in other Islamicate musical cultures, such as Persian and Turkish, for talking about love. In short, even in places where only one ethnic

community might gather to hear and appreciate music, the subtle presence of other communities, cultures, and languages can often still be sensed, even in audible ways.

The last song, "Why Have I Come to America?," is a particular testament to this entangled nature of musical performance and production in Detroit. It was originally written in the Turkish language by a Greek musician named Achilleas Poulos, then lightly adapted by an Armenian musician named Jimmy Nazarethian. The portion of lyrics printed here come from a slim pamphlet sold at Paros Book Store, Phonographs & Records, on 806 South Solvey Avenue in Detroit, which advertised recent releases by Pharos (P'aros) Record Company. These lyrics are printed with the Armenian alphabet, but in the Turkish language, using a widely common mixed language and script form known as Armeno-Turkish. Here, another kind of psychic torment is on display. The absent beloved, the *yar* from "I Went into the Garden," has been replaced by America itself, whose charms have beguiled and ensnared the hapless lover, who is now doomed to wander far from hearth and kin. The song is significant, then, in part because it offers a cogent demonstration of how post-Ottoman musical cultures continued to change and evolve in America, and it did not simply remain frozen in time and lifeless once transplanted in alien soil. To help readers visualize the way that the script and language itself cross many different territories, we have included here the original Armeno-Turkish (in the Armenian script), a rendering in the modern Turkish script, and finally our English translation.

These three songs paint but a small portrait of the lives of once-Ottoman musical cultures replanted in Metro Detroit, which then, of course, also became American musical cultures. Collectively, these and other materials form the online collaborative public humanities project "The Middle East in Metro Detroit: (Post) Ottoman Migrations," which explores different spaces where these heterogeneous communities came into contact with one another; relied on one another; and, sometimes, erupted together in uneasy tensions and conflict. For more, the project can be found at https://translatingmichigan.org/the-middle-east-in-metro-detroit.

Arabic

"Gondola on the Nile"

by Louis Wardini
Translated from Arabic by Graham Liddell[1]

SIDE ONE

I adore you, I am pleased with you,
O loveliest of all God's people
I delight in our rendezvous
[My heart is enthralled][2]

Your beauty is captivating
[It transforms] all my sadness [to joy]

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[1] The translator wishes to thank Yousri Alghoul, Ali Harb, and Ammar Owaineh for their help in transcribing the Arabic lyrics.

[2] Brackets indicate Arabic words that could not be identified for certain while listening to the septuagenarian recording. These parts of the translation are based on best guesses.

The birds sing to your beauty,
perched on the branches of the Egyptian willow

I adore you, I am pleased with you,
O loveliest of all God's people

Come, let's take a gondola out on the Nile
to thank the Lord with longing and kissing
Blissful love,
effortless serenity,
a castle being swayed from side to side

[O bearer] of the oud:
Play on the strings
sing to me, sing
the music of enchantment

O, my gondola, O my companion,
fill the cups of wine
Come back [through the corridors] of serenity
Come back to the Nile

SIDE TWO

Call my name, cure me
Sing to me, [nurture] me
Love scorches me
and your absence wears me down

O my love, O artist,
you've abandoned me once more

O my Lord, O Provider
bring me your beneficence

Call my name, cure me
Sing to me, [nurture] me

Come, let's take a gondola out on the Nile
to praise the Lord with longing and kissing
Blissful love,
effortless serenity,
a castle being swayed from side to side

O [bearer] of the oud:
    Play on the strings
sing to me, sing
the music of enchantment

O, my gondola, O my companion,
fill the cups of wine
Come back [through the corridors] of serenity
Come back to the Nile

ԲԱՑՕԹԵԱՅ

ԵՐԳԱՀԱՆԴԷՍ

Նախաձեռնութեամբ՝

Տիթրոյթի ԿՈՄԻՏԱՍ Երաժշ. Միութեան

Ղեկավար՝

ՅԱՐՈՒԹԻՒՆ ԷՔԻՋԵԱՆ

Տեղի պիտի ունենայ

ԿԻՐԱԿԻ 22 ՅՈՒԼԻՍ 1928·

ՓԱԼՄԸՐ ՓԱՐՔ

DETROIT, MICH.

«ՇԻՆԱՐԱՐ» ՏՊ · 209 Griswold Թէլ· RAnd. 1225

"I Went into the Garden"

Performed at Palmer Park, Sunday, July 22, 1928[3]
Translated from Armenian by Michael Pifer

I went into the garden, my heart was burned, wounded,
From the dear beloved [*aziz yar*], my wounded heart was bereft,
bereft.

I called to my dear beloved [*aziz yar*], there was no reply;
Amidst the flowers, my sweet rose was gone.

My pitiless beloved toyed with my heart,
Scorched my liver, and left me, left.[4]

[3] Multiple versions of the song can be found in print; this translation reflects the pamphlet's lyrics but has substituted "khagh" for the pamphlet's more unusual "khash" in the penultimate line, as the former is a relatively standard reading for this song.
[4] This is a rather literal translation of an originally Persian-derived phrase meaning, figuratively, to strike with inconsolable grief. The liver, and not only the heart, is an organ of affect in many traditions.

Կը պարունակէ «ՓԱՐՈՍ» ըէֆըրտներու վրայ երգուած հայերէն եւ արեւելեան ժողովրդական երգերը :

ԳԻՆ 10 ՍԷՆԹ

"Why Have I Come to America?"

Original Turkish by Achilleas Poulos; Armeno-Turkish variant lightly adapted by Jimmy Nazarethian
Booklet of Record Lyrics, sold at Paros Book Store, Phonographs & Records, 806 South Solvey Ave., Detroit
Translated by Kristin Dickinson and Michael Pifer

The published Armeno-Turkish:
Նէտէն կէլտիմ Ամէրիգայա
Թութուլտըմ գալտըմ ավարայ,
Շիմտի պին քէրրէ փիւշմանըմ,
Ֆագաթ կէչտի, ահ նէ՛ չարէ,
Ա՛հ կէլմէզ օլայտըմ,
կէօրմէզ օլայտըմ
Թէք սէնի շիրին Ամէրիգա,
Կէօրմէզ օլայտըմ
կէլմէզ օլայտըմ.

Rendering in Modern Turkish:
Neden geldim Amerika'ya?
Tutuldum kaldım avare,
Şimdi bin kere pişmanım.
Fakat geçti, ah ne çare,
Ah gelmez olaydım,
Görmez olaydım
Tek seni şirin Amerika,
Görmez olaydım
Gelmez olaydım.

Why have I come to America?
I became ensnared, a wanderer I remained,
A thousand times over do I regret it.

But it's too late, O what's the use?
O, I wish I hadn't come,
I wish I hadn't seen
You alone, sweet America,
I wish I hadn't seen you,
I wish I hadn't come to you.

Contributors

Mostafa Abedinifard is an Assistant Professor of Modern Persian Literature and Culture in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia. He earned his PhD in Comparative Literature and holds an MA in English Language and Literature. His research focuses on modern Persian and Iranian literature and culture, with an emphasis on feminist studies, critical masculinities, and humor studies. He has completed the first full translation of *The Pearl Cannon* into English and is currently working to place it with the right publisher.

Ali Abdeddine (he/him) earned his PhD in literature with a specialization in Amazigh poetry from the University of Hassan II Casablanca, Morocco, in 2023. His dissertation investigates the impact of Arab hegemony on Amazigh literature in written forms. He has 10 years of experience teaching Arabic (MSA and Darija) and Tashelhit to Arabic Flagship, Project GO, CLS, and Fulbright scholars. Dr. Abdeddine grew up in Douar Anguizem, a small village in the foothills of the High Atlas Mountains in the Essaouira Province.

Rafeeq Ahamed (1961–) is a poet whose Malayalam ghazals follow rules of *radif* and *qāfiya* (two formal characteristics of the ghazal in Persian and Urdu) and draw on the Malayalam poetic tradition.

Afeef Ahmed is a PhD student in the Department of South Asian Studies at Harvard University. His work primarily focuses on the memories of conquest and militarization of Muslim communities in Early Modern South India. He works with Tamil, Malayalam, Arabic, and Persian manuscripts and archival sources to understand the frontier formation of the region. He completed his undergraduate studies in English from the University of Delhi, New Delhi, and his master's from the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar, Gujarat. He was awarded the Charpak Lab Fellowship at CEIAS-EHESS, Paris in 2022.

Abdul Jalal Zulqad Ali (1796–1891) was an Assamese Muslim preacher who composed multiple Islamic manuals, most of which remain unpublished.

Essafi Moumen Ali was born in 1949 in Douar Ameln, in the Aït Mazal tribe of the Chtouka Ait Baha region. He grew up in Rabat, where he pursued his education, starting from a Qur'anic school and continuing through higher university studies. He earned a law degree from the Faculty of Law, which enabled him to enroll in the Higher Institute of Judiciary, from which he graduated as a judge. He is currently a lawyer in Casablanca. In addition to his judicial career, Essafi Moumen Ali is considered one of the pioneers of Amazigh prose writing. In 1984, he published the first Amazigh play, *Usan Ṣmidnin* (The cold days). He later published a long Tamazight prose text in 1993 titled "Tighri n Tabrat" ("Reading the Letter"), followed by *Awareness of Our Amazigh Identity* (1996), *Amazigh Dialogues with the Prime Minister* (1998), and *Aɣaras n Wurɣ* (The golden path), published in 2012 in both Tamazight and Arabic, for which he was awarded the Amazigh Culture Prize. He was one of the leaders of AMREC (Moroccan Association for Research and Cultural Exchange) and was a member of IRCAM (Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture).

Shahabaz Aman (1969–) is a singer credited for composing the first Malayalam ghazal that was adhered to the rules of *radif*, *qāfiya*, and *takhallus*, so challenging claims that the Malayalam language was inadequate to follow the rules of Urdu ghazal. The piece translated here—"Sajini"—appeared in 2011 in an album of the same name.

Razieh Araghi is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature and Middle Eastern Studies at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on women translators as marginalized voices of modernity and the circulation of texts from English and French in Turkish and Persian periodicals. She teaches courses on world literature, translation, and cultural studies, with a focus on how texts and visual media shape national and transnational imaginaries.

Ibrahim Badshah is a translator, academic, and currently a PhD candidate in the Department of English, University of Houston. Ibrahim's PhD dissertation explores the possibility of an analytical category of "Resistance Translation" through a study of translation practices in the Global South. Ibrahim translates primarily between Arabic, English, and Malayalam, and his publications include novels and short stories by Man Booker International Prize–winning author Jokha Alharthi, the International Prize for Arabic Fiction–winning author Saud Al-Sanousi, and the Hindu Literary Prize–winning author Manoranjan Byapari. He is currently translating a collection of poems in Arabic by Najwan Darwish into Malayalam.

Bikash K Bhattacharya is an MPhil student in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom.

Adeli Block (she/they) is a PhD candidate in Linguistic Anthropology at the University of Michigan and has lived, studied, and worked in Morocco for over four years. Their research concerns the social consequences of language policy change after Tamazight became an official language in 2011. Adeli graduated from the University of Texas at Austin as an Arabic Flagship Scholar, majoring in Middle Eastern languages and cultures and geography. Adeli grew up in Northern Virginia in the Washington metropolitan area.

Venu V. Desam (1959–) wrote the first known ghazals in Malayalam, which were produced in the 1998 album *Pranamam*.

Tara Dhaliwal is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at Brown University. Her work is concentrated on folklore and storytelling in 19th-century Punjab (North Indian subcontinent), with a particular focus on landscapes, non-human animals, and gender. Her research aims to understand how stories help us make sense of the world around us.

Kristin Dickinson is an Associate Professor of German Studies at the University of Michigan. Her research on the intersections of German

and (Ottoman) Turkish literature examines the potential of translation, as both a formal and a social medium, to intervene in nationalist ideologies and nationally structured areas of study. Her book, *DisOrientations: German-Turkish Cultural Contact in Translation (1811–1946)*, examines literary translations as a complex mode of cultural, political, and linguistic orientation. Through a unique multilingual archive, it reveals the omnidirectional and transtemporal movements of translations, which harbor the productively disorienting potential to reconfigure the relationships of "original" to "translation," "past" to "present," "West" to "East," and "German" to "Turkish."

Sadeq Hedayat (1903–51) was a pioneering Iranian modernist writer, best known for *The Blind Owl*, a landmark of Persian literature. His work, spanning fiction, folklore studies, and literary translation, introduced new narrative techniques and existential themes into Persian prose. He also translated European literature into Persian, engaging deeply with modernist aesthetics. *The Pearl Cannon*, one of his final and most satirical works, remained unpublished in full until after his death. Hedayat died by suicide in Paris in 1951.

Ziyana Fazal is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at Northwestern University. Her research examines the multilingual literary contributions of Muslim women in early 20th-century Kerala, focusing on how their engagements with Malayalam, Hindi, Urdu, and Arabic shaped their postcolonial secular identities. Her dissertation explores how these writers challenged the dominance of Arabic in Islamic discourse while foregrounding Islamic reform, piety, and ethical subjectivity within modernist frameworks. Drawing on archival research, literary translation, and oral history, her work investigates the intersections of gender, genre, religiosity, and language in colonial and postcolonial South Asia. Through translating fiction, essays, and autobiographical texts, she traces how Muslim women's literary practices reimagined both the Indian linguistic nation and the global *ummah*.

Tyler Fisher completed his doctorate in Medieval and Modern Languages at the University of Oxford and is now Dean of the

Honors College and Professor of Languages and Literatures at Florida Gulf Coast University. With Haidar Khezri, he has published collaborative translations of Kurdish poetry in *The Bangalore Review* and *Poet Lore*.

Farzad Kamangar, a Kurdish school teacher, poet, journalist, and activist, was born in the city of Kamyaran in the Kurdistan Province of western Iran. While imprisoned by the Islamic Republic of Iran for four years, and even after being sentenced to death, Kamangar continued to advocate for human rights, women's rights, and greater cultural and political self-determination for Iran's minority communities via highly poetic letters that he smuggled out of prison, sometimes in fragments. His letters display his dual commitment to beautiful literary expression and to unflinching documentation of human rights abuses in Iranian Kurdistan. After years of imprisonment and torture, Kamangar was executed, at age 35, along with four other political prisoners on May 9, 2010, in Iran's notorious Evin Prison on charges of *moharebeh* (waging war against God) and for undermining national security.

Forugh Karimi was born in 1971 in Kabul, Afghanistan. She attended medical school in the capital until 1996, when she was forced to flee the country following the Taliban takeover. Karimi sought refuge in the Netherlands and has made a life for herself there as a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and acclaimed Dutch-language novelist, publishing three novels in just the last three years. However, her first foray into writing took place in Dari Persian, with the short story "Sepia Veils and White-Flowered Branches," which she published in 1989, at the age of 19, in the popular Persian-Pashto Afghan magazine *Zhwandūn* (meaning "life" in Pashto).

Haidar Khezri is Associate Professor of Arabic at the University of Central Florida (UCF). Following his PhD in Comparative Literature at Damascus University, he taught at universities in Iran, Syria, Turkey, and the United States. In 2019, he became UCF's first full-time professor of Arabic, a key role for building the university's capacity to teach Middle Eastern languages and cultures.

ONV Kurup (1931–2016) was a poet known particularly for his ghazals, often featuring themes of love. He collaborated extensively with the musician Umbayee (P. A. Ibrahim, 1950–2018), who produced more than 20 albums of ghazals during his lifetime.

Abu'l Barakat "Munir" Lahori (1610–44) was a Persian-language poet who was active during the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58).

Anna Learn is a fourth-year PhD candidate at the University of Washington, Seattle (UW), where she studies Persian, South Asian, and Hispanic literature. Her dissertation examines the concept of Afghan women's literature and necessarily involves the practice of translation with Persian-language materials. Since 2021, she has worked for the UW Translation Studies Hub as their graduate student assistant. On the side, she writes essays on literary topics for public-facing platforms such as *Full Stop*, *World Literature Today*, and *Electric Literature*, focusing on literature in translation.

Graham Liddell completed a PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan in 2023, where he studied contemporary Arab and Afghan narratives of refugeehood. Before graduate school, he worked in Middle East journalism and was based in the West Bank. His translations of Palestinian literature have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Banipal*, *ArabLit Quarterly*, and *The Stinging Fly*. His journalistic work has been published in *USA Today*, *The Detroit News*, and *Middle East Eye*, among other publications.

Thankamma Malik (1917–2001) was a pioneering bilingual writer and translator from Kerala, India, whose literary contributions bridged Malayalam and Hindi traditions. Born into a Christian family, her life took a transformative turn after hearing a speech by Mahatma Gandhi during the Indian freedom movement. Deeply moved, she committed herself to learning Hindi, pursuing formal education at Shradhanand Hindi College in Kottayam and later at Prayag Mahila Vidyapeeth in Allahabad, where she studied under the renowned Hindi poet Mahadevi Varma. Malik's literary career spanned short

stories, poetry, and translations, many of which appeared in Malayalam periodicals such as *Al-Manar* and *Muslim Review*. Her marriage to Malik Muhammed, editor of the Malayalam monthly *Mithram*, marked another turning point in her life; she then embraced Islam and adopted the name Thankamma Malik. Her writing, shaped by Gandhian ideals and a deep sense of social justice, played a vital role in shaping 20th-century Malayalam literature.

Koṅṅaṇaṃvīṭṭil Ibrāhīmkuṭṭi Musliyār (1849–1905) was a distinguished Islamic scholar, translator, and polyglot from Malabar, born into the renowned scholarly lineage of the Makhdūms of Ponnani. Immersed in the rich Islamic intellectual traditions from an early age, he received a traditional education encompassing Islamic law, Arabic grammar, poetics, history, astronomy, medicine, mysticism, and occult sciences. His linguistic expertise extended across multiple languages, including Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Syriac, Urdu, and English. A devoted Sufi, Musliyār was initiated by his father into the Qādiriyya, Naqshbandiyya, and Chishtiyya Sufi orders. His scholarly contributions were vast and diverse, spanning translations, original compositions, and commentary literature. He translated numerous Arabic texts and authored works in both Arabic and Arabi-Malayalam, including treatises on medicine and Islamic jurisprudence, as well as hagiographical poetry. Among his most notable works is *Quṭbiyyat*, a litany he compiled, blending a premodern Arabic praise poem with supplicatory prose. A significant portion of his literary corpus consists of commentary-translations of Qurʾanic chapters and hagiographical poetry from Arabic into Arabi-Malayalam.

Jimmy Nazarethian (birth and death unknown) was an Armenian musician who adapted the song "Why Have I Come to America?" by Achilleas Poulos.

Jaideep Pandey is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He works on comparative literary modernities between Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia; translation studies; and languages of longing and desire across Urdu, Hindi, Persian, and Arabic. He also translates from Urdu into English.

Michael Pifer is Marie Manoogian Assistant Professor of Armenian Language and Literature in the Department of Middle East Studies at the University of Michigan. He has previously published translations from dialectal and Western Armenian in *Absinthe* and *Dibur*. His research revolves around questions of multilingualism, mixed-script writing, and cultural exchange in the premodern period. In particular, his work focuses on how Armenian literature developed alongside neighboring literary traditions within shared spaces. He is the author of *Kindred Voices: A Literary History of Medieval Anatolia* (Yale University Press, 2021) and a co-editor of *An Armenian Mediterranean: Words and Worlds In Motion* (Paglrave Macmillan, 2018). Currently he is a team member of "Armenia Entangled: Connectivity and Cultural Encounters in Medieval Eurasia," funded by a grant from the European Research Council. This project seeks to establish a framework for studying the Armenian plateau as a space of cultural entanglements from the ninth to the 14th centuries.

Achilleas Poulos (1893–1970) was a Greek musician who wrote lyrics in Turkish. His song "Why Have I Come to America?" was adapted by the musician Jimmy Nazarethian.

Musab Abdul Salam is a PhD candidate at the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Oregon. His research draws on insights from postcolonial theory, South Asian studies, and the anthropology of religion in the study of the textual cultures of the Malabar Coast.

Satchidanandan (1946–) is a poet whose collection of ghazals, *Ghazalukal Geethangal* (2004), attempted to present the Malayalam ghazal as a unique form of its kind, which the author defined as something closer to Azad Ghazal (free ghazal) and Rabindra Sangeet (the songs by Rabindranath Tagore).

Sunil Sharma is Professor of Persianate & Comparative Literature at Boston University. His areas of research are premodern Persian

literature, specifically poetry and court cultures, history of the book, and travel writing. His last monograph, *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court* (Harvard University Press, 2017), is a study of early modern Persianate literary culture and the communities of Iranian émigré poets. He has also published books on the medieval poet Amir Khusraw—*Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sultans and Sufis* (Oneworld, 2005) and, translated with Paul E. Losensky, *In the Bazaar of Love: The Selected Poetry of Amīr Khusrau* (Penguin, 2011)—and translated women's travel writings in *Three Centuries of Travel Writing by Muslim Women* (Indiana University Press, 2022).

Ameen Perumannil Sidhick is a PhD student in the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He works primarily on the social and cultural history of religious communities in Kerala and the Indian Ocean World. His dissertation explores premodern religious encounters, specifically Christian and Muslim social and religious formulations in Malabar and the Indian littoral. Of particular fascination to the scholar is the social and intellectual history of religious vernaculars of Abrahamic religious groups in the region. He completed his undergraduate studies in History at the University of Delhi, New Delhi, and earned his master's degree from the Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Vijay Sursen (b. unknown–) is a poet who composes ghazals in Malayalam, following both the rules of *radif*, *qāfiya*, and *takhallus* and adhering to the poetic tradition of Malayalam, which blends images from nature and themes of love.

Sanaullah Makti Thangal (1847–1912) is an important reformist figure belonging to the Mappila community of Kerala. Thangal resigned from the post of excise inspector in the British administration at the age of 35 to dedicate himself to counter-missionary polemics. Thangal's work *Kadorakudāram* is considered to be the first work in Malayalam to be published by a Keralite Muslim. He ran a number of newspapers and journals and is widely considered to have played an important role in the emergence of modern reform

movements. Even though Thangal's primary contributions were in the field of missionary polemics, he also worked toward reform within the community. He advocated the learning of modern Malayalam, English, and Hindustani along with Arabic. He also attempted to standardize the Arabi-Malayalam script, although it was not widely accepted within the community. Today, Thangal is claimed by both the traditionalists as well as the reformists, suggesting his crucial place in the modern history of the community. Important works of Thangal include *Kadorakudāram*, *Pārkkalīta Pōrkkaḷam*, *Tāṇṭān Kaṇṭamāla*, and *Makti Manakleśam*.

Ihsan Ul-Ihthisam is a PhD student in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. His research explores the history of Indian Ocean languages, ideas, and religious thought, with a particular focus on their intersection with Sufi writings and performances in the Muslim vernaculars of premodern South and Southeast Asia. He completed his undergraduate studies in History and Geography at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and earned his master's degree from the Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His dissertation examines premodern lyrical traditions associated with the Sufi saint Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī across the Indian Ocean region. An avid reader and enthusiast of poetry, Ihsan engages deeply with lyrical traditions in Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, and Persian.

Louis Wardini (1894–d. unknown) migrated from Beirut to New York as a child around 1904 and lived in numerous US cities with Syrian Lebanese communities before moving to Detroit in the late 1920s. In addition to performing in Detroit establishments such as Saint Maron Hall in the 1940s, Wardini also founded Wardatone as a Detroit-based recording label in 1951.