The Treatment of Coeval Persian Poetry in Arabic Anthologies of the Eleventh/Seventeenth Century: A Preliminary Study*

THEODORE S. BEERS
Freie Universität Berlin

(theo.beers@fu-berlin.de)

Abstract

In this short article, I draw attention to the discussion of poets from Iran (al-ʿAjam) in two Arabic biographical anthologies of the eleventh/seventeenth century: the Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr of Ibn Maʿṣūm (d. 1120/1709) and the Nafḥat al-rayḥāna of Muḥammad Amin al-Muḥībbī (d. 1111/1699). The latter text not only addresses the careers of noteworthy Persian poets, but it also presents samples of their work that al-Muḥībbī has translated into Arabic verse. In the case of the poet Ṣāʾīb Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676), at least one of al-Muḥībbī’s translations can be traced to the original Persian. This reveals a specific instance of cross-cultural literary appreciation in the Ottoman-Safavid-Mughal period.

Introduction

This paper is intended to alert specialists in Persian literary history to a heretofore unnoted curiosity: that some Arabic literati of the eleventh/seventeenth century were familiar with recent happenings in Persian poetry. As a general statement, given the context of Ottoman cosmopolitanism, this should come as no surprise. However, it is the particulars of the present case that are most interesting. Two anthologists of the period, the Damascene Muḥammad Amin al-Muḥībbī (d. 1111/1699) and the Medinese (though widely

* Arabic and Persian transliteration in this paper generally follows the IJMES standard (with a couple of exceptions for Persian). I am fortunate to be working as a postdoctoral fellow in the ERC-funded project AnonymClassic at Freie Universität Berlin, and I thank the project and its principal investigator, Beatrice Gründler, for their support of my research. Thanks are due also to the three anonymous reviewers of this paper, whose detailed and insightful comments made it possible for the argument to be sharpened in several respects. Beyond the revisions that I have made to this article, I plan to address some of the issues highlighted by the reviewers in a subsequent paper, which is already in progress.

© 2020 Theodore S. Beers. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, which allows users to copy and distribute the material in any medium or format in unadapted form only, for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the original authors and source.

itinerant) Ibn Maʿṣūm (d. 1120/1709), included sections on ʿAjamī poets in works that are otherwise mainly devoted to surveying literary and intellectual figures from around the Arab world. The result is that we are able to gain some insight into which Iranian or Persian poets of the early modern era developed reputations that crossed into the Arabic cultural sphere. (Of course, it was nothing special for Ottoman Turkish literati of this period to have extensive knowledge of Persian poetry, from the classics to the works of some of their contemporaries. But here we are considering Arabic anthologies, which represent a different scenario—an issue to which we will return.)

It should be acknowledged at the outset that what follows is one modest result from an initial assessment of a few sources. There are, in all likelihood, early modern Arabic anthologists apart from al-Muḥībī and Ibn Maʿṣūm who incorporate some treatment of Persian poets into their work. And it is difficult to imagine the full range of questions that might productively be investigated with regard to the sharing of literary culture across nominal political and linguistic lines in the Ottoman-Safavid-Mughal era. We are currently at a point at which the fields of Persian and Arabic literary history, each in its own way, are engaged in the process of revisiting texts from what was long considered a period of decline.1 It will require still more time for us to understand the broader regional dialogues that accompanied this so-called decadence.

For the moment, we can pick a bit of low-hanging fruit. Among the simplest questions to ask of the sources at hand are the following: Which Persian poets do al-Muḥībī and Ibn Maʿṣūm discuss in their anthologies? What do they have to say about those figures? What selections of verse do they quote, and in what manner? A particularly exciting finding is that al-Muḥībī provides a notice on the poet Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676), who was not long dead at this time, and translates snippets of his poetry into Arabic—into Arabic verse, no less. We will see that it is possible, in at least one case, to identify the original Persian poem(s) in Ṣāʾib's ḏīvān. In the process, we find an innovative image that Ṣāʾib deploys in a number of his ghazals, and which was evidently successful enough to find its way to Damascus and to be rendered into Arabic. Such a result is already useful, despite the preliminary nature of the current paper.

A Note of Appreciation

Before moving forward, I must express my gratitude to the members of the Holberg Seminar on Islamic History, a group that met annually at Princeton between 2015 and 2018. The seminar was established by Michael Cook after he was awarded the Holberg Prize in 2014. The aim of this paper and the special issue in which it appears is to honor Michael, the other senior scholars who led the seminar—Khaled El-Rouayheb, Antoine Borrut, and Jack Tannous—and the graduate student members, myself included, who were

1. Two of the many recent monographs in this vein are Adam Talib’s history of the maqṭūʿ genre in Arabic poetry of the later medieval and early modern periods, and Sunil Sharma’s elegant study of Persian poetry in Mughal India. See Adam Talib, How Do You Say “Epigram” in Arabic? Literary History at the Limits of Comparison (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Sunil Sharma, Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).
given transformative mentorship and learned a great deal from one another over the course of four years.

Considering this paper and the ongoing research that it represents, I can thank the Holberg Seminar in at least three ways. First, it was Khaled who suggested that I examine Arabic literary anthologies of the eleventh/seventeenth century, since he had studied them and noticed mention of Persian poets. I am not sure whether I would have stumbled upon this connection on my own or heard about it from anyone else. Second, in a more general sense, the other members of the Holberg group—who are mostly Arabists of one stripe or another—always encouraged me to continue working with Arabic sources in addition to my specialization in Persian. Our field stands in need of researchers who are able and willing to engage with texts in multiple languages and from different traditions. With regard to the literary history of the early modern Near East, it is relatively easy to find scholars with mastery of both Persian and Turkic (Soo Yong Kim and Ferenc Csirkés come to mind). The artificial boundary in research between Persian and Arabic seems a bit stronger for the time being. In any case, were it not for my experiences in the Holberg Seminar, I might have remained in the safe territory of classical Persian poetry. Third, and finally, committing to writing a few thoughts about the anthologies of al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maṣūm, long before I will have the ability to do justice to the topic, strikes me as a reminder of how much my research plans have been enriched through interaction with my Holberg colleagues and mentors—and through Michael’s generosity. I made note of so many questions that demand further study that I will likely never stop reaping dividends from the long days and evenings that we spent together in Jones Hall, listening to the cicadas’ song and the pattering rain in the unmistakable atmosphere of the New Jersey summer.

Setting Out the Problem

Did Arabic literati of the early modern period follow contemporary developments in Persian poetry? The answer is clearly yes, to an extent; this much will be demonstrated below. But it is difficult to find discussion of the matter in scholarship on Persian literary history. It is certainly possible that this has been addressed in studies that I have not managed to find. And I will be pleased if the process of bringing this paper to publication makes me, and others, aware of additional prior literature. To take a specific example, none of what I have read about Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī, either in Persian or in European languages, mentions his inclusion in the anthology of al-Muḥibbī. If the connection were widely known, it would


merit a note in any overview of the poet’s biography and legacy.⁴ There can be no doubt about the pertinence of the fact that Šāʿib’s reputation spread to Damascus, with samples of his work being translated into Arabic, either during his life or within a couple of decades of his death. So there is clearly reason to draw further attention to these sources.

In any event, given that I propose to offer a bit of new insight into a question that does not have a well-defined treatment in the existing literature, it might be helpful to begin by sketching a few relevant ideas.

First, and most importantly, there should be no assumption that a cultural barrier stood between the Ottoman Arab provinces and Safavid Iran, or between the classical Persian and Arabic poetic traditions. If anything, we should default to the hypothesis that the Persian poets of a given era had some awareness of, if not interaction with, coeval Arabic poetry—and vice versa. It is in no way counterintuitive or, a priori, surprising that anthologists such as Ibn Maʿṣūm and al-Muḥibbī should have paid some attention to literary happenings in Iran and the broader Persianate sphere. What would have prevented authors in these lands from becoming aware of one another? At the same time, the intuitiveness of a phenomenon does not obviate the need to go to the trouble of investigating it. It is plausible that a Damascene intellectual would hear about a few of the famous Iranian poets of his day. The resulting discussion in an Arabic anthology may still be new to researchers (especially Persians).

Second, there is probably a kernel of truth to the idea in Near Eastern history that more Persian-speakers were versed in Arabic literature than Arabic-speakers were versed in Persian, and, in turn, that more Turkic-speakers were versed in Arabic and Persian literature than either Arabic-speakers or Persian-speakers were versed in Turkic. This is, in part, a simple matter of chronology. The classics of Arabic poetry stretch back to the pre-Islamic era. The great works of New Persian literature (in poetry and prose) begin to appear in the fourth/tenth century. Turkic literature, by contrast, although it can be traced to the same early period, took longer to attain critical mass, at least in written form. It is illustrative that the work of the Timurid statesman-intellectual ʿAlī Shīr Navāʾī (d. 906/1501) is considered to have played a foundational role in the development of Turkic poetry, with classical Persian models among the dominant influences in this process.

Another obvious consideration is the use of Arabic in religious contexts and in the sciences. Any educated person would need to learn Arabic for purposes as fundamental as studying the Qurʾān, regardless of what poetry or belle-lettrist prose he or she might also read. These points are not worth belaboring. We know that transmission and influence in the literary culture of the premodern Near East were both multidirectional and continuous.⁵


⁵. One of the more vivid cases in this dynamic is Kalīla wa-Dimna, a book that was repeatedly translated and adapted in all of the region’s literary languages. The Arabic text of Ibn al-Muqaffa’ was reworked in Persian (ca. 540/1146) by Naṣr Allāh Munshī—whose version became influential enough that it was retranslated into Arabic in the Ayyubid period, under the title Siyar al-mulūk (ca. 683–98/1284–99). A later Persian adaptation, the
But we have valid reasons to be less predisposed to expect Arabic literati to have knowledge of Persian poets, in distinction to the familiarity that Persian literati are assumed to have with the Arabic tradition. It bears noting that some Persian biographical anthologies (tažkiras), including the genre-defining Taḏkirat al-shuʿarāʾ (892/1487) of Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, include prefatory sections that honor the great Arabic poets. The inverse is hardly true.

Third, on a related note, there is a difference between reading the older, “canonical” works of another literary tradition and following its recent or current developments. The former seems to have been more common in the case of intercultural appreciation between Arabic and Persian. If we found that an Arabic anthologist or balāgha theorist mentions Firdawsī (d. ca. 411/1020), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), or Saʿdī Shīrāzī (d. ca. 690/1291), we would not be surprised in the slightest, given the longstanding importance of these figures. The Shāhnāma even saw a partial translation into Arabic at the hands of al-Fāṭḥ b. ‘Alī al-Bundārī (d. after 639/1241–42). (There is no indication that al-Bundārī’s rendering was particularly influential in its own right, but the fact that it was produced speaks to the status of Firdawsī’s original.) A similar tendency holds in Persian authors’ engagement with the Arabic tradition. For instance, the prefatory discussion in Dawlatshāh’s taḏkira, mentioned above, starts with Labīd (d. ca. 40/660–61) and goes no further than the generation of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122). Dawlatshāh was writing in the 1480s, but it is not made explicit whether he was familiar with Arabic poetry from later than the sixth/twelfth century. A hypothetical equivalent of what we find with al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm—namely, an early modern Persian anthology that includes discussion of Arabic poets recently active in the Ottoman provinces—would be noteworthy indeed. The bias of classicism is perhaps more consistent, and more relevant, than the imbalance between Persians’ familiarity with Arabic and Arabs’ familiarity with Persian.

Fourth, on another related topic, it should be borne in mind that many Persian poets also composed verse in Arabic. This is, in fact, the context in which a chapter on Iran (al-ʿAjam) appears in Ibn Maʿṣūm’s anthology: he focuses on Arabic poetry by his contemporaries from that land. (The differences between the approaches of al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm will be discussed below.) I have suggested that there is some validity to the idea that Arabs were less likely to be knowledgeable about Persian literature. One of the manifestations of this phenomenon is the relative paucity of authors whose native and primary language was Arabic but who also wrote in Persian. A list of figures meeting these criteria would be short, and they would fall under special circumstances. (Among the first examples that come to mind are the Shiʿī scholars who moved from the Jabal ʿĀmil region to Iran in the Safavid
period, such as Shaykh Bahāʾī, d. 1030/1621.

The fact that it was common for Persian poets to have some work in Arabic may represent an additional vector by which they could gain an international reputation.

Fifth, whereas we still do not know a great deal about the sharing of poetry or belles lettres between the Arabic and Persian spheres in the early modern era, somewhat more work has been done on cosmopolitanism in intellectual culture. Of particular note here is an article by Khaled El-Rouayheb, which demonstrates that the eleventh/seventeenth century saw a kind of efflorescence of scholarship in the Ottoman Arab provinces. El-Rouayheb discusses a number of important authors of this period, highlighting ways in which their work was influenced and invigorated through new contact with the ideas of Persian and Maghribi scholars. During the eleventh/seventeenth century, there was some migration of intellectuals from Safavid territory in the Caucasus to Ottoman Syria; from India to the Hijaz (Medina in particular); and from the Maghrib to Egypt. These movements gave students in the Ottoman provinces access to works with which they were previously unfamiliar—including, in the case of Persian influence in Syria, a number of commentaries by Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502) and ʿĪsām al-Dīn Isfarāʾīnī (d. ca. 943/1536–37). El-Rouayheb also points to a specific individual who settled in Damascus in this period and became a successful teacher credited with broadening the horizons of local intellectuals: Mullā Maḥmūd al-Kurdī (d. 1074/1663–64). He was one of a number of Sunni Kurdish or Azeri scholars who migrated westward into Ottoman territory upon the conquests of the Safavid Shah ʿAbbās I (r. 995–1038/1587–1629) in the Caucasus. Maḥmūd al-Kurdī spent several decades teaching in Damascus, and his students carried his approach to a new generation, which included none other than Muhammad Amin al-Muḥibbi.

We could, therefore, posit a logical narrative to explain the way in which al-Muḥibbi, at least, initially became aware of Persian poets of his century. There was a political development—the seizure of territories in the Caucasus by the Safavids—which spurred the movement of scholars from that region into Syria. There they began teaching books (mainly ones written in Arabic) by prominent authors from the Persianate realm; and this could have given rise to a broader interest in the intellectual and cultural products of the eastern lands. In the end, a Damascene such as al-Muḥibbi was primed to learn Persian and to read (and translate!) a certain amount of recently composed poetry. There is, no doubt, more to the story, but this is a useful starting point. We can leverage scholarship in intellectual history to begin to understand a related, but less-studied, phenomenon in literary history. It is also worth noting that the connection between Medina and India explains the familiarity of Ibn Maḥṣūm with Iranian and Persian poets. As we will see in the following section, he


11. As is mentioned below, al-Muḥibbi spent time in Istanbul, and he evidently learned Turkish. It is possible that the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the capital played a role in introducing him to Persian literature.
spent most of his life in India, starting when his father was offered a position at the Quṭb-shāhī court in the Deccan.

Where does this leave us? There may not be an acknowledged framework in the field of Persian literature studies within which to analyze the reception of Persian poetry among early modern Arabic anthologists. This type of question represents a small niche. But we may be guided by the ideas outlined above. Should we be surprised to find discussion of coeval Persian poets in Arabic biographical works of the eleventh/seventeenth century? Probably not, though it would be difficult to dispute the uncommonness of such sources. We are more accustomed to seeing Persian authors’ engagement with the Arabic tradition—and, in many cases, their writing in Arabic—than we are to encountering the inverse. The reciprocal influence between Persian and Turkic poetry in the Timurid and Ottoman-Safavid periods is well understood, but it seems less obvious how to conceptualize the Persian-Arabic nexus. There is also the tendency, mentioned above, for the reception of an outside cultural tradition to focus on “canonical” texts. For now, we can begin by considering the sources before us and some of the factors that help to explain how authors such as al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maṣūm may have gained their interest in, and familiarity with, the poets of al-ʿAjam.

**Introducing the Authors and Texts**

Although the work of al-Muḥibbī is of greater importance to this paper, I will start with a brief review of the career of Ibn Maṣūm, since his anthology was completed earlier and seems to have reached and influenced his Damascene contemporary. His full name (sans patronymics) is ʿAlī Khān Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibn Maṣūm, and he was born in Medina in 1052/1642. His father, Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad (d. 1086/1675), belonged to a Shiʿi sayyid family, whereas his mother was the daughter of a Sunni merchant-cum-jurist. As will become clear, Ibn Maṣūm identified as a Shiʿi, or at least presented himself as such. Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad had a rather complicated career, which need not be addressed in detail here; but the most relevant point is that he was able to secure a position at the court of the Quṭb-shāhī dynasty.
in Golconda, near Hyderabad. In due course, the rest of the family, including the teenaged Ibn Ma’sūm, relocated to India. Our author would remain on the subcontinent for most of his adult life.

Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad served at the Quṭb-shāhī court through the 1660s and into the early 1670s, and it is probable that Ibn Ma’sūm followed in his footsteps. When the Quṭb-shāh of that period, ‘Abd Allāh, died in 1082/1672, Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad was bold enough to make a claim for the throne, on the basis that he had taken one of the ruler’s daughters as his second wife. This plan was thwarted, and both the father and the son were jailed. For Niẓām al-Dīn Ahmad, this was the end of the line: he died in prison in 1086/1675. But Ibn Ma’sūm managed to appeal to the Mughal emperor Awrangzēb for release, after which he traveled to the central court. He spent nearly three productive decades in Awrangzēb’s service. This might appear surprising at first glance, given Ibn Ma’sūm’s Shi‘i leanings and the ruler’s famous concern for Sunni orthodoxy. In reality, the oft-misunderstood Awrangzēb was willing to employ a substantial number of Shi‘i bureaucrats and intellectuals at his court. Ibn Ma’sūm may also have benefited from his status as a sayyid from the Ḥijāz. Finally, in 1114/1702–3, Ibn Ma’sūm felt that his position at the Mughal court was deteriorating, so he took the excuse of a pilgrimage trip to return home. He then tried to establish himself in various other places, including at the Safavid court in Iṣfahān, before settling at last in Shirāz. He spent a few years teaching at the Mansūriyya madrasa and died in 1120/1709.

We have a number of extant works from Ibn Ma’sūm, in a range of fields. His first book is a stylized travel narrative of his family’s move from Medina to Golconda, completed in 1075/1665, when he was in his early twenties. It appears that he was almost continuously producing something new from this point until his death, with the exception of his period of imprisonment. The text that is of relevance here is a literary anthology titled Sulāfat al-‘aṣr fī maḥāsin a’yān al-‘aṣr, or “The unpressed wine on the distinctions of the notables of the epoch,” which Ibn Ma’sūm finished in 1082/1671. Before proceeding any further, I must note that there has been a surprising amount of disagreement and confusion about this title. It is often rendered in scholarship (including in Lowry’s essay), and even in printings, as Sulāfat al-‘aṣr fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarā’ bi-kull miṣr, or “The unpressed wine on the distinctions of the poets of every land.” This reading is puzzling, since it breaks the rhyming prose (sajʿ) of the title, unless miṣr were read in the informal manner as maṣr. I consulted four manuscripts of the work—the finest of which is MS Petermann I 630 at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, copied in 1212/1798—and all of them have Sulāfat al-‘aṣr fī maḥāsin a’yān al-‘aṣr or a close variant thereof, such as Sulāfat al-‘aṣr min maḥāsin a’yān

15. On this dynasty and its regional competitors, see Carl W. Ernst, “Deccan i. Political and Literary History,” in Encyclopædia Iranica.
16. A fuller version of the story is given in Lowry, “Ibn Ma’sūm.”
17. The completion of the Sulāfat, according to the colophons of several copies that I consulted (see below for details), took place on a Thursday with seven days remaining in the month of Rabī’ al-Ākhīr 1082. This would correspond to late August 1671.
18. See, for example, the printing of Aḥmad Nājī al-Jamālī and Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī (Egypt, 1324/1906).
This is not simply a matter of comparing title pages; Ibn Maʿṣūm describes his naming of the work in the preface (fol. 6r in the Berlin manuscript). Another problem with changing the title to *al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kull miṣr* is that it spoils Ibn Maʿṣūm’s wordplay. The repetition of *al-ʿaṣr* is deliberate, denoting the pressing of wine in the first instance and “epoch” in the second.

In any event, the author explains that he was motivated to write this work after receiving a copy of an earlier anthology, the *Rayḥānat al-alibbā wa-zahrat al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* (“The sweet basil of the intelligent and the flower of worldly life”) of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khafājī, an Egyptian who died in 1069/1658. This is an interesting point, since, as we will see below, al-Muḥībbī was likewise inspired by the *Rayḥānat al-alibbā*. It bears emphasizing that Ibn Maʿṣūm, then living in Golconda or Hyderabad, was sent a copy of al-Khafājī’s work (which had been written in Egypt) by an unnamed acquaintance in Mecca. This shows an impressive degree of interconnectedness across the Dār al-Islām and fits with El-Rouayheb’s identification of a vibrant intellectual culture in the eleventh/seventeenth century.

The *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr* is divided into five main chapters on the basis of geography. This is a common organizational scheme, used also by al-Khafājī and al-Muḥībbī. The first chapter is devoted to Mecca and Medina; the second, to Egypt and the Levant; the third, to Yemen; the fourth, to Iraq, Bahrain, and Iran (*al-ʿAjam*); and the fifth, to the Maghrib. The focus throughout is on recent and contemporary figures, which is in keeping with the tendency in the Arabic anthological tradition to produce an update or continuation of what prior authors have established. Ibn Maʿṣūm aims to address some of al-Khafājī’s omissions and to pick up where he left off. Unlike al-Muḥībbī (discussed below), however, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not give his new work a title that clearly references that of the text that inspired it.

The part of the fourth chapter that addresses the notables of *al-ʿAjam* is fairly short and, for a Persianist, perhaps not entirely satisfying. There are only four dedicated notices, on the following individuals: Muḥammad Bāqir “al-Dāmād al-Ḥusaynī,” that is, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631); al-Mīrzā Ibrāhīm b. al-Mīrzā al-Hamadānī (d. ca. 1025/1616); Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Ibrāhīm “al-Ṭabīb al-Shīrāzī” (d. after 1075/1664–65); and Mullā Faraj Allāh al-Shūshtarī. The first two figures are better known—especially Mīr Dāmād, of course. By contrast, it is

---

19. In addition to the Berlin manuscript, I saw three copies that are held at the Kitāb-khāna-yi Majlīs-i Shūrā-yi Millī in Tehran, under the numbers 2279 (or 404), 5799, and 9372.

20. The edition of the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr* used for references in this paper (along with the Berlin manuscript) is that of Mahmūd Khalaf al-Bāḍī.

21. *The Rayḥānat al-alibbā* has been edited by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw in two volumes (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967). This is the same scholar responsible for the edition of al-Muḥībbī’s *Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna* (discussed below). Note that the word *alibbāʾ*—presumably of the pattern *afʿilāʾ*, adjusted for the geminate root—has a final *hamza*, but it may be left out in this title to help the rhyme with *dunyā*.

22. In the edition of al-Bāḍī, these chapters begin, respectively, on pp. 39, 483, 685, 773, and 899. It is clear from the page numbers—and unsurprising, given Ibn Maʿṣūm’s background—that the first chapter is by far the largest.

It seems clear that the common thread in all four cases, and a connection between them and Ibn Maʿṣūm, is their Shiʿism. The author also indicates that he had some interaction with al-Shīrāzī and al-Shūshtarī; for example, he describes an exchange of poetry by correspondence with the former. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this section in the Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr is that it contains little Persian. Ibn Maʿṣūm focuses on the Arabic poetry of Iranian Shiʿi intellectuals.

The one exception occurs in the notice on al-Hamadānī, in which the author quotes a few snippets of Persian verse by “people of understanding” (dhawī al-albāb) to emphasize points that he has raised in his discussion. These poems are unattributed, but I was able to trace one line to a ghazal by ʿUrfī Shīrāzī (d. 999/1591). It goes as follows: “Except in time of calamity, congratulation is a vice among us, a vice; in our city, Eid has no custom of felicitation” (tahniyat juz dar muṣibat pish-i mā ʿayb ast, ʿayb; ʿid rā dar shahr-i mā rasm-i mubārak-bād nīst). Apart from these “outside quotations,” Ibn Maʿṣūm cites no Persian (as far as I could determine). In fact, he closes the section on al-ʿAjam by explaining that there have been numerous eminent Iranians in the past century, “but most of them did not occupy themselves with Arabic verse, focusing rather on more important matters” (ghayr anna aktharahum lam yataʿāṭa al-naẓm al-ʿarabī, ihtimāman bi-mā huwa ahamm minhu). And he follows this note with a list of further ʿAjamī notables that he did not manage to address in detail. The focus remains on Shiʿi scholars; two of the figures included in this list are Mullā Ṣadrā (d. ca. 1050/1640–41) and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680).

It would certainly be worth pursuing a thorough study of this subchapter in the Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, and I hope to do so. For the purposes of the present paper, however, this source is not as immediately attractive as is the anthology of al-Muḥibbī. Ibn Maʿṣūm shows a preference for limiting his discussion to Arabic authors, even when considering Iranians. This may come as a disappointment, since he obviously knew Persian and spent the bulk of his career in India, where he would have had limitless exposure to poetry in that language. I do not mean to downplay the importance of the Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr; it is a valuable work that seems to have received little attention from Arabists and perhaps none from Persianists. As we will see below, however, al-Muḥibbī takes a different and more striking approach, keeping his text in Arabic by translating samples of Persian poetry.

24. Ibrāhīm Hamadānī was a prominent Shiʿi scholar and jurist who was shown favor by Shah ṬAbbās. See Andrew J. Newman, Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 178.


26. Ibid., 781. The full Persian text of the poem can be found in the online corpus Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/orfi/ghazalor/sh137/. The meter is ramal. Alternatively, see the edition of ʿUrfī’s kulliyāt by Ghusain Ḫusain Javāhīrī Vajdī (Tehran: Kitāb-khāna-yi Sanāʾī, 1357/1978), 249; or the edition of Muhammad Valī al-Ḥaq Anṣārī, 3 vols. in 2 (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1378/1999), 1:216. (This ghazal is numbered 137 by Ganjoor and 256 by Anṣārī; it is unnumbered in Javāhīrī’s edition.) At several points in this paper, I provide links to Ganjoor, since it is universally accessible, while also citing scholarly editions that may be more difficult to find.

27. Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, ed. al-Bāḍī, 794.

28. Ibid., 795. In the Berlin manuscript, this is found on fol. 424v.
Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī was born in Damascus in 1061/1651 into a prominent family of intellectuals that had roots in Hama.29 His grandfather served a long tenure as a judge (qāḍī) in Damascus. Muḥammad Amīn’s father (b. 1031/1621–22, d. 1082/1671) was similarly well educated, and he was appointed to a range of administrative and judicial posts throughout the Ottoman lands, including in Istanbul, Āmid (i.e., Diyār Bakr), and Beirut. This meant that the younger al-Muḥibbī was often apart from his father during his childhood, but he received a comprehensive education with the leading scholars in Damascus. In the 1670s, after his father’s death, Muḥammad Amīn embarked on a period of itinerancy of his own. He spent a substantial amount of time in Istanbul, where he continued his studies.

At some point after he turned thirty—around the early 1090s/1680s—al-Muḥibbī returned to Damascus and wrote the work to be discussed in this paper.30 It is a literary anthology titled Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna wa-rashḥat ṭilāʾ al-ḥāna, or “The scent of sweet basil and the flowing wine of the tavern.” We do not know when exactly al-Muḥibbī completed this text. Neither the preface nor the conclusion mentions a specific date, and in all of the references that I have seen to the Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna in scholarship, the year that is cited (1111/1699) pertains to the author’s death. Nevertheless, it appears that the anthology is linked to the earlier part of al-Muḥibbī’s authorly career and that it predates his more famous book in the same genre, Khulāṣat al-athar fī a’yān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar (“The essence of the legacy of the notables of the eleventh century”).31 The Khulāṣat al-athar has references to events that took place as late as 1101/1690, which provides a terminus post quem. It is also worth noting that al-Muḥibbī began work on a continuation (dhayl) of the Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna, which remained incomplete at the time of his death in 1111/1699.32 So it seems plausible that he wrote the Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna and then the Khulāṣat al-athar, then returned to the former to add a dhayl, but died before it was finished. (More could be done to confirm this sequence of events.) Among the other extant works by al-Muḥibbī are several treatises on linguistic and grammatical topics. One of these, Qaṣd al-sabīl fīmā fī lughat al-ʿArab min dakhīl, is described by El-Rouayheb as among “the most extensive premodern works on foreign loanwords in Arabic.”33

The concept of the Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna is to collect information about noteworthy individuals whose lives overlapped with that of al-Muḥibbī. As is customary in anthological texts (often called ṭabāqāt or tarājim in Arabic), the content is presented in a series of notices (tarājim), each devoted to a specific person. In a given notice, discussion of the


30. These events are described by al-Muḥibbī in the preface to the Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna, starting at 1:9.

31. See the four-volume Beirut printing of the work by Maktabat Khayyāṭ in 1966. I believe this is a reproduction of the version that was published in Cairo by al-Maṭbaʿa al-Wahbiyya in 1284/1867–68.

32. The incomplete dhayl has also been edited by al-Ḥulw; it is included as the sixth volume in his edition of the Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna.


Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā 28 (2020)
The Treatment of Coeval Persian Poetry in Arabic Anthologies

biography of the figure in question—his family background, teachers, students, and works, with perhaps a few anecdotes—is followed by selections of poetry. The organization of this anthology is again based on geography: there are eight chapters, for the eight regions whose notables al-Muḥibbī covers. The first chapter addresses Damascus and its environs, and, for obvious reasons, it is the longest section of the *Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna*, with the author discussing many of his personal connections. The second chapter is devoted to Aleppo, and the third to al-Rūm, i.e., the Ottoman heartland. Significantly, al-Muḥibbī presents some of his own Arabic translations of Turkic poetry written by the individuals treated in the third chapter, which parallels his treatment of Persian poets later in the text. The fourth chapter addresses Iraq and Bahrain, and at the end of it, al-Muḥibbī adds a brief section on the notables of Iran (al-ʿAjam)—though this would be easy to miss in a survey of the anthology’s contents, since it is not given a proper heading. This passage contains only five notices, of which the first two seem to have been sourced from the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*. The paucity of content does not, however, diminish the section’s thought-provoking nature. I will review al-Muḥibbī’s treatment of the Ṭhe ṃ́̃̄jīs in greater detail below, with particular attention to his notice on Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī.

The fifth chapter of the *Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna* is on Yemen; the sixth, on the Ḥijāz; the seventh, on Egypt; and the eighth, on the Maghrib. The work is of considerable magnitude: in the edition of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw, it runs to five full volumes (with most of the fifth devoted to indexes). The same edition includes a sixth volume containing the extant material from al-Muḥibbī’s incomplete *dhayl*. The length of notices in this anthology ranges from a couple of pages for individuals whom the author deems relatively less important, to around twenty pages for especially distinguished figures or those who were close to al-Muḥibbī. In the larger notices, extensive quotation of poetry tends to account for most of the space.

A final general point to emphasize about the *Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna* is that the entire work is intended as a kind of continuation of an earlier text, al-Khafājī’s abovementioned *Rayḥānat al-alibbā*. The title of al-Muḥibbī’s book encodes a reference to that of al-Khafājī, and in the preface of the *Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna*, al-Muḥibbī explains that he read the *Rayḥānat al-alibbā* and wanted to extend its approach to cover the prominent individuals of his own time. The practice of authoring an update to a prior work and giving it a title to indicate the connection was common in the Arabic anthological tradition. It can be traced to the *Yatīmat al-dahr fi maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr* (“The peerless of the age on the distinctions of the people of the epoch”) of Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī (d. ca. 429/1038) and the texts that took up its

34. In al-Ḥulw’s edition of the *Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna*, this chapter takes up all of the first volume and most of the second.

35. These chapters start, respectively, at 2:429 and 3:3 in al-Ḥulw’s edition.

36. For example, all of the last eight notices in this chapter include lines of poetry that al-Muḥibbī claims to have “Arabized” (*ʿarrabtu*). See *Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:129–38.

37. This chapter begins at 3:139.


39. These chapters start, respectively, at 3:239, 4:3, 4:391, and 5:3 in al-Ḥulw’s edition.
mantle, most importantly the *Dumyat al-qaṣr wa-ʿuṣrat ahl al-ʿaṣr* (“The palace statue and the refuge of the people of the epoch”) of Abū al-Qāsim ʿAlī al-Bākharzī (d. 467/1075) and the *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat al-ʿaṣr* (“The palace pearl and the record of the epoch”) of ʿImād al-Dīn al-İṣfahānī (d. 597/1201).

The Treatment of Persian by al-Muḥibbī

Now that we have a general sense of these two works, we can look more closely at the passage concerning ʿAjami figures in the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*. As was noted above, al-Muḥibbī provides only five dedicated notices. They pertain to the following individuals, in order: al-Ṭabīb al-Shīrāzī; Mullā Faraj Allāh al-Shūshtāri; ʿUrfī al-Shīrāzī (d. 999/1591); Ṭālib al-Āmulī (d. 1036/1626–27); and Şāʾib (d. ca. 1087/1676).

It is plain that the first two notices are based on the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*—a work that al-Muḥibbī cites at several points. Less clear is how al-Muḥibbī came into possession of a copy of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s anthology, which was completed perhaps a decade before the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* was started. In any case, the discussion of al-Ṭabīb al-Shīrāzī and Faraj Allāh al-Shūshtāri is of relatively little interest, compared to the original material that follows.

The notices on ʿUrfī, Ṭālib, and Şāʾib are brief; none of them takes up more than a page. In his biographical comments on ʿUrfī, al-Muḥibbī explains that the poet moved to India—we know from other sources that this occurred in 992/1584—and that “he roam[ed] around that country and filled it with his sublimity” (*wa-kāna dakhala al-Hind fa-jāsa khilālahu, wa-malaʾa bilādahu jalālatahu*). The author then reports that ʿUrfī died in India after “setting loose what was in his quiver of secrets” (*fa-nashala mā fī kinānatihi min al-maknūnāt*) and “scattering what was in his treasury of riches” (*wa-nathara mā fī dhakhāʾirihi min al-makhzūnāt*). At this point in the notice, al-Muḥibbī wishes to transition to quoting ʿUrfī’s poetry, but he remarks that he “did not come upon any Arabic poem by him that has been conveyed by transmitters” (*lam aqif lahu ʿalā shiʿr ʿarabī tanquluhu al-ruwāt*). And so, he explains, he translated a few lines himself (*fa-ʿarrabtu mufradāt*). It should be noted that al-Muḥibbī consistently uses the verb *ʿarraba* (of the second wazn) and its derivatives in this anthology when referring to poetry that he has “Arabized.”

From ʿUrfī, he offers a total of five lines, evidently taken from three poems. I have not yet been able to identify the original Persian for any of these lines, despite spending a fair amount of time searching; but it ought to be possible. In one of the excerpts, ʿUrfī complains of having become an old man before experiencing middle age. There are poems in his *dīvān* that express similar ideas, though none appears to be a close match. Two other general features of al-Muḥibbī’s translation practice should be mentioned. First, he never quotes

---

40. A valuable introduction to this genre in Arabic literature is given in Bilal Orfali, *The Anthologist’s Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His “Yatīmat al-dahr”* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–33 (i.e., chap. 1).

41. In the edition of al-Ḥulw, at least, the heading for the notice on Şāʾib—unlike the others in this section—does not include his nisba (Tabrīzī) or any other part of his name.

42. For a list of these citations, see *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 5:634.

43. Ibid., 3:225.

44. This includes al-Muḥibbī’s translations from Turkic.
the Persian directly, making it necessary to “reverse-engineer” his lines to uncover the source poems. Second, al-Muḥibbī is strict in rendering the Persian verse into Arabic verse that follows the standard rules of prosody. He does not keep the same meter and rhyme as those used in the original poems—Persian is such a different language from Arabic, anyway, that its implementation of the Khalīlian system is effectively a new creation—but there is always some meter and rhyme.

Ṭālib Āmulī receives the least discussion of any figure in this section. Al-Muḥibbī praises the quality of his poetry in conventional terms and then provides two lines (apparently from a single poem) that he has translated. In this case, also, I have not managed to find a match in Ṭālib’s Persian dīvān. It is a frustrating task to attempt to pick distinctive words in the Arabic and search for possible equivalents in Persian, with no other clues. There is, furthermore, the chance that al-Muḥibbī produced a free or inaccurate translation, which would doom the effort.

The entry on Ṣāʾib is where we are fortunate enough to achieve a true result. And this is ideal, since Ṣāʾib is by far the latest of the three poets. Both ʿUrfī and Ṭālib, in fact, died before al-Muḥibbī was born, which makes their inclusion in the anthology somewhat atypical. (Had they been Arabic poets, they likely would have been covered by al-Khafājī.) Ṣāʾib, on the other hand, may have been alive until just four or five years before al-Muḥibbī began writing the Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna. The praise for Ṣāʾib at the beginning of the notice is also more hyperbolic than what we find with ʿUrfī and Ṭālib. Al-Muḥibbī describes him as “one worth a thousand” (wāḥid maʿdūd bi-alf) and states that “all who preceded him among the poets [of the Persians] lag behind him, along with his followers” (jamīc man taqaddamahu min shuʿarāʿihim mutaʾakhkhir maʿa al-khalaf). In a nice turn of phrase, al-Muḥibbī adds that Ṣāʾib “played with meanings as the east wind plays with the ben tree, and as maidenhood [plays] with the desirous lover” (wa-qad talāʿaba bi-l-maʿanī talāʿub al-ṣabā bi-l-bāna, wa-l-ṣibā bi-l-ʿāshiq dhī al-lubāna). Note the use of words derived from the root ṣ-b-w, close to ṣ-w-b, the source of the name Ṣāʾib.

At the transition to the poetry portion of the notice, al-Muḥibbī explains that he “has brought forth of his Arabized [selections] that which the mind cannot imagine” (wa-qad awradtu min muʿarrabātihi mā taṭīshu ʿinda takhayyulihi al-adhhān). This is slightly confusing, as it seems to leave open the possibility that the author is presenting someone else’s translations of Ṣāʾib. But it remains most probable that al-Muḥibbī made his own Arabic versions, as in the prior entries. He quotes four lines drawn from two of Ṣāʾib’s poems (two lines from each). The second excerpt contains a phrase that is sufficiently uncommon that I hoped it might occur in the same form in the original Persian. It goes as follows: “Kingship lies not in wealth / nor in horses or armor; the Alexander of the age is a youth / who possesses bare sustenance” (mā al-mulk bi-l-māl wa-lā / bi-l-khayl wa-lā bi-l-daraq; Iskandar al-dahr fatan / yamliku sadd al-ramaq). The term used for “bare

46. Ibid., 3:227.
47. The meter appears to be a variant of rajaz. The following transcription better represents the way that these lines would be read: maʿl-mulk bi-l-māl wa-lā / bi-l-khayl wa-lā bi-d-daraq; Iskandaruʿd-dahrī fatan /
sustenance” is *sadd al-ramaq*, which may require explanation. *Sadd* can refer to a dam, or to the stopping up or blocking of something (among other senses, depending on the context). *Ramaq* refers to the spark or breath of life. The compound *sadd al-ramaq*, then, can be translated as “stopping up the breath of life,” that is, the minimum amount of sustenance required to keep a person alive. In modern Arabic, it is more common to see a verbal form such as *sadda ramaqahu*, “he had just enough to keep body and soul together.”

A perceptive reader may already notice the connection between the mention of *sadd al-ramaq* and the invocation of Alexander the Great in this poem. There is an implicit reference to the *sadd* of Alexander—the barrier built by the character Dhū al-Qarnayn (identified with Alexander) in the Qur’an to protect humanity from the hordes of Gog and Magog. In the relevant verse, *al-Kahf* 94, the word employed is indeed *sadd*. This context allows for a deeper reading of Ṣāʾib’s poetry fragment. Kingship is not defined by worldly possessions, we are told; rather, whoever is living on the edge, just barely subsisting, is the Alexander of his age—with the stopping up of his breath of life equivalent to the wall of Dhū al-Qarnayn.

Before I describe the results of searching for *sadd al-ramaq* in Ṣāʾib’s *dīvān*, it should be noted that al-Muḥibbī’s treatment of Persian poetry does not end completely with this notice. This is followed by yet another short section (*faṣl*), which the author reports that he “assembled from Arabic translations old and new” (*jaʿaltuhu li-l-muʿarrabāt qadīman wa-ḥadīthan*). Here al-Muḥibbī quotes numerous excerpts of verse that he identifies as having been translated from Persian, drawing on a variety of sources. The first several examples are from the *Dumyat al-qaṣr* of al-Bākharzī (d. 467/1075). Several others are attributed to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (whom al-Muḥibbī calls “al-Shihāb”), including one that is apparently found in his work titled *Ṭirāz al-majālis* (“Ornament of the symposia”). In another case, there are two lines that the Syrian-Palestinian scholar Ḥasan al-Būrīnī (d. 1024/1615) purportedly translated from the poet Vaḥshī Bāfqī (d. 991/1583). (I have tried to identify the original Persian, so far without success.) And al-Muḥibbī mentions Ibn Maʿṣūm as the source of one excerpt, though it is not drawn from the section on al-ʿAjam in the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*. This passage in the *Naḥṭ al-rayḥāna* is fascinating in its own right and merits careful study. In fact, not all of the material assembled here is poetry; there are also *yamliku saddaʿr-ramaqi*. Please note, additionally, that my general practice when quoting poetry in this paper is to separate hemistichs with a semicolon. I have made an exception in this case, owing to the brevity of the meter.

---

48. This verbal construct is mentioned under the definition of *ramaq* in Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 4th ed. (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1994), 417.
51. *Naḥṭ al-rayḥāna*, 3:231. The *Ṭirāz al-majālis* is little known, but it has been published (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Wahbiyya, 1284/1867–68).
a few proverbs (amthāl) said to be of Persian origin. But any further investigation will need to wait for a different paper.

A Distinctive Image in Ṣāʾib’s Poetry

As far as I have been able to establish, the term sadd-i ramaq (with the Persian iżāfa) is used in seven of Ṣāʾib’s ghazals, as well as in one of his “scattered snippets.” The latter is a category of poetry with formal similarities to qiṭʿas, labeled mutaḥarrīqāt in copies of Ṣāʾib’s dīvān. In three of the ghazals, sadd-i ramaq occurs in the opening line, or maṭlaʿ. I will review each instance, but we should begin with that which appears closest to the translation of al-Muḥibbī: ghazal no. 3,439. Its first line goes as follows: “Kingship lies not in silver and gold and jewels; whoever has bare sustenance is Alexander” (pādshāḥī na biḥ ẓim u zar u gawhar bāshad; har-kih rā sadd-i ramaq hast, Sikandar bāshad). This is an almost perfect match, considering the degree of license required to transform Persian verse into Arabic verse. It may also be significant that it is a maṭlaʿ, since opening lines are disproportionately quoted in anthologies. The next closest occurrence is in the ninth line (of eleven) in ghazal no. 969: “The king is not the one who has a limitless treasure of jewels; whoever has just enough to subsist in the world is Alexander” (nīst shāh ān kas kih dārad ganj-i gawhar bi-shumār; har-kih rā sadd-i ramaq hast az jahān Iskandar ast). Even this is similar enough to al-Muḥibbī’s version to be a plausible source.

Moving on, we find similar phrases in the following locations. The ninth line (of ten) in ghazal no. 1,832: “Make do with whatever sustenance you receive; since the one who survives on the bare minimum becomes Alexander” (bih har-chih mī-rasad az rizq sāzagārī kun; kih har-kih sākht biḥ sadd-i ramaq Sikandar gasht). The first line of ghazal no. 1,887: “For us, the cap of poverty is equal to the crown; bare sustenance is equal to the kingdom of Alexander” (mā rā kulāh-i faqr biḥ afsar barābar ast; sadd-i ramaq biḥ mulk-i Sikandar barābar ast). The eleventh line (of twelve) in ghazal no. 3,430: “That day I was among the people of noble souls; when minimal sustenance became for me the Wall of Alexander” (būdam ān rūz man az jumla-yi āzāda-ravān; kih marā sadd-i ramaq sadd-i Sikandar mi-shud).

53. The full text of the poem can be found in the online corpus Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh3439/. The meter is ramal. Among printed versions of Ṣāʾib’s poetry, the edition of his dīvān by Muḥammad Qahramān in six volumes (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī va Farhangī, 1985–91) is generally preferred. In that edition, ghazal no. 3,439 (per Ganjoor) is numbered 3,443 and is found at 4:1662–63.

54. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh969/ and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib’s dīvān, 2:491 (ghazal no. 969). The meter is ramal.

55. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh1832/ and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib’s dīvān, 2:901–2 (ghazal no. 1,832). The meter is mujtašā.

56. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh1887/ and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib’s dīvān, 2:927 (ghazal no. 1,887). The meter is mużāriʿ.

zarrīn chu bāshad, makhzan-i zar ġū mabāš; hast chūn sadd-i ramaq, sadd-i Sikandar ġū mabāš).\textsuperscript{58} The fourth line (of seventeen) in ghazal no. 6,714: “Until he blocks for himself the path of desire at the point of bare subsistence; a man will not be compared to Alexander” (tā na-bandad rān-i khwāhish bar khud az sadd-i ramaq; dar naẓar-hā sha’n-i Iskandar na-dārad ādām).\textsuperscript{59} And, finally, the second line (of three) in no. 388 of the mutafarriqāt: “He is Alexander, even if he is in the garb of poverty; whoever restricts himself to bare sustenance” (Iskandar ast agar-chih buvad dar libās-i faqr; har kas kih ikhtišār bih sadd-i ramaq kunad).\textsuperscript{60}

Taken together, these appearances of the phrase sadd-i ramaq constitute a significant result. They are also reflective of Šā’īb’s œuvre. He composed around seven thousand ghazals over the course of a career that lasted at least five decades (even if we set as the starting point his departure for Kabul in 1034/1624–25). Šā’īb was not only prolific but also inventive, striving to develop new poetic images. He could take a peculiar, mundane term and construct an intricate field of meaning around it.\textsuperscript{61} Given his corpus of thousands of poems, if one notices an interesting choice of words in a given ghazal and searches for it elsewhere, one is likely to find numerous examples. In fact, sadd-i ramaq, with (it seems) fewer than ten occurrences, is probably among the rarer images deployed by Šā’īb. It is all the more remarkable, then, that one of these poems found its way to Damascus and struck the fancy of al-Muḥibī. It may have been relevant that sadd-i ramaq is such an Arabic-sounding turn of phrase, even when employed in Persian.

A final question here is whether Šā’īb’s way of using sadd-i ramaq is actually uncommon. The answer is that it appears to be unique. It is rare to come upon this phrase in Persian poetry in any context. I found only two ghazals by Bēdil of Lahore (d. 1133/1720)—who lived after Šā’īb, of course—and neither includes the connection to Alexander.\textsuperscript{62} For Bēdil, in both instances, the relevant idea is the virtue of contentment (qanāʿat). Even in prose literature, there are few occurrences of sadd-i ramaq. It appears once in the Gulistān of Saʿdī and twice

\textsuperscript{58} See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh4884/ and the Qahramān edition of Šā’īb’s dīvān, 5:2360 (ghazal no. 4,888). The meter is ramal.

\textsuperscript{59} See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh6714/. The meter is ramal. The copy of the Qahramān edition of Šā’īb’s dīvān that I was able to access lacked the sixth volume, in which this and the next reference would fall. For the final two Šā’īb references, therefore, I consulted a different edition, carried out by Sīrūs Shamīsā (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mustawfī and Intishārāt-i Bihzād, 1373/1994) on the basis of a manuscript held at the National Museum of Pakistan. In the Shamīsā edition, this ghazal is numbered 1,848 and is found on p. 712.

\textsuperscript{60} See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/motefarreghat/sh388/ and the Shamīsā edition of Šā’īb’s dīvān, 822 (in which the mutafarriqāt are unnumbered). The meter is mużāriʿ.

\textsuperscript{61} I recall a paper that Paul Losensky delivered at the ASPS conference in Sarajevo in 2013, focusing on Šā’īb’s figurative use of the term shīrāza, which refers to the thread that stitches together a bookbinding. There is a seemingly inexhaustible supply of such linguistic treasures in Šā’īb’s dīvān.

\textsuperscript{62} In the online corpus Ganjoor, these are ghazals 1,213 and 2,065 from Bēdil. In the former, it is in the fifth line (out of ten); in the latter, also on the fifth line (out of nine). The meters are ramal and hazaj, respectively. For printed versions of these poems, see the edition of Bēdil’s kulliyyāt by Akbar Bihdārvand and Parviz ʿAbbāsi Dākānī, 3 vols. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ilhām, 1376/1997), 177, 492. The ghazals are not numbered in this edition.
in Naṣr Allāh Munshī’s version of *Kalīla va Dimna*. There is again no mention of Alexander. Unless I have overlooked something, within the Persian tradition this metaphor belongs to Şā‘īb.

**Conclusions**

This paper has drawn attention to the fact that there are at least two Arabic anthologies of the eleventh/seventeenth century that incorporate some treatment of then-recent Persian poets. The second of these sources, the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* of al-Muḥibbi, is further distinguished by its notices on poets who are major figures in Persian literary history, and by the inclusion of Arabic verse translations from their works. It is exciting to be able to follow one of al-Muḥibbi’s renditions to the original *ghazal(s)* in the *dīvān* of Şā‘īb and, in the process, to discover a highly original motif.

A great deal remains to be done to contextualize these findings. To what extent, for example, do other anthologies from the Ottoman Arab sphere engage with the works of Iranian or Persian authors? Can more be determined about the role of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī and his *Rayḥanat al-alibbā*, given the clear influence that the text exerted on both Ibn Ma‘ṣūm and al-Muḥibbi? (Did al-Khafājī also know Persian?) Are there other snippets of translated Arabic poetry in the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, or quotations of Persian poetry in the *Sulāfat al-‘aṣr*, that could be traced to their sources with sufficient effort? These are a few of the questions that I intend to pursue in my ongoing research into early modern anthological sources. On a broader level, I would like to emphasize again the need for Persianists and Arabists who study this period to collaborate in order to enhance our understanding of the ties between literary traditions that have often been viewed in isolation. The time is ripe to pursue more thorough dialogue across the field. The *inḥiṭāṭ* paradigm has been challenged; works under the rubric of *ṭabaqāt*, *tarājim*, and *taẓkira*s are studied more intensively than ever; and the term “Indian style” (*sabk-i Hindī*) has all but lost its pejorative connotation. Is there yet a wider cultural world of the Ottoman-Safavid-Mughal era for us to rediscover?

---

Bibliography

Primary Sources


*Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 28 (2020)


Secondary Literature


