

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

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## Abstract

*In this short article, I draw attention to the discussion of poets from Iran (al-‘Ajam) in two Arabic biographical anthologies of the eleventh/seventeenth century: the Sulāfat al-‘aṣr of Ibn Ma‘ṣūm (d. 1120/1709) and the Naḥḥat al-rayḥāna of Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī (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-Muḥibbī has translated into Arabic verse. In the case of the poet Ṣā‘ib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676), at least one of al-Muḥibbī’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 Amīn al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699) and the Medinese (though widely

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\* 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.

itinerant) Ibn Maʿṣūm (d. 1120/1709), included sections on ʿAjāmī 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-Muḥibbī 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.<sup>1</sup> 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-Muḥibbī 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-Muḥibbī provides a notice on the poet Ṣāʿib 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 Ṣāʿib’s *divān*. In the process, we find an innovative image that Ṣāʿib 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

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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 (Sooyong 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 Maʿṣūm, 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> If the connection were widely known, it would

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2. There is more scholarship on literary interplay between Arabic and Persian in earlier historical periods. In this connection, two recent papers by Alexander Key and an important monograph in Persian by Āzartāsh Āzarnūsh should be highlighted: Alexander Key, “Moving from Persian to Arabic,” in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, ed. William Granara, Alireza Korangy, and Roy Mottahedeh, 93–140 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); idem, “Translation of Poetry from Persian to Arabic: ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and Others,” *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 5 (2018): 146–76; Āzartāsh Āzarnūsh, *Chālīsh-i miyān-i Fārsī va ‘Arabī: Sada-hā-yi nukhust* (Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, 2008). Extending this body of work to later periods will be a valuable endeavor.

3. For a review, see Theodore S. Beers, “*Tazkīrah-i Khayr al-Bayān*: The Earliest Source on the Career and Poetry of Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676),” *Al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 24 (2016): 114–38.

merit a note in any overview of the poet's biography and legacy.<sup>4</sup> There can be no doubt about the pertinence of the fact that Ṣā'ib'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 Ma'ṣūm 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 Persianists).

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 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī (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 Qur'an, 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.<sup>5</sup>

4. See, for example, Paul E. Losensky, "Ṣā'eb Tabrizi," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*; and Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Ma'ānī, *Kārvān-i Hind: Dar aḥvāl va āsār-i shā'irān-i 'aṣr-i Ṣafavī kih bih Hindūstān rafta-and*, 2 vols. (Mashhad: Āstān-i Quds-i Razavī, 1369/1990–91), 700ff.

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 (*tazkiras*), including the genre-defining *Tazkirat al-shu‘arā*’ (892/1487) of Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, include prefatory sections that honor the great Arabic poets.<sup>6</sup> 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 Sa‘dī 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-Faṭḥ b. ‘Alī al-Bundārī (d. after 639/1241–42).<sup>7</sup> (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 *tazkira*, 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 Ma‘ṣūm—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-‘Ajām*) appears in Ibn Ma‘ṣūm’s anthology: he focuses on Arabic poetry by his contemporaries from that land. (The differences between the approaches of al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Ma‘ṣūm 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 Shi‘i scholars who moved from the Jabal ‘Āmil region to Iran in the Safavid

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*Anvār-i suhaylī* of Ḥusayn Vā‘iz Kāshifī (d. 910/1504–5), served as the basis for an Ottoman Turkish translation, the *Humāyūn-nāma* of Ali Vasi Çelebi (d. 959/1543–44). On this complex process, see Dagmar Riedel, “Kalila wa Demna i. Redactions and Circulation,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

6. See Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-shu‘arā*, ed. Fāṭima ‘Alāqa (Tehran: Pizhūhishgāh-i ‘Ulūm-i Insānī va Muṭāla‘āt-i Farhangī, 2007), 33ff.

7. See David Durand-Guédy, “Al-Bundārī, al-Faṭḥ b. ‘Alī,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 3rd ed.

period, such as Shaykh Bahāʿī, d. 1030/1621.)<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 Maghribī 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 Ḥijāz (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 ʿIṣām 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.<sup>10</sup> Maḥmūd al-Kurdī spent several decades teaching in Damascus, and his students carried his approach to a new generation, which included none other than Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī.

We could, therefore, posit a logical narrative to explain the way in which al-Muḥibbī, 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-Muḥibbī 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 Maʿṣūm with Iranian and Persian poets. As we will see in the following section, he

8. See Rula Jurdi Abisaab, “Jabal ʿĀmel,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*; and Etan Kohlberg, “Bahāʿ-ʿal-Dīn ʿĀmeli,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

9. Khaled El-Rouayheb, “Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 2 (May 2006): 263–81.

10. On these campaigns, see H. R. Roemer, “The Safavid Period,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart, 189–350 (Cambridge, 1986), 266–68.

11. As is mentioned below, al-Muḥibbī 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,<sup>12</sup> but it seems less obvious how to conceptualize the Persian-Arabic nexus.<sup>13</sup> 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 Maʿṣūm 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 Maʿṣūm, since his anthology was completed earlier and seems to have reached and influenced his Damascene contemporary.<sup>14</sup> His full name (sans patronymics) is ʿAlī Khān Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibn Maʿṣūm, 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 Maʿṣūm 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

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12. To give an illustrative example, the Ottoman historian Mustafa Âli of Gallipoli (d. 1008/1600) was an admirer and, for a time, a correspondent of the poet Muḥtasham Kāshānī (d. 996/1588)—despite the latter's close ties to the Safavid court. See Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 142.

13. One approach is to consider the process whereby Persian literature influenced developments in Ottoman Turkish, which in turn had an impact on Arabic authors. This phenomenon has been studied, for example, with reference to the history of the Arabic chronogram. See Thomas Bauer, “Vom Sinn der Zeit: Aus der Geschichte des arabischen Chronogramms,” *Arabica* 50, no. 4 (2003): 501–31.

14. All of the details about Ibn Maʿṣūm's biography that are provided here, and a good deal more, can be found in Joseph E. Lowry, “Ibn Maʿṣūm,” in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 1350–1850*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart, 174–84 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009). Please note, however, that I have corrected a couple of date conversions, including in the case of Ibn Maʿṣūm's death. He is reported to have died in Dhū al-Qaʿda 1120, which corresponds to January–February 1709. For more on this point, see Maḥmūd Khalaf al-Bādī's introduction to his edition of Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsīn ahl al-ʿaṣr*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Dār Kinān, 1430/2009), 17.

in Golconda, near Hyderabad.<sup>15</sup> In due course, the rest of the family, including the teenaged Ibn Maʿṣūm, relocated to India. Our author would remain on the subcontinent for most of his adult life.

Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad served at the Quṭb-shāhī court through the 1660s and into the early 1670s, and it is probable that Ibn Maʿṣūm followed in his footsteps. When the Quṭb-shāh of that period, ʿAbd Allāh, died in 1082/1672, Nizām 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.<sup>16</sup> For Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad, this was the end of the line: he died in prison in 1086/1675. But Ibn Maʿṣūm 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 Maʿṣūm’s Shiʿi leanings and the ruler’s famous concern for Sunni orthodoxy. In reality, the oft-misunderstood Awrangzēb was willing to employ a substantial number of Shiʿi bureaucrats and intellectuals at his court. Ibn Maʿṣūm may also have benefited from his status as a *sayyid* from the Ḥijāz. Finally, in 1114/1702–3, Ibn Maʿṣūm 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 Shīrāz. He spent a few years teaching at the Maṣūriyya madrasa and died in 1120/1709.

We have a number of extant works from Ibn Maʿṣūm, 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-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsīn aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, or “The unpressed wine on the distinctions of the notables of the epoch,” which Ibn Maʿṣūm finished in 1082/1671.<sup>17</sup> 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-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsīn al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kull miṣr*, or “The unpressed wine on the distinctions of the poets of every land.”<sup>18</sup> 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-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsīn aʿyān al-ʿaṣr* or a close variant thereof, such as *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr min maḥāsīn aʿyān*

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 Maʿṣūm.”

17. The completion of the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 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 Rabīʿ al-Ākhir 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).

*al-‘aṣr*.<sup>19</sup> This is not simply a matter of comparing title pages; Ibn Ma‘ṣūm describes his naming of the work in the preface (fol. 6r in the Berlin manuscript). Another problem with changing the title to *al-shu‘arā’ bi-kull miṣr* is that it spoils Ibn Ma‘ṣūm’s wordplay. The repetition of *al-‘aṣr* is deliberate, denoting the pressing of wine in the first instance and “epoch” in the second.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup> This is an interesting point, since, as we will see below, al-Muḥibbī was likewise inspired by the *Rayḥānat al-alibbā*. It bears emphasizing that Ibn Ma‘ṣūm, 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-‘aṣr* is divided into five main chapters on the basis of geography. This is a common organizational scheme, used also by al-Khafājī and al-Muḥibbī. 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-‘Ajam*); and the fifth, to the Maghrib.<sup>22</sup> 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 Ma‘ṣūm aims to address some of al-Khafājī’s omissions and to pick up where he left off. Unlike al-Muḥibbī (discussed below), however, Ibn Ma‘ṣūm 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-‘Ajam is fairly short and, for a Persianist, perhaps not entirely satisfying.<sup>23</sup> 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

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

20. The edition of the *Sulāfat al-‘aṣr* used for references in this paper (along with the Berlin manuscript) is that of Maḥmūd Khalaf al-Bādī.

21. The *Rayḥānat al-alibbā* has been edited by ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw in two volumes (Cairo: ‘Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967). This is the same scholar responsible for the edition of al-Muḥibbī’s *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* (discussed below). Note that the word *alibbā*<sup>2</sup>—presumably of the pattern *af‘ilā*<sup>2</sup>, 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-Bādī, these chapters begin, respectively, on pp. 39, 483, 685, 773, and 899. It is clear from the page numbers—and unsurprising, given Ibn Ma‘ṣūm’s background—that the first chapter is by far the largest.

23. *Sulāfat al-‘aṣr*, ed. al-Bādī, 775–96.

difficult to find further information about the latter two.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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” (*tahnīyat juz dar muṣībat pīsh-i mā ʿayb ast, ʿayb; ʿīd rā dar shahr-i mā rasm-i mubārak-bād nīst*).<sup>26</sup> 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*).<sup>27</sup> 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).<sup>28</sup>

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 ʿAbbās. See Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 178.

25. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, ed. al-Bādī, 783.

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 *kullīyyāt* by Ghulām Ḥusayn Javāhirī Vajdī (Tehran: Kitāb-khāna-yi Sanāʿī, 1357/1978), 249; or the edition of Muḥammad Valī al-Ḥaqq 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 Javāhirī’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-Bādī, 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> It is a literary anthology titled *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna wa-rashḥat ṭilā' 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 *Nafḥat 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 'ashar* (“The essence of the legacy of the notables of the eleventh century”).<sup>31</sup> 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 *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, which remained incomplete at the time of his death in 1111/1699.<sup>32</sup> So it seems plausible that he wrote the *Nafḥat 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-'Arab min dakhīl*, is described by El-Rouayheb as among “the most extensive premodern works on foreign loanwords in Arabic.”<sup>33</sup>

The concept of the *Nafḥat 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 *ṭabaqāt* or *tarājīm* in Arabic), the content is presented in a series of notices (*tarājīm*), each devoted to a specific person. In a given notice, discussion of the

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29. On al-Muḥibbī's biography, see the introduction of 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw in his edition of *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna wa-rashḥat ṭilā' al-ḥāna*, 6 vols. (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967–71), starting at 1:4. Another helpful overview is provided by Muḥammad Zāhid Abū Ghudda in “al-'Allāma al-mu'arrikh al-adīb al-shā'ir Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī,” website of Rābiṭat al-'Ulamā' al-Sūriyyīn, March 1, 2016, [https://islamsyria.com/site/show\\_articles/7939/](https://islamsyria.com/site/show_articles/7939/).

30. These events are described by al-Muḥibbī in the preface to the *Nafḥat 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-Maṭba'a 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 *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*.

33. El-Rouayheb, “Opening the Gate,” 276.

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,<sup>34</sup> and, for obvious reasons, it is the longest section of the *Nafḥat 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> The fourth chapter addresses Iraq and Bahrain,<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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 ʿAjamīs in greater detail below, with particular attention to his notice on Ṣāʿib Tabrīzī.

The fifth chapter of the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* is on Yemen; the sixth, on the Ḥijāz; the seventh, on Egypt; and the eighth, on the Maghrib.<sup>39</sup> 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 *Nafḥat 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 *Nafḥat 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 fī 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 *Nafḥat 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 *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:129–38.

37. This chapter begins at 3:139.

38. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:213–38.

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-Bākhārī (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-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201).<sup>40</sup>

### 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 ʿAjāmī 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-Shūshtarī; ʿUrfī al-Shīrāzī (d. 999/1591); Ṭālib al-Āmulī (d. 1036/1626–27); and Ṣāʿib (d. ca. 1087/1676).<sup>41</sup> It is plain that the first two notices are based on the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*—a work that al-Muḥibbī cites at several points.<sup>42</sup> 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-Shūshtarī is of relatively little interest, compared to the original material that follows.

The notices on ʿUrfī, Ṭālib, and Ṣāʿib 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 roamed around that country and filled it with his sublimity” (*wa-kāna dakhala al-Hind fa-jāsa khilālahu, wa-malaʿa bilādahu jalālatahu*).<sup>43</sup> The author then reports that ʿUrfī died in India after “setting loose what was in his quiver of secrets” (*fa-nashala mā fi kinānatihi min al-maknūnāt*) and “scattering what was in his treasury of riches” (*wa-nathara mā fi dhakhāʿirihi 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 tanquluḥu 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.”<sup>44</sup>

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 Maṣʿūd 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 Ṣāʿib—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.<sup>45</sup> 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 Ṣāʿib is where we are fortunate enough to achieve a true result.<sup>46</sup> And this is ideal, since Ṣāʿib 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.) Ṣāʿib, on the other hand, may have been alive until just four or five years before al-Muḥibbī began writing the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*. The praise for Ṣāʿib 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” (*jamīʿ man taqaddamahu min shuʿarāʾihim mutaʾakkkhir maʿa al-khalaf*). In a nice turn of phrase, al-Muḥibbī adds that Ṣāʿib “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-maʿānī 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 Ṣāʿib.

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 taʿīshu 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 Ṣāʿib. 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 Ṣāʿib’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*).<sup>47</sup> The term used for “bare

45. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:226.

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: *māʾl-mulku bīʾl-māli wa-lā / bīʾl-khayli wa-lā bīʾd-daraq; Iskandaruʾd-dahri 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). And *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.”<sup>48</sup>

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.<sup>49</sup> In the relevant verse, *al-Kahf* 94, the word employed is indeed *sadd*. This context allows for a deeper reading of Ṣā’ib’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 Ṣā’ib’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” (*ja’altuhu li-l-mu’arrabāt qadīman wa-ḥadīthan*).<sup>50</sup> 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-Bākhari (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”).<sup>51</sup> In another case, there are two lines that the Syrian-Palestinian scholar Ḥasan al-Būrīnī (d. 1024/1615) purportedly translated from the poet Vaḥshī Bāfqi (d. 991/1583).<sup>52</sup> (I have tried to identify the original Persian, so far without success.) And al-Muḥibbī mentions Ibn Maṣūm as the source of one excerpt, though it is not drawn from the section on al-‘Ajam in the *Sulāfat al-‘aṣr*. This passage in the *Nafḥat 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

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*yamliku sadda’r-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.

49. See William L. Hanaway, “Eskandar-nāma,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

50. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:228. The section continues through 3:238.

51. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:231. The *Ṭirāz al-majālis* is little known, but it has been published (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Wahbiyya, 1284/1867–68).

52. On this author, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, “Al-Burini, Hasan b. Muhammad,” *Historians of the Ottoman Empire* website, September 2008, <https://ottomanhistorians.uchicago.edu/en/historian/al-burini-hasan-b-muhammad/>.

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 Ṣāʿib's Poetry

As far as I have been able to establish, the term *sadd-i ramaq* (with the Persian *izāfa*) is used in seven of Ṣāʿib's *ghazals*, as well as in one of his "scattered snippets." The latter is a category of poetry with formal similarities to *qitʿas*, labeled *mutafarriqāt* in copies of Ṣāʿib'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" (*pādshāhī na bih sīm u zar u gawhar bāshad; har-kih rā sadd-i ramaq hast, Sikandar bāshad*).<sup>53</sup> 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 bī-shumār; har-kih rā sadd-i ramaq hast az jahān Iskandar ast*).<sup>54</sup> 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 sāzgārī kun; kih har-kih sākht bih sadd-i ramaq Sikandar gasht*).<sup>55</sup> 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 bih afsar barābar ast; sadd-i ramaq bih mulk-i Sikandar barābar ast*).<sup>56</sup> 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 mī-shud*).<sup>57</sup> The opening line of *ghazal* no. 4,884: "If you have a golden face, refuse the treasury of gold; if you have bare sustenance, refuse the Wall of Alexander" (*chihra-yi*

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 Ṣāʿib'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 Ṣāʿib'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 Ṣāʿib's *dīvān*, 2:901–2 (*ghazal* no. 1,832). The meter is *mujtaṣṣ*.

56. See Ganjoor at <https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh1887/> and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʿib's *dīvān*, 2:927 (*ghazal* no. 1,887). The meter is *muṣṣarīʿ*.

57. See Ganjoor at <https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh3430/> and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʿib's *dīvān*, 4:1658–59 (*ghazal* no. 3,434). The meter is *ramal*.

*zarrīn chu bāshad, makhzan-i zar gū mabāsh; hast chūn sadd-i ramaq, sadd-i Sikandar gū mabāsh*).<sup>58</sup> 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 rāh-i khwāhish bar khud az sadd-i ramaq; dar naẓar-hā sha’n-i Iskandar na-dārad ādamī*).<sup>59</sup> 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 ikhtiṣār bih sadd-i ramaq kunad*).<sup>60</sup>

Taken together, these appearances of the phrase *sadd-i ramaq* constitute a significant result. They are also reflective of Ṣā’ib’s oeuvre. 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). Ṣā’ib 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.<sup>61</sup> 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 Ṣā’ib. It is all the more remarkable, then, that one of these poems found its way to Damascus and struck the fancy of al-Muḥibbī. 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 Ṣā’ib’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 Ṣā’ib, of course—and neither includes the connection to Alexander.<sup>62</sup> For Bēdil, in both instances, the relevant idea is the virtue of contentment (*qanā‘at*). Even in prose literature, there are few occurrences of *sadd-i ramaq*. It appears once in the *Gulistān* of Sa’dī and twice

58. See Ganjoor at <https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh4884/> and the Qahramān edition of Ṣā’ib’s *dīvān*, 5:2360 (*ghazal* no. 4,888). The meter is *ramal*.

59. See Ganjoor at <https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh6714/>. The meter is *ramal*. The copy of the Qahramān edition of Ṣā’ib’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 Ṣā’ib 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.

60. See Ganjoor at <https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/motefarreghat/sh388/> and the Shamīsā edition of Ṣā’ib’s *dīvān*, 822 (in which the *mutafarriqāt* are unnumbered). The meter is *muzārī‘*.

61. I recall a paper that Paul Losensky delivered at the ASPS conference in Sarajevo in 2013, focusing on Ṣā’ib’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 Ṣā’ib’s *dīvān*.

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 *kullīyyāt* by Akbar Bihdārvand and Parvīz ‘Abbāsī 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*.<sup>63</sup> There is again no mention of Alexander. Unless I have overlooked something, within the Persian tradition this metaphor belongs to Ṣā'ib.

### 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-Muḥibbī, 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-Muḥibbī's renditions to the original *ghazal*(s) in the *dīvān* of Ṣā'ib 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'sūm and al-Muḥibbī? (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 *inḥitāṭ* paradigm has been challenged; works under the rubric of *ṭabaqāt*, *tarājim*, and *tazkiras* 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?

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63. In Wheeler M. Thackston's bilingual edition of the *Gulistān* (Bethesda, MD: Ibex, 2008), the relevant passage is at 158–59. In Mujtabā Mīnuvī's edition of *Kalīla va Dimna* (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tih-rān, 1343/1964), see 83, 109.

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