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Inscribing Persian in the Arabic Cosmopolis

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INSCRIBING PERSIAN IN THE ARABIC COSMOPOLIS: A CASE STUDY OF QUR'ĀNIC EXEGESIS FROM KHORASAN

Majid Daneshgar[*] and Sajjad Rizvi[**1]

Abstract: Scholarly discourse on the Persianate tends to focus on the influence of Persian in Iran and further east, and often occludes the way in which the Persian language is inflected and present in the Arabic cosmopolis further west. Similarly, the formation of 'Islamic classics' and scholarly genres including exegesis tends to ignore the role of Persian works (and texts produced in a Persianate context). Through a case study of Qur'ānic exegesis in Persian and its reception west of Iran, we demonstrate how Persian is inscribed into the Arabic cosmopolis such that the development of post-classical exegesis should place these works alongside the major Arabic classics of al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī and al-Basīṭ; in effect, we contend the study of Qur'ānic exegesis cannot ignore the study of Persian exegesis. Through examining rare manuscripts, we show how scholars read, copied and promoted Persian *tafsir* in Arabophone contexts. Not only does this study follow up on and test some earlier scholarly works dealing with the circulation of Persian translations of the Qur'ān and its commentaries as well as the scholarly impact of the Persians further west, it indicates the contribution of Persian exegesis to a normative understanding of the Islamic exegetical traditions at the heart of the madrasa.

Keywords: *Persianate tafsir*, *Arabic cosmopolis*, *Khorasan*, *Levant*, *Nisapur*

Dissatisfied with the way in which some recent scholarly formations consider the nature of the 'classic' in the Islamic tradition with their Arabo-centric bias, and similarly disappointed with the way in which the cultural formation of the Persianate seems to neglect the 'scriptural' and more explicitly 'religious' disciplines, we present this study on the significance of Persian Qur'ānic exegesis in the classical period. Scholarly discourse on the Persianate tends to focus on the influence of Persian language, civility and courtly culture in Iran, Anatolia and further East and often occludes the way in which the Persian language and learning is inflected and present in the Arabic cosmopolis further west.[2] Marshall Hodgson, from whom the concept is

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[1] We jointly delivered an earlier version of this article at the American Academy of Religion (Quran Unit) in November 2021.

[2] Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Muhsin S. al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015). Ricci's

drawn, conceived of the Persianate as a zone in which the rise of New Persian brought a "new overall cultural orientation within Islamdom"; as such, it informed all the languages of high culture that emerged in Muslim contexts and beyond.[3] It is difficult to separate Persian from Arabic when one considers the reception and transmission of Islamic learning diachronically in parts of the Islamic East; we should rethink the cultural space as the Perso-Arabic cosmopolis. Similarly, the formation of 'Islamic classics' and scholarly genres including exegesis tends to ignore the role of Persian works (and of texts produced in a Persianate context).[4] Hodgson was primarily concerned with power and culture but in his quest for understanding the course of 'conscience' in world history, it is not inconceivable that he would have included texts and knowledge production that in its social and cultural formation of selfhood and civility would include the 'religious.'[5] Unfortunately, many have built on his conceptualisation to separate the sphere of culture from religion.[6]

Through a case study of Qur'ānic exegesis in Persian and its reception west of Iran (as well as nodding towards the East), we demonstrate how Persian is inscribed into the Arabic cosmopolis such that the development of post-classical exegesis should place these works alongside the major classics of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Nīsābūrī al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035) and his student Abūʾl-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī (d. 1076), all Persian origin exegetes from the 'Nishapur' school who wrote in Arabic.[7] In effect, we contend the study of Qur'ānic exegesis as a disciplinary formation cannot ignore the study of Persian exegesis. Through examining rare manuscripts, we will show how scholars read, copied and promoted Persian *tafsir* in Arabophone contexts. Not only does this study follow up on and test some earlier scholarly works dealing with the circulation of Persian translations of the Qur'ān and its commentaries,[8] as well as the scholarly impact of the

conception of Arabic cosmopolis draws upon Sheldon Pollock's notion of the Sanskrit cosmopolis as exemplified in his *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

3 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), vol. 2, 293.

4 *Contra* Ahmed el-Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). Two recent collections on Qur'ānic exegesis broadly assume the classical tradition is expressed solely in Arabic: see Karen Bauer (ed.), *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qurʾanic Exegesis: 2nd/8th–9th/15th C.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013); Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (Eds.), *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014).

5 That reading the Qur'ān was closely associated with *adab* and ethical formation does not need extensive argument; for some indications, see Nuha Alshaar (Ed.), *The Qurʾan and Adab: The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017); Francesco Chiabotti et al. (Eds), *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Cathérine Mayeur-Jaouen (ed), *Adab and Modernity: A Civilising Process?* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

6 On this, see Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 13-14.

7 Walid A. Saleh, "The Last of the Nishapuri School of *Tafsir*: al-Wāḥidī and his Significance in the History of Qurʾanic Exegesis," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126 (2006); Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qurʾān Commentary of al-Thaʿlabī* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

8 Kristin Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006); Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾan: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012).

Persians further west,[9] it indicates the contribution of Persian exegesis to a normative understanding of the Islamic exegetical traditions at the heart of the madrasa.[10]

Our use of Persian or even the Persianate is not linguistically reductionist, nor are we perpetuating a nationalist reading of Persian as inscribing the extent and limits of Iran or the Persian Empire.[11] We do not assume that translation is a simple process of transmission or transmutation from one discrete culture into another through annexation or simple appropriation,[12] nor are we making larger claims about the nature of a cosmopolitan culture, an 'Islamic' republic of letters in which Persian is closely inscribed and determinant for the Arabic cosmopolis. Rather, we reflect on the evidence for the multivocity of linguistic scholarly networks and traditions that are intertwined and demonstrate how scholars who were familiar with materials in Persian drew upon and reflected them in their Arabic scholarly output without either ceding through linguistic syncretism or a theory of translation from one to the other.

Insofar as texts are reflective of a way of life and the intellectual networks that sustain it, we are trying to reinscribe Persian exegesis as a way of life and multilayered form of knowledge production into the study of Islamic exegesis. As such, we provide a different mode of the 'provincialisation of Arabic' in a decolonial turn in the study of exegesis that traditionally might assume Arabic normativity of the tradition with respect to which other linguistic expressions are mere facets of vernacularisation.[13] One final caveat: we are not discussing a neglected field of translation in this case from Persian to Arabic in the way in which previous specialists have discussed Greek into Arabic in the ʿAbbasid period or Sanskrit into Persian in early modern India; our concern is not with translation but the influence of multivocality and linguistic plurality from East to West within the Islamic world.[14] Before considering some

9 Khaled el-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), especially 37-56, which focuses on the 'rational sciences' but similar things might be said of exegesis, which played a somewhat liminal role between the 'rational' and 'scriptural' or revealed.

10 In the Islamic East, the Persian influence came with Islamisation, see Chiara Formichi, "Introduction," in *The Routledge Handbook on Islam in Asia*, ed. Chiara Formichi (London: Routledge, 2022), 9-11.

11 Mana Kia points to this potential problem in *Persianate Selves*, 8-11.

12 We do not directly engage the literature on what we might mean by the Persianate as a cultural token and way of life; for that, see Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf (Eds.), *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Space* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Nile Green (ed), *The Persianate World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019). For an excellent and nuanced study on translation, see Torsten Tschacher, "Islamic and Sanskritic Imaginaries in Southeast Asia," in *The Routledge Handbook of Islam in Asia*, ed. Chiara Formichi (London: Routledge, 2022); Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval Hindu-Muslim Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

13 That provincialisation is already somewhat indicated in Shahab Ahmed's famous *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) and its notion of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, but more recently in the highly interesting case study of Taushif Kara, "Provincializing Mecca? (1924–1969)," *Global Intellectual History* (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2021.1939504. On the assumptions of the lesser status of vernaculars, see the discussion in Ricci, *Islam Translated*, 16-19.

14 On the Greek into Arabic, see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbasid Society* (London: Routledge, 1998); Uwe Vagelpohl, *Aristotle's Rhetoric in the East* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). For the 'Perso-Indica,' see Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Shankar Nair, *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).

examples of classical Persian exegesis that constitute our main evidence for the significance of Persian in the formation of the Islamic Qur'ānic exegetical traditions, it might be useful to consider the abiding influence of Persian in Arabic literary, theological and intellectual formation through a few cursory examples.

PERSIAN IN THE ARABIC COSMOPOLIS: OVERLOOKED MATERIALS

While examining manuscripts in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, one can encounter several Persian manuscripts that were copied and circulated in Egypt. Some of them now housed in Europe were acquired by French Orientalists, collectors and travellers.[15] Among the most favoured ones are the literary and poetic works of Persian poet Saʿdī (d. 1292) of Shiraz, particularly his *Golestān*, which were copied, read and translated by Muslim translators of the French colonial army in Egypt (e.g. BSB Cod. Pers.147 and 148).[16] There is also an original Arabic manuscript, BSB Cod. arab. 892, including Persian phrases and notes (e.g. *rūz-nāmah-ye ʿAlī*), and another Arabic manuscript, BSB Cod. arab. 824, whose first folio is a two-layered sheet, the second one including Persian textual elements and calligraphy. Several thousand copies of Arabic and Persian manuscripts in Egypt were collected by Jean-Joseph Marcel (d. 1845), the French scholar, philologist and printer who accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte during his invasion of Egypt. Arabs' interest in reading and translating Persian was not limited to colonial officers or political purposes. The local printing houses, including the Saʿīdiyyah publishing house, close to al-Azhar mosque and university, were instrumental in translating and promoting original Persian works. An example is the five-volume *Sīrat al-Amīr Ḥamzah al-Bahlawān* (the Tale of the Warrior Amīr Ḥamzah), which is the Arabic translation of the famous Persian *Qiṣṣah-ye Amīr Ḥamzah Pahlavān* or *Ḥamzah-nāmah* (the Tale of Ḥamzah).[17] Also, Egyptians were highly engaged with Persian poets and polymaths at the turn of the 20th century. For instance, Wadīʿ Afandī al-Bustānī, influenced by English poet Edward FitzGerald, translated poems by ʿUmar Khayyām, introducing him as *al-shāʿir al-faylasūf al-Fārisiyy* (Persian poet and philosopher) published with Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif. Both these Persian

15 In many other cases of similar collections, at the hand of looters. Generally on these phenomena, see Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), especially 26-27, 114-24; Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750–1850* (New York: Random House, 2005).

16 For the cultural influence of Saʿdī in ethical formation and pedagogy as well as his poetic impact far beyond the Persophone world, see Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Domenico Ingenito, *Beholding Beauty: Saʿdī of Shiraz and the Aesthetics of Desire in Medieval Persian Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

17 The *Ḥamzah-nāmah* along with other epic works seems to have enjoyed a revival with the advent of print culture in the 19th century with a publication in Lucknow in 1855 at the famous Naval Kishore Press. See John William Seyller and Freer Gallery of Art, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, 2002). On the role of the Naval Kishore press in the formation of the 'Islamic classics' in the North Indian context on the cusp of formal British empire in India (published in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, as well as Sanskrit and later Hindi), see Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008), especially 266-350.

works were famous and well-circulated in South and Southeast Asia since the late 14th and early 15th centuries.[18]


سيرة
الامير حمزة البهلوان
الجزء الثالث
سعيد علي الخضوصي

Figure 1: Sīrat al-Amīr Ḥamzah al-Bahlawān[19]

In the late 19th century, the seminarians at al-Azhar in Cairo were well-acquainted with the Islamic scholarship of Persians – which was well-attested in the Mamlūk period but especially from the Ottoman, as discussed in el-Rouayheb.[20] This is evident in Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī's (d. 1940) social-political work, *Aḥlām fīʾl-siyāsah* (Political Dreams), which ends with a note about his interlocutor, the Iranian cleric ʿAbd Allāh al-Zanjānī (d. 1941), who published his book on *Taʾrīkh al-Qurʾān* (History of the Qur'ān) in Cairo, Tabriz and Tehran, among others. Interestingly, as stated by Jawharī, he was a link between Iranian and Cairene seminaries and academic institutes and communicating recent *tafsirī* literature between these places.[21]

This period also saw wider cultural links between Persia and Egypt as well as the religious context of 'reconciling' different Islamic confessions (*taqrīb bayn al-madhāhib*), which was primarily inflected in Persian and Arabic.[22] Jawharī used to be connected with al-Khidīwiyyah school, where interest in reading Persian and other languages of Muslim communities was common. This claim is also supported with a catalogue of Persian (and Jawi) materials from al-Khidīwiyyah library compiled by ʿAlī Afandī Ḥilmī b. Sultan b. Muḥammad al-Dāghistānī in c. 1888.[23] It might also be possible that Persian manuscripts and printed volumes in Cairo were brought by Ottoman Turks who were already competent in Persian, given its prominence as a courtly language; however, the circulation and reading of such works may highlight their

18 Regarding the reception of the Tale of Ḥamzah and Persian poetry (e.g. Khayyām) in Southeast Asia, see respectively Majid Daneshgar, "Persianate Aspects of the Malay-Indonesian World: Some Rare Manuscripts in the Leiden University Library," *Dabir* 8 (2021); Majid Daneshgar, "A very old Malay Islamic Manuscript: Carbon Dating and Further Analysis of a Persian-Malay Anthology," *Indonesia and the Malay World* (2021).

19 Various copies of this early printed volume are found in different libraries. This is from the Iranian Parliamentary Library, Tehran. It is available for open access for which we are grateful.

20 el-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*.

21 Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, *Aḥlām fīʾl Siyāsah* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalābī, 1935).

22 Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

23 ʿAlī Afandī Ḥilmī al-Dāghistānī, *Fihrist al-Kutub al-Fārisiyyah waʾl-Jāwiyyah al-Maḥfūẓah biʾl-Kutub-khānah al-Khidīwiyyah al-Miṣriyyah* [Handlist of the Persian and Jawi Books kept in the Khedival Library in Cairo] (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿUthmāniyyah bi-Miṣr, 1888).

significance among Arabs.[24] The reception of Persian literary, scholarly and scholastic materials in the heart of Arabophone regions was established much earlier. Several historical reports inform us about Persians and Arabs moving between each other's lands, from Bukhara and Nishapur (in Khorasan) to the Levant, Mecca, Medina and Cairo; a simple perusal of names in the many biographical dictionaries indicates that process and we have the famous attestation of historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) on the central significance of non-Arabs especially Persians in the scriptural disciplines such as *ḥadīth*, in Arabic grammar and in the rational sciences.[25] The Islamic ecumene was a connected zone of intellectual networks, exchange and knowledge production. The inhabitants of the Malay Archipelago interacted with Persians in the world of Islam from the earlier period, just as the Arabic-speakers of the African continent had strong ties with Persian thinkers and schools of thought in the Gulf and India. One of the most important reports about the way in which Arabs and Persians communicated with each other after the emergence of Islam is the book *Tārīkh-e Nīsāpūr*. It includes various sections about the people of Nishapur as well as Khorasan who left there for Arabophone regions and vice versa.[26] Nishapur, according to this report, was the homeland of many Arab thinkers and scholars, which gave rise to its region of Pusht or Busht being called "Arabestān-e Khorāsān" or "Khorasan's Arabia."[27]

On the other hand, many people bearing the nickname or family name of al-Nisābūrī or al-Bukhārī left Khorasan towards the Levant, Arabian Peninsula, Anatolia and other locales. In this vein, Persians emerged as the critical link in disseminating learning in the rational disciplines between Central and Western Iran and Egypt. One example is the well-known theologian Shams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1348). His commentary *Maṭāliʿ al-Anẓār: Sharḥ ṭawāliʿ al-Anwār* [Insider's Lights: A Commentary on the Work] – on ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī's (d. 1319) *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār min maṭāliʿ al-anẓār* [The Rising Light from Far Horizons][28] – was produced in the "khānqah of the Mamlūk Emir Sayf ad-Dīn Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī (d. 1342) and [was] presented as a gift to the Mamlūk Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1341) during the latter's third reign."[29] His commentary, *Tasdīd al-qawāʿid* [Contriving the Principles], on another well-attested and pithy theological text, *Tajrīd al-ʿaqāʾid* [Summation of Belief] by Shiʿi theologian, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274), who served the Ismailis of Alamut and later the Mongols in Baghdad and Maragha, was completed in 1324 in Tabriz but circulated widely in Iran, being glossed by ʿAlī al-Jurjānī (d. 1413) in

24 On the Ottoman Qur'ānic exegetical tradition and the role of Persian in it, see Susan Gunasti, *The Qurʾan between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic: An Exegetical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2019).

25 Ibn Khaldūn, cited in Richard N. Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975), 150.

26 Regarding Nīshābūr, see the works of Richard W. Bulliet such as: "The Political-religious History of Nishapur in the Eleventh Century," *Islamic Civilisation 950-1150* (1973).

27 Muḥammad ʿAbdullāh Ḥakīm Nīshābūrī, *Taʾrīkh-e Nīshābūr*, trans. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khalīfa (Tehran: Ketāb-khānah-ye Ibn Sīnā, n.d.), 140.

28 As translated by Al Ghouz (see the following source).

29 Abdelkader Al Ghouz, *Brokers of Islamic Philosophy in Mamlūk Egypt Shams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1348) as a Case Study in the Transmission of Philosophical Knowledge through Commentary Writing*, ASK Working Paper 24 (Bonn: Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg, 2015).

Shiraz as well as in Egypt and the Ottoman lands.[30] Being in contact with thinkers in Isfahan, Tabriz, Damascus and Cairo demonstrated Iṣfahānī's extensive scholarly network and how Persianate and Arabophone inhabitants were in contact. This becomes important when one realises that

> [i]t is not rare to find Mamlūks that have arrived in Egypt during the days of al-Ẓāhir Barqūq (r. 1382–1389 and 1390–1399) said to have known Persian, or to have been known as 'Persians,' some of them functioned as envoys to the Timurids.[31]

Other Mamlūks linked to Persians and Central Asian communities through competence in their languages are, among others, Mankalī Bughā al-Salaḥī (d. 1432) – also the "inspector of the Markets of Cairo"[32] – and Asanbughā al-Dawādār (d. 1400).[33] These rulers could have played a role in the circulation of Persian materials in their regions. In this regard, one would now wonder to what extent Persian, as a language of *ʿulūm al-dīn*, was read and circulated across the Arabophone region, particularly before the dominance of the Ottomans in most parts of the Arab world.

One of the main areas of Islamic sciences, through which Persians and Arabs could possibly have the highest level of collaboration, is the category of *tafsir*. *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* [Compendium of the Exposition of the Exegesis of Verses of the Qurʾān], better known as *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī*, one of the oldest comprehensive exegeses on the Qur'ān, was translated early at the Samanid court in the 10th century CE and begins with a preface through which it is clearly said that scholars from neighbouring regions of Iran are asked to join the army of translators – whether this occurred in Tabriz or Khorasan needs further investigation – to translate a copy of this *tafsir* brought from Baghdad "as the Qur'ān used to be ignored":

> This book is an exegesis of the glorious Qur'ān made by Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, God's mercy upon him, translated into the Persian language. In order to do this, the [Arabic] book had been brought from Baghdad as there was an ignorance about the Qur'ān. And they presented it to Amīr Muẓaffar Abū Ṣāliḥ Manṣūr b. Nūḥ b. Naṣr b. Aḥmad b. Ismāʿīl, may God's mercy be upon all of them. It seemed very difficult for him to read and comprehend it in the Arabic language. As such, he ordered to translate it into the Persian language. He gathered the thinkers of Transoxiana asking them "can we translate this book into the Persian language?" they answered "Yes, whoever is unable to comprehend Arabic is

30 Four of the earliest manuscripts of the Jurjānī gloss exist in Cairo at the Dār al-kutub and at least one of the manuscripts of the Tasdīd used in the critical edition exists in Cairo – see Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *Tasdīd al-qawāʿid fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-ʿaqāʾid* [Contriving the Principles in Commentary on the Summation of Belief], ed. Khālid b. Ḥamad al-ʿAdwānī (Kuwait: Dār al-ḍiyāʾ, 2012), introduction, vol. 1, 128-31.

31 Koby Yosef, "Cross-Boundary Hatred: (Changing) Attitudes towards Mongol and "Christian" Mamlūks in the Mamluk Sultanate," in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History Economic, Social and Cultural Development in an Era of Increasing International Interaction and Competition*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Stephan Conermann (Bonn: V&R Unipress Bonn University Press, 2019), 179.

32 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 195.

33 Yosef, "Cross-Boundary Hatred," 179-180.

allowed to read and write the Qur'ān commentary in Persian, as also stated by the Glorious God 'We have not sent a messenger except in the language of his people' (Q 14:4)."[34]

Translators from Transoxiana, Balkh, Bab al-Hind, Samarqand, Espanjab (Sepanjab) in Turkistan (?), Fergana in Uzbekistan gathered and completed this task.[35] The translation remains the earliest Persian rendition of the Qur'ān as well as its exegesis that is extant and was part of the patronage of New Persian at the Samanid court; as such, it represents the expression of vernacular learning and an attempt to communicate to those unfamiliar with Arabic.

Unsurprisingly, the core argument of *tafsir* production in the Muslim world relied on a left to right movement, from Arabic to the other languages of Asia. This has also affected academic discourse, which does not allow us to go beyond old-fashioned frames, viewing the so-called *classics*[36] of *tafsir*: from al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Bayḍāwī, al-Jalālayn to ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā. Not only did this general classification lead scholars to neglect other exegetical traditions, it also convinced them that the so-called *Islamic classics* in the first place came from an Arabo-Sunni background. Whether Persian (and other) exegetical works were considered as a pedagogical medium in the Arabo-Sunni context, or were read by native Arabs, was not considered. Unearthing historical evidence in this study demonstrates that classical Persian Qur'ānic exegeses produced from the classical period (1000–1300 CE) were among the important materials in Islamic intellectual history. A normative approach that designates Sunni texts in Arabic as classics will tend to marginalise other works even if they are in core genres of Islamic learning such as exegesis. It also perpetuates a colonialist epistemology that pits core versus periphery, normative versus dissonant, classic versus anomalous.[37]

EXEGESES FROM PERSIA

Tafsir in the Persianate context, with a particular emphasis, received special attention from the late 19th century. Apart from the famous comprehensive Arabic exegeses of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1319), which were considered to be the scholarly product of Persian scholars of Islam, Orientalist scholars studied several relatively

34 MS Bibliothèque nationale de France. Supplèment Persan 1610, fl. 3. Also see Mohammad Jafar Yahaghi, "An Introduction to Early Persian Qur'ānic Translations," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 4/2 (2002): 105-109.

35 On the Persian translation of *Tafsīr-e Ṭabarī*, see Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾan*, 302-30.

36 Although we do not believe in ascribing "classics" to any work, as there might have been many works which were marginalised, removed or modified over the course of history, and replaced with those produced in or for the court.

37 On the need for a decolonial approach to the study of the Qur'ān, see Sajjad Rizvi, "Reversing the Gaze? Or Decolonizing the Study of the Qur'an," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 33 (2021): 122-138; Joseph Lumbard, 'Decolonizing Qurʾanic studies', *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 176. About the impossibility of "decolonisation" in the Muslim world (and the East), see Majid Daneshgar, *Studying the Qur'an in the Muslim Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Majid Daneshgar, "I Want to Become an Orientalist Not a Colonizer or a 'De-Colonizer,'" *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 33, no. 2 (2020): 173-185.

unknown Qur'ān manuscripts.[38] One of them is a mysterious commentary widely known in Iran as "Tafsir-e Cambridge" or the *Cambridge Qur'ānic Commentary*. In fact, this is MS Mm.4.15 preserved in Cambridge University Library whose content, orthography and details seem valuable for Islamic intellectual history. This copy belonged to the famous Dutch Arabist Thomas Erpenius (1584–1624) and was bought from his widow in 1632. The opening page of the manuscript includes Latin notes, some of which were penned by Erpenius. This copy, which only comprises the second volume, from the chapter on Maryam (Q19), was copied by someone known as Muḥammad Abū al-Fatḥ al-Faqīh al-Gharīb in 1231. A number of scholars, including Edward G. Browne, wrote a long essay about its origin, style and identity, confirming its significance to the history of Persian Islam.[39] Later on, it was fully edited and accompanied with a critical introduction, by Iranian scholar Jalāl Matīnī in 1970, who also established that the commentary was produced when Persian orthography was in transition.[40] Its "archaic" particularities led Browne to conclude it could originally have been produced earlier, in the 10th century, contemporaneous with the famous Persian epic *Shāhnāmah*, and it could have been the first known Persian prose work.[41] Therefore, it might be regarded as the oldest Persian manuscript held in Cambridge University Library.

We have no information, at present, about the actual author of this commentary or the origins of the scribe. Even reading the scribe's name and colophon was a topic of debate between Browne, Robertson Smith, Rieu and de Goeje; was he someone Arab or Persian? Interestingly, some parts of this copy include marginal points in Arabic, apparently written by a native speaker, trying to show an alternative style of writing Arabic verses of the Qur'ān, particularly those with long vowels (*alif*) (e.g. ff. 15, 119). It contains a Latin interlinear translation of the Persian commentary (f. 323) – not examined in former studies. Having marginal Persian, Arabic and Latin notes demonstrates its circulation in different hands over the course of history. However, Browne and Matīnī agreed on its provenance from Khorasan. Given Browne's hypothesis about the antiquity of the text, this could be the oldest known Qur'ānic commentary of Khorasan and the Persianate world, which moved back-and-forth between the hands of Arabists and Persianists. It is not farfetched to imagine that this commentary was in the possession of Arabs, as Khorasan and Nishapur were a hub of Arab itinerant scholars.

Since the 2000s, Western-based scholars of Islam, Walid Saleh and Travis Zadeh, among others, have demonstrated the significance of Qur'ānic commentaries in Arabic and Persian from Khorasan, respectively. Saleh categorises them as commentaries of the school of Nishapur, among which the most known are those of Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 1015), al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035) and his student al-Wāḥidī (d. 1076), while Zadeh sheds light on how the theological-religious affiliation of commentators may have contributed to the production, distribution and reception of Persian translative commentaries. As Saleh stated, commentaries by al-Wāḥidī along with

38 See E. M. Wherry, *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Quran: Comprising Sale's Translation and Preliminary Discourse* (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), vol. 1, vi.

39 Edward G. Browne, "Description of an Old Persian Commentary on the Ḳurʾán," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26, no. 3 (1894).

40 Jalāl Matīnī (Ed.), *Tafsīr-e Qorʾān-e Majīd*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Bonyād-e Farhang-e Irān, 1970).

41 Browne, "Description of an Old Persian Commentary," 505.

those of his master, al-Thaʿlabī, are the main sources of *tafsir* in this region, and form the base on which the next generation of popular commentaries like *al-Kashshāf* of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) as well as *al-Jalālayn* were written.[42] Besides, Zadeh argued, while having similar approaches to translation, the Persian commentaries of Khorasan were inspired by earlier Arabic *tafsir* attributed to the companion and cousin of the Prophet, ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAbbās, as well as by some local ones including those of al-Thaʿlabī and al-Wāḥidī.[43] More importantly, Persian exegeses, particularly those of Isfarāyinī and Sūrābādī (see below) used eloquent Persian terms and phrases while producing their commentaries, proving their purpose was to promote a Persian reading of the Qur'ān; a vernacular Qur'ān, as Zadeh puts it.

READERS OF KHORĀSĀNĪ TAFSIR

Among the commentaries from Khorasan, some were instrumental in shaping the Islamic literature of non-Persian regions. Liu Zhi (d. c. 1739), one of the most influential Muslim scholars of China, used several Arabic and Persian materials while writing his works on 'Muslim philosophy' in Chinese in 1704. The list of books he used shows that three main Qur'ānic commentaries were used by him while reading the Qur'ān. Two of them were in Persian and one in Arabic. The Arabic one is the famous commentary of 'Qāḍī', referring to the name al-Bayḍāwī, while the Persian are two less-examined commentaries, *Tafsir-e Zāhidī* and *Tafsir Baṣāʾir-e Yamīnī*.[44] In the Han kitab tradition that formed the Chinese Islamic corpus bringing Sufism into conversation with Confucianism, many of the works studied seem to have been mediated by Persian, especially from the Persian Sufi tradition; in exegesis, the major work seems to have been *Tafsir-e Ḥusaynī* by Ḥosayn Vāʿeẓ-e Kāshefī (d. 1504).[45] Other figures in that tradition, such as Wang Daiyu (d. 1658) and Ma Dexin (d. 1874), seemed to have read the same Persian 'classics' in Sufism and *tafsir*.

Tafsir-e Zāhidī or *Laṭāʾif al-Tafsir* is a commentary by a Shāfiʿī scholar, al-Shaykh Abū Naṣr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Sulaymānī al-Darvāzajakī, who was known as *Fakhr al-aʾimmah* (the Pride of Scholars), *Sayf al-Millah waʾl-dīn* (the Sword of the Community and the Faith), *al-ʿālim al-zāhid* (the Pious Scholar) and more importantly, *Tāj al-mufassirīn* (the

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42 Walid A. Saleh, "The Introduction to Wāḥidī's al-Basīṭ: An Edition, Translation and Commentary," in *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qurʾanic Exegesis (2nd/8th–9th/15th C.)*, ed. Karen Bauer (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013).

43 Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾan*, 507-508.

44 Donald Daniel Leslie and Mohamed Wassel, "Arabic and Persian Sources Used by Liu Chih," *Central Asiatic Journal* 26, no. 1/2 (1982), esp. 96. See also Kristian Petersen, *Interpreting Islam in China: Pilgrimage, Scripture, and Language in the Han Kitab* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 59-61. On the general significance of al-Bayḍāwī, see Walid A. Saleh, "The Qurʾān Commentary of al-Bayḍāwī: A History of Anwār al-tanzīl," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2021).

45 Petersen, *Interpreting Islam in China*, 35-45, 61; Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 32-34; Sachiko Murata, *The First Islamic Classic in Chinese: Wang Daiyu's Real Commentary on the True Teaching* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 10-15. Petersen also cites two important studies on the Persian sources of the Han Kitab: Bai Shouyi, *Zhongguo Yisilan Shi Cunguo* [Manuscripts of the History of Islam in China] (Yinchuan: Ningxia Peoples' Press, 1982), 366-74; Tasada Kodo, "An Aspect of Islamic Culture in China," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 16 (1957): 75-160.

Crown of Qur'ān Exegetes). According to an early manuscript copy kept in the Parliamentary Library of Iran (Ms. 8487/1387), this work was copied in Bukhara on 8 November 1125.

It is said he began writing it in 1115 and completed it in 1125. This commentary attempted to apply Persian terms and phrases, as many as possible, while translating and interpreting the Qur'ān. It is believed this commentary was influenced by the mystical teachings of the Sufi Khwāja ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī (d. 1088) and some earlier Arabic traditions, which was common in the Khorasan region, including those of Ibn ʿAbbās. Interestingly, he is also critical of the Muʿtazilah as well as Karrāmiyyah, two other sects with their own exegetical tradition particularly on the western side of Bukhara, in Nishapur, to the extent they are seriously humiliated and cursed by al-Darvāzajakī – perhaps a reason for *Tafsir-e Zāhidī*'s marginalisation in the next generation of exegetical works.[46]

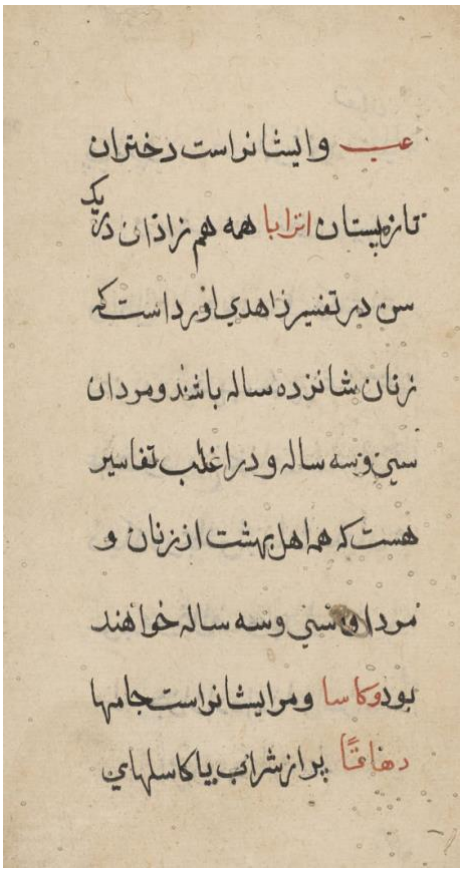

Figure 2: fl. 6, Ms. GMS 167. *Tafsir-e Ḥusaynī* or *Mawāhib-e ʿAliyyah*, Auckland Libraries, New Zealand. This page also shows Kāshefī's reference to *Tafsir-e Zāhidī*[47]

[46] Moḥsen Muʿīn, "Darvāzajakī, Aḥmad b. Ḥasan," in *Islamic World Encyclopedia* 17 (Tehran: Dāʾerat al-maʿāref-e bozorg-e eslāmī, 2014). In its embrace of traditionalist theology, it perhaps prefigures the *tafsir* of Maybudī that also claimed to be from the spiritual teachings and legacy of Anṣārī. See Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qurʾan Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). On Muʿtazilī *tafsir*, see Suleiman Mourad, "The Muʿtazila and their *Tafsīr* Tradition," in *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qurʾan*, vol. 3, ed. Mustafa Shah (London: Routledge, 2013); Alena Kulinich, "Beyond Theology: Muʿtazilite Scholars and their Authority in Rummānī's *Tafsīr*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 78 (2015).

[47] This manuscript copy is perhaps the one where Jalāl Matīnī could only find its first part while publishing the Persian edition of *Tafsīr-e Ḥusaynī*.

The other Persian exegesis shaping Chinese Muslim philosophical works in the Han Kitab was *Tafsir-e Baṣāʾir-e Yamīnī* or according to Ḥājj Khalīfah, *al-Baṣāʾir fīʾl-Tafsir* produced in c. 1182.[48] This is a classical Persian commentary on the Qur'ān by Muʿīn al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. Abī l-Ḥasan al-Nisābūrī (contemporary of Bahram-Shah of Ghazna [d. 1157]) which was well-known among non-Persians. Given its period, orthography and exegetical features, this *tafsir* has particular significance in terms of exegesis and literature. Every chapter begins with a well-developed introduction addressing the biography and occasion of the revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) of the *sūra* (e.g. fl. 136, on Q 12), which is, of course, a method constructed by formal exegetes. This *tafsir* is also among the pioneering exegetical works that drew upon narratives and *ḥikāyat* from Islamic and literary sources, influenced by scriptural traditions, in order to interpret a verse.[49] Interestingly, as stated also by Leslie and Wassel, the number of such Islamic materials and commentaries could be more in the "West,"[50] especially on the western side of China where the core lands of Islam were located. This makes sense, too, as another copy of *Tafsir Baṣāʾir-e Yamīnī* (Ms. Supplèment Persan 57 in Bibliothèque nationale de France), gives more information about its circulation among Arabs, particularly where he discusses the story of Prophets. For instance, to interpret Q12: 22 "And when he reached maturity, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. This is how We reward the good-doers," it (fl. 140) says:

> When Joseph (pbuh) was forty years old, We granted him whatever We had already promised him; thus We granted him prophecy and sovereignty by which he could rule and issue decrees. And We enlightened his consciousness and perception through which he could speak with certainty …

This part as well as the next verse, Q12:23, include long Arabic marginal and supercommentaries – showing native hands – as well as a few Turkish interlinear translations. Moreover, our opinion about them being kept by Arabs is based on the name of the Arab scholar, Aḥmad b. Abī al-Barakāt (including his handwriting in Arabic) as well as Ibrāhīm Afandī (fl. 1), apparently an Ottoman in Egypt. Apart from these two commentaries, whose reputation reached non-Persian Islamic circles, there are a few more works whose scribes or place of inscription would suggest how important they were in Islamic intellectual history during a specific period of time. The manuscript *Persan 12* in the Bibliothèque nationale de France is one of them. The first folio includes two Arabic phrases, clearly written by a foreign hand, as *Tafsir al-Qurʾān Fārisiyyah* (A Persian Qur'ān Commentary). It also includes an introductory phrase:

> This Qur'ānic commentary, one of the works produced by the great Imam known for his virtue among the people, named as Muḥammad al-Isfarāyinī among scholars, great thinkers and noble.

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48 See Qāḍī Muʿīn al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Nisābūrī, *Tafsīr Baṣāʾir-e Yamīnī*, ed. ʿAlī Ravāqī (Tehran: Mīrāṯ-e Maktūb, 2019).

49 This is narrative or haggadic exegesis seeking to establish and explain the context for revelation (*Sitz im Leben*) in the theory of John Wansbrough – see his *Qurʾanic Studies: Sources and Methods for Scriptural Interpretation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122-48.

50 Leslie and Wassel, "Arabic and Persian Sources," 104.

This refers to the famous Qur'ānic translation and commentary known as *Tāj al-Tarājim fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān liʾl-Aʿājim* [The Crown of Translations, Exegesis of the Qurʾān for non-Arabs] by the Shafiʿī scholar Abū al-Muẓaffar Shāhfūr b. Tāḥir b. Muḥammad al-Isfarāyinī, also known as Shāhfūr from the 11th century. As mentioned in his preface, his work was an attempt to restructure former Persian translations of the Qurʾān, those which were not fully compatible with the Arabic Qur'ān.[51] This commentary includes a comprehensive introduction divided into four chapters, as the virtues of the Qur'ān, on doctrine of *Ahl-e sunnat vaʾl-jamāʿat*, regarding the principles of religious piety, the meaning of God's attributions and the translation of traditional reports about the virtues of the Qur'ān.[52]

The *Persan 12*'s title page with Arabic notes clearly demonstrates it was in the possession of Mawlānā Jalāl b. Ḥājj Maḥmūd b. Ṣafā, also kept in the family with later research endowment [highly likely] in Mecca (ff. 21, 103, 118) dated *yawm al-Tarwiyyah* (8th) Dhūʾl-Ḥijja 907/14 June 1502. The name of Muḥammad Çelebī, Shujāʿ b. Muḥammad, Nabī b. Ḥasan, etc., can also be seen (fl. 1). The sixth volume of this copy ends with additional information, suggesting its circulation among larger circles where Persians and Arabs were interacting and reading this manuscript, including someone known as Abī Ḥāmid ʿAbd al-Malik bin ʿAbd Allah. Traces of the name of ʿAbd al-Malik Abī Ḥāmid from the late 7th and early 8th AH/13th and 14th CE centuries are found in the list of Haleb's thinkers.[53] Also, on fl. 13, is an unclear note mentioning the name of Muḥammad b. Ḥāji ʿAwaḍ b. ʿAlī with the date of mid 15 Safar 898/6 December 1492 and further illegible Arabic phrases can be seen. Ibn ʿAwaḍ was Zaydī from Yemen with strong connections to Medina and Mecca, which in that period was ruled by *ashrāf* who were Zaydī.[54] *Persan 12* is interestingly written in the classical format of modern Persian, the one which was originally written during the 12th and 13th centuries. It may allow us to think this copy was written during a period when classical orthography and spelling was still part of the Persian language. Our perception about the popularity of this Persian source among Arabs is also supported by another copy preserved in the Bodleian Library of Oxford University. A two-volume set of this *tafsir* (MS. Marsh 168 and 169) was copied in Baghdad by Ḥabīb Allāh Jamāl al-Dīn Iṣfahānī in Muharram 948/May 1541.[55] This copy also includes marginal notes in Arabic by different hands, which may again point to the local readers of Persian *tafsir*. These copies of al-Isfarāyinī's *tafsir* were circulating in Arabophone regions in the mid-15th century, when Arabs were in close association with Mamluk Cairo; they had control over the main cities of Mecca and Medina and had ties with

51 Abū al-Muẓaffar Shāhfūr b. Tāḥir b. Muḥammad al-Isfarāyinī, *Tāj al-Tarājim fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān liʾl-Aʿājim*, ed. Najīb Māyel Haravī and ʿAlī Akbar Elāhī Khorāsānī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e ʿilmī o farhangī, 2006), vol. 1, 5-6, although the editors did not consider the manuscript of Paris as they assumed it should not be Isfarāyinī's work.

52 al-Isfarāyinī, *Tāj al-Tarājim*, 6.

53 *Tarajmproject*, "Tarajim," accessed March 1, 2022, https://tarajm.com/people/64723.

54 *Fihris al-Shāmil liʾl-Turāth al-ʿArabī al-Islāmī al-Makhṭūṭ, ʿulūm al-Qurʾān, al-Maṣāḥif al-makhṭūṭah wa-makhṭūṭāt rasm al-Maṣāḥif* (Amman: al-Majmaʿ al-Malikī li-buḥūth al-Haḍārah al-Islāmiyyah, Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt, 1989), vol. 2, 1063. On Zaydīs in Medina and Mecca and their authority, see Richard Mortel, "Zaydi Shiism and the Hasanid Sharifs of Mecca," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987).

55 Also, see Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'ān.*

Yemenis. Subsequently, the Ottomans obtained geopolitical power and ruled Syria and Egypt (1517–1635) and developed their penetration into Mecca and Medina.

We have already read about the interaction between Persians and Cairenes during the reign of Mamlūk Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1341), and Persians were possibly the main actors and promoters of their local Islamic learning, in Arab spheres, from the prolific school of the Khorasan in the 16th century. On the other hand, the Bodleian MSS Marsh 168−169 were produced in Baghdad in 1541. The first Safavid Shah Ismāʿīl's I (r. 1501–1524) captured Baghdad in 1508, persecuted Sunnis, destroying their so-called *heretical* symbols and tombs, and patronised the tombs of Shiʿi imams around the city of Baghdad.[56] Later on, the Ottomans under the rule of Shah Suleyman I (r. 1520-1566) took control of Baghdad in 1534 and began to revive Sunni cultural hegemony, while providing some level of tolerance for the Shiʿa as well as some non-Muslim communities of Baghdad to hold their own beliefs and practices – to some degree.[57] This may provide better understanding why the Persian thinker Jamāl al-Dīn Iṣfahānī copied the *tafsir Tāj al-Tarājim* in Baghdad.[58] It was done during the restoration of Sunnism in Baghdad, and when the Safavid Persian Shiʿa had not considered former Persian (-Sunni) classics seriously. Another conjecture for its reception in the Arabian zone is that it addresses global issues of Islamic sciences, viz., highlighting the *faḍāʾil* or virtues and qualities of the Qur'ān and describing theological themes of Sunni and Ashʿarī materials.[59]

Syria was another major Arabophone land welcoming Persianate Islamic culture. It is very close to the north-western cities of Iran (e.g. Tabriz), from where Islamic teachings mixed with Persian arts and literature were flourishing.[60] This influence of Persian elements is seen until the early 20th century. The Egyptian physician and commentator of the Qur'ān, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī (d. c. 1888), left Cairo for the Levant. He lived for a long time in Aleppo where he was also buried. Having completed his second and third commentaries on the Qur'ān, he received supportive letters and then autographs confirming the importance of his exegetical perspectives presented by means of empirical scientific accounts. The striking point is that several autographs are scribed in the Persian *nastaʿlīq* calligraphic style. Among them, there are Muḥammad al-Munshī al-ʿUthmānī, Muḥammad b. Muṣṭafā Ṭanṭawī (1825 or 1826–1889) and Bakrī b. Ḥāmid ʿAṭṭār (1835 or 1836−1903) who used this pen. Although this influence began from the "Persian period (586–332 BCE) in the southern Levant,"[61] it continued its path after the Islamisation of the region and formative period of Islam through the north and north-

56 Hans Roemer, "The Safavid Period," in *The Cambridge History of Iran vol 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 216.

57 See Stefan Winter, *The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7-30.

58 Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters (Eds.), "Baghdad," in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 71-72.

59 His introductory parts include theological sections covering "regarding the Sunni religious beliefs," "God's attributions" and "translation of reports addressing the virtues of the Qurʾan." See al-Isfarāyinī, *Tāj al-Tarājim*, vol. 1, 7-37.

60 On the significance of Tabriz as a centre of learning in the Timurid period, see Judith Pfeiffer (Ed.), *Politics, Patronage, and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th-15th Century Tabriz* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

61 Samuel R. Wolff, "Mortuary Practices in the Persian Period of the Levant," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65, no. 2 (2002).

west regions of Syria, when they had closer contact with the Ottomans. However, Syria became part of the Ottoman empire at the turn of the 16th century, and this is despite the earlier generation of Persians from Bukhara and from Tartus visited each other. In the case of Levantines, we may name Muhammad b. ʿĪsā Yazīd from Tartus, Syria or Abū ʿAbd from Jerusalem who came to Nishapur in the 10th century.[62]

To gauge the influence of Persian commentaries in the Levant, we rely on a manuscript copy that is the work of Abū Bakr ʿAtīq b. Muhammad Haravī Nīsabūrī (d. c. 1100), also known as Sūrābādī or Sūrābānī and Sūrāyānī. He was attached to the Karrāmiyyah pietistic movement and lived in the 11th century in the Khorasan region of the Persianate world.[63] There are ambiguities about his origin and the former period of his life, but, according to historical accounts like the one by Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī, he lived during the reign of Alp Arslan, Sultan of the Seljuk Empire (r. 1063–1072) who extended his ruling territory as far as Armenia and Anatolia, as well as in the reign of Malik-Shāh I (r. 1072–1092).[64] The common scholarly view is that his *tafsir* was divided into seven volumes, which according to Mojtabā Mīnovī, could have been completed c. 1077–1087.[65] There are also ambiguities about the title of the work: whether it should be known as *Tafsīr al-Tafāsīr* (the Conclusive Commentary of All Commentaries) or *Tafsīr al-Basīṭ* (the Comprehensive/Large Commentary) – the latter pointed out in our copy. A few copies are extant. Among the oldest is MS India Office Islamic 3840, an incomplete copy, too, of volume six that was part of the India Office collection, now in the British Library.[66] It was dated 1129 and its images were reproduced in Iran in 1966 with a short introduction by Mīnovī. This copy was penned by Maḥmūd b. Gergīn … Turkī, using particular orthography including archaic particularities.[67] The exemplary feature of this *tafsir* is that it presents an interesting package of Qur'ānic stories taken from different local and Islamic sources. This is why Mahdavī compiled an extract of the stories of this commentary in 1968. Later, the whole manuscript copy of this *tafsir* was edited by ʿAlī Akbar Saʿīdī Sīrjānī (d. 1994) and was, after some delay, published in 2001. The Ottomans had already shown interest in this *tafsir*, particularly after the 16th century. One example would be a copy scribed by ʿAbd Allāh al-Qirīmī from Ottoman Anatolia – perhaps, originally from Tatarstan – dated 1557–58. Other copies, which are quite old, include the names of people coming from the Arab world.[68] Travis Zadeh also mentions one of its copies penned in Baghdad in 1141, which, according to him, was probably produced in Karrāmī circles of Baghdad.[69] However, we came across another old copy of this commentary produced in the Levant. The Leiden University Library houses MS 575 (former 1657), which is the second volume of *Tafsīr-e Sūrābādī*, beginning with Chapter

62 Nīshābūrī, *Taʾrīkh-e Nīshābūr*, 32-33.
63 Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'ān*, 464-562.
64 Yahya Mahdavī, *Qiṣaṣ-e Qurʾān-e Majīd: bar-gereftah az Abū Bakr ʿAtīq Nayshābūrī mashhūr bih Sūrābādī* [Stories from the Glorious Qurʾān reported by Abū Bakr ʿAtīq Nayshābūrī known as Sūrābādī] (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Tehrān, 1968), 14.
65 *Tafsīr-e Qorʾān-e Karīm* (Tehran: Bonyad-e Farhang-e Īrān, 1965), i.
66 The British Library holds four codices: volumes one and two and two copies of volume six. See https://www.fihrist.org.uk/catalog/person_52991598.
67 Thanks to Mohsen Feyzbakhsh for providing us with a scanned copy of this manuscript.
68 For more see, Mahdavī, *Qiṣaṣ-e Qorʾān-e Majīd*.
69 Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'ān*, 554. This is MS Or. 11311 in the British Library, a copy of volume six.

7, *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* and ending with Chapter 18, *Sūrat al-Kahf*.[70] Despite their sterling efforts to edit and introduce this *tafsir* in the Persian-speaking context, the abovementioned Iranian thinkers did not examine paleographical aspects of the manuscripts, let alone that the Leiden copy under discussion was not examined thoroughly by them nor by Travis Zadeh as far as we checked. The first folio says:

> The second volume from *Tafsīr al-Basīṭ* that was given by the pious Imam Abū Bakr ʿAtīq bin Muhammad al-Nīsābūrī known as *Sūrābādī*, God's mercy upon him.

This page includes additional notes, added later, telling us that they were in the possession of someone known as Ismāʿīl b. Awaḍ in c. 1401, and later "Jalāl", and we now know that Awaḍ is a family name of Arab communities from Yemen. However, two points that deserve further attention are the colophon and marginal points and glosses. The colophon suggest this work was copied outside the Persianate region and in one of the main Arab-speaking regions, Aleppo in Syria:

> Inscribed by the poor servant of God, Ḥasan the son of Aḥmad al-Bukhārī in the city of Aleppo in 769/1367–68.

Being copied by someone known as "al-Bukhārī" clearly explains that classical Persian commentaries used to be copied by Persians coming from Khorasan who used to study and live in Arabophone regions. Arabic marginal notes (fl. 3) and glosses in some places suggest the significance of this *tafsir*, having been read along with other well-known commentaries. For instance, Q18 ends with a short gloss, confirming that *Tafsīr-e Sūrābādī* was read along with *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* (fl. 303):

> 'In fact, Jeremiah (pbuh) is Khiḍr and he is a man from the descendants of Aaron the son of ʿImran, as stated by Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq.' And Wahb b. Munabbih says that 'Jeremiah is actually a prophet, who was sent by God when Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) was attacked [and sieged] by Nebuchadnezzar.' Based on [*Tafsir*] *al-Kashhāf* and while interpreting/in the interpretation of *Sūrat al-Kahf*.

[70] The embossed stamp and other signs suggest it was acquired by Levinus Warner (c. 1618 – 22 June 1665), perhaps in Ottoman Turkey.

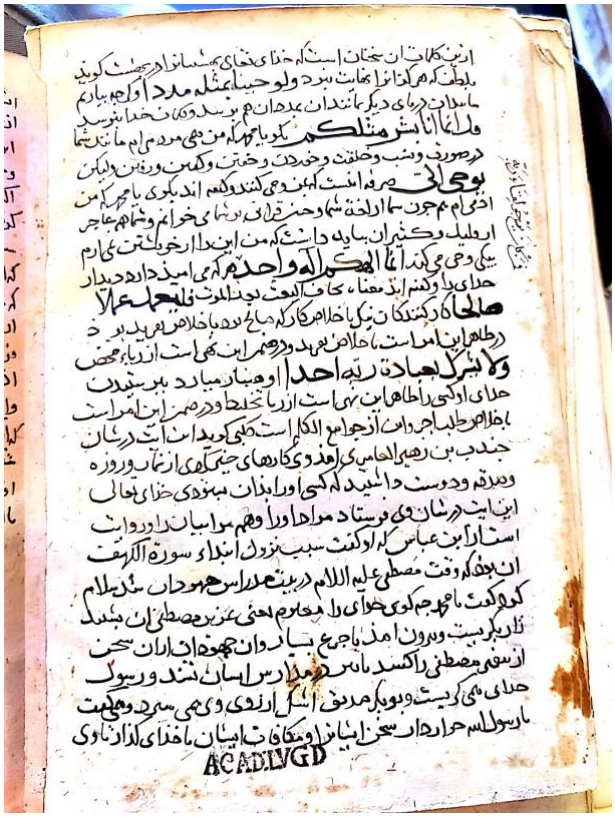

Figure 3: Fl. 303. MS 575. Leiden University Library, the Netherlands

Given the colophon and this marginal paragraph are written with a few dots (an archaic form of modern Persian orthography), and the similarity of the handwritings, the author of this supercommentary could be the main scribe (namely, al-Bukhārī), who to some extent followed older orthography[71] while copying the text. This demonstrates the simultaneous reading of Sūrābādī and al-Zamakhsharī in the Levant when Persian was still in its classical format and spelling. Although al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashhāf* used to be one of the main works glossed in *tafsir* literature, this source confirms it was used as an exegetical instrument to complement reading a Persian Khorāsānī *tafsir* in the 14th century.

Aleppo used to be known as the metropolis of Syria for a long time[72] and "enjoyed of large share of the Indian and Persian commerce" prior to the 15th century.[73] From the 13th until the early 16th century it was under in/direct control of Mamluk, who attempted to (re)construct monuments like the Great Mosque, and centres of health and science in the Levant.[74] We may mention the establishment of the Bimaristan al-Arghuni in 1354. As such, we may say that Mamluks, having connections with Caucasus and the Persianate world, were instrumental in

71 For example, *dhāl* instead of *dāl*.

72 Alex Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo Containing a Description of the City, and the Principal Natural Productions in Its Neighbourhood. Together with an Account of the Climate, Inhabitants, and Diseases; Particularly of the Plague*, 2nd ed. (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1794), vol. 1, 1.

73 Ibid., 349.

74 Giulia Annalinda Neglia, *The Cultural Meaning of Aleppo: A Landscape Recovery for the Ancient City* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2020).

promoting Persian materials across their territories, among which the Qur'ānic commentaries of Khorasan have a particular status.

CONCLUSION

The political context and political theology of different Islamic polities and their processes of facilitating intellectual networks and patronage for knowledge production influences the ways in which disciplines have developed. The question raised here is the influence of linguistic traditions within the development of the classical Qur'ānic exegetical tradition between and across Persian and Arabic. What we need to consider further is not just the way in which multilingualism and polyglot learning and forms of literary and intellectual cosmopolitanism worked within the Islamic republic of letters in the classical and early modern period, but a far more comprehensive understanding of Persianate Islamic intellectual cultures in the East and West and their impact beyond the rational and ethical sciences (as is often emphasised in the study of the 'Persianate') in the scriptural sciences. Thus, the next immediate step will be a more comprehensive and diachronic study of Persianate *tafsir* from its origins to the modern period, a fuller intellectual history perhaps of the school of Khorasan? Along the way, we can further revisit the processes of translation and transmission, cosmopolitanism, epistemological pluralism, as well as a fuller and more nuanced understanding of Islamic learned traditions beyond the binaries of Arabic and non-Arabic, normative and heterodox, and rational and scriptural.

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