

approach, and the insights provided by Alharthi into embodiment in the ‘*udhrī* poetic tradition, will serve as an important foundation and inspiration to future scholarship on the history of emotions and sexuality in the Arabic literary tradition.

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MUHYIDDIN IBN ‘ARABI (translated by MICHAEL SELLS):

The Translator of Desires: Poems.

(The Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation.) 323 pp. Princeton:

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In 1911, R.A. Nicholson published an edition and translation of *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*, a collection of 61 love poems composed by the famous Sufi metaphysician of al-Andalus Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) in Mecca in late 1214/early 1215. As Martin Lings recalled over half a century later, the publication of Nicholson’s translation “was something of an event”, the *Tarjumān* being the first work of Ibn ‘Arabī to appear in English translation. Since that time, the work has continued to garner considerable attention. In a helpful appendix to this new edition and English translation of the *Tarjumān*, Michael Sells lists no fewer than 14 partial or complete translations of the collection – into English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Turkish, and targeted at various kinds of reader – since Nicholson’s seminal effort. Of these, the French translation by Maurice Gloton (1996) and the extensively annotated two-volume German translation by Wolfgang Hermann (2013) are especially notable contributions to Ibn ‘Arabī scholarship.

Even with this abundance of existing translations, there are reasons to welcome Sells’s new version. First, although Nicholson’s translation remains an admirable work of scholarship, the Cambridge scholar was himself acutely aware that his work on Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sufism was necessarily provisional. Since his time, of course, Ibn ‘Arabī’s work has received considerable scholarly attention, making the task of interpreting his poetry that much easier. Second, Nicholson’s version was explicitly presented as a “literal” rendering of the *Tarjumān*. For this reason, his translations struggle to capture the lyricism of the Arabic originals and are unlikely to appeal to readers whose primary interest is not Sufi metaphysics. By contrast, Sells has striven for – and achieved – translations that read well as English poetry. Compare, for instance, their respective versions of the first verse of poem 55:

I am absent, and desire makes my soul die; and I meet him and am not cured,
so ‘tis desire whether I am absent or present. (Nicholson)

Without him I die
and with him’s no better
With or without him
longing’s the same (Sells)

Even if one prefers Nicholson's more literal rendering of the key technical terms *ghayba*, *nafs*, and *fanā'* here, there is still evident value in translating lyric poetry as lyric poetry. Third, Sells is perhaps uniquely qualified to undertake this project. A professor in the Departments of Divinity and Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago, his previous work has included translations of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, early Sufi literature, and selected poems from the *Tarjumān*, while two chapters of his magisterial *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* are devoted to Ibn 'Arabī's use of "apophatic discourse".

The translations do not disappoint. Though eschewing rhyme and metre, Sells has successfully captured the power and lyricism of the Arabic originals:

Longing's my mount
solitude's my mantle,
my dawn wine's delirium,
tears are for dusk

runs the last verse of his version of poem 23. Occasionally, there are enjoyable resonances of the canon of English literature, as in poem 17:

My spirit is willing
but my legs are weak
Who's here for me now
with help and cheer?

Sometimes, it is true, Sells slips into an overly colloquial register – for instance, when he translates the phrase "*marāḍī marīḍat al-*..." as "I'm in a bad way" – yet such instances are few and far between. Other notable features of the translations include the addition of titles to the poems, the use of translation as well as transliteration for rendering Arabic names (for instance, "harmony" for Ibn 'Arabī's beloved Nizām), and the use of the Arabic names of Biblical/Quranic figures, which helps to underline the fact that the *Tarjumān*, like the *Fuṣūṣ*, is immersed in the prophet-stories of the Quran.

While the translations can enjoyably be read on their own, readers seeking a deeper understanding of the poems and their literary and intellectual context will want to turn to Sells's introduction and notes. The introduction offers an engaging survey of the composition of the *Tarjumān* and the debates over the true meaning of the poems. We learn of the role played by the beautiful Nizām in inspiring the poems (what Sells calls "the romance of the *Tarjumān*"), the allegation of an Aleppan jurist that the poems were works of purely secular eroticism ("the trial of the *Tarjumān*"), and Ibn 'Arabī's explanation of the inner, Sufi metaphysical meaning of the poems in his own commentary on the collection ("the allegory of the *Tarjumān*"). Sells's discussion here is full of insightful observations: for instance, that Ibn 'Arabī's celebration of Nizām's Persian descent "may reflect the wider cultural symbiosis within thirteenth-century Islamic civilization", or that the poems of the *Tarjumān* are not "versified philosophy" but are actually "generative of Ibn 'Arabī's vision of existence".

Sells's notes on the poems, meanwhile, are full of useful information for readers unfamiliar with Islamic tradition or the conventions of Classical Arabic poetry: the Quranic background to the poems, the rituals of the Ḥajj, Ibn 'Arabī's use of *jinās* and the *rajaz* metre, and the flora and fauna of Arabia are all explained in helpful

detail. Nevertheless, readers hoping for the kind of conceptual analysis found in Sells's study of poem 11 of the *Tarjumān* – the famous verses on “the religion of love” – in *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* are likely to be disappointed. The notes contain relatively little for students of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sufi thought. While this reflects Sells’s perfectly valid view that our interpretation of the poems should not be constrained by the Sufi metaphysical meanings that Ibn ‘Arabī affixes to them in his commentary, many readers will still be curious to learn how Ibn ‘Arabī interprets his poems allegorically. For that, Nicholson’s notes – and Hermann’s German edition – remain the more useful. That said, Sells’s work remains an impressive achievement, and one that ought to be celebrated by anyone interested in Ibn ‘Arabī or Classical Arabic poetry.

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NIKOLAOS VRYZIDIS (ed):

The Hidden Life of Textiles in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean. Contexts and Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Islamic, Latinate and Eastern Christian Worlds.

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This volume originated in a workshop held on 3 June 2016 at the Benaki Museum of Islamic Art in Athens, organized by Nikolaos Vryzidis. The workshop was divided into four panels, respectively dedicated to: medieval Islamic textiles in the eastern Mediterranean in cross-cultural perspective; cross-cultural encounters in Spain and Italy; different Ottoman textile productions; and oriental Christian textiles. The themes of these four panels are reflected in the contributions here written by art historians and archaeologists, all focusing on the medium of textiles. The stated aims of the volume are to document how networks of mobility and processes of interaction operated in different areas of the Mediterranean and the different end-products they produced in each case, employing current methodologies on cultural identity and cross-cultural exchange. On a broader perspective, the title of this volume refers to the often still unknown significance of textiles as sources of cultural, historical and archaeological information in the Islamic, Latinate and eastern Christian worlds.

The volume gathers ten articles followed by the concluding remarks written by Nikolaos Vryzidis and a glossary of textile terms used in the book given by Ana Cabrera Lafuente and Nikolaos Vryzidis. The general introduction of the book, written by Laura Rodríguez Peinado and Ana Cabrera Lafuente, presents an analysis of the methodological problems in the study of Andalusī textiles. Avinoam Shalem’s discussion on textile metaphors in medieval Arabic poetry follows. Scott Redford focuses on the representation of the colour red as well as checkerboard and zigzag patterns in fresco paintings of a local elite household in Cappadocia. He then explores their relation to flags used by the Rum Seljuk sultans and their armies. This article is followed by Maria Sardi’s investigation of foreign influences in Mamluk textiles and how these led to a new aesthetic. Vera-Simone Schulz presents