

Lights

LIGHTS

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LIGHTS

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TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Lights stands in solidarity with the resistance and resilience of Palestinians. We see the suffering caused by the ongoing Nakba and believe it is necessary to recognize the ongoing violences and erasures of U.S. settler colonialism. In that vein, we name the Indigenous nations upon whose land the University of Chicago is built:

Hooçąk (Winnebago/Ho'Chunk), Jiwere (Otoe), Nutachi (Missouria), and Baxoje (Iowas)
Kiash Matchitiwuk (Menominee)
Meshkwahkîha (Meskwaki)
Asâkîwaki (Sauk)
Myaamiaki (Miami), Waayahtanwaki (Wea), and Peeyankihšîaki (Piankashaw)
Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo)
Inoka (Illini Confederacy)
Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe), Odawak (Odawa), and Bodéwadmik (Potawatomi)

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I'm so pleased to present to you Volume 5, Issues 1 and 2 of Lights. Months ago when we decided to resume publication of the journal, we knew it would look a little different from previous issues. Well here we have it: something big, broad, and beautiful to make up for lost time.

To state the obvious, much has happened in the seven years since this journal was last published, most notably for us, a global pandemic. Despite never having met most of the editorial team in person, I feel lucky that the journal gave us the chance to remotely collaborate and to share a social and creative space, albeit through screens.

I'm so grateful for the hard work of the published writers whose stories and essays have populated my Zoom class daydreams, and I'm especially thankful for the labor and vision of the editorial team, Hannah Kim, Aileen Ida, Lily Sadowsky, Christian Borgen, and Jake Murphy, a group of really kind and amazing people.

Here's to better years and future issues,
Grace Clements



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THREE

● DROPS

OF ●

● BLOOD

by Sadegh Hedayat

translated from Persian by CLAY CATLIN

One day has passed since they transferred me to a different room. Can it be that things are as the administrator promised? That now I have been fully rehabilitated and in another week I'll be discharged? Haven't I been doing well? One year has passed. During this whole period whenever I pleaded and whined that I needed a paper and pencil they never gave them to me. I always told myself at all hours of the day that if only I could grasp a pencil and paper in my hand, I would write down all manner of things. But yesterday, without even me having asked, they brought them to me. Those things that I wanted so badly, those things that I begged and begged so persistently for! But what's the use? Even now, I scour my brain for something to write, but I can't think of a single sentence. It's like someone has seized my hand or as if my arm has suddenly become insensate. Now that I focus my eyes between the tangled, confused lines that I've scrawled across the page, the only words that are readable are these: "three drops of blood." The cerulean sky, the verdant miniature garden, the blooming buds upon the hill, and the placid breeze bringing the scent of the blossoms into my room. But what's the use? I can't derive the least bit of pleasure from these things. All of it is merely fluff for poetry and it's fine enough for children and those that are doomed to remain only children throughout their entire lives.

One year has passed since I came to this place. From dusk to dawn I am kept awake by the noises of a cat. Its horrifying screeches and scratchy warbles frustrate me so bitterly I feel my very soul slipping away from my body. When morning comes, I have hardly opened my eyes when the thoughtless injection comes. What dreary days and horrid hours I've passed in this place. In summer, we congregate in a dingy cellar wearing yellow shirts and pants and in winter we loiter beneath the sun near the front of the miniature garden. One year has passed while I've been living among these bizarre and unfortunate people. There is no fellowship whatsoever between me and them. The differences between us are like those between the earth and the sky, but their plaintive wails, their strange silences, their foul babbling, their wretched sobs, and their mad cackles will plague my sleeping hours with nightmares forever.

An hour still remains until we eat our dinner. The printed menu describes the same typical meal: yogurt soup, rice pudding, plain rice, bread, and cheese—just enough food to keep us from starving to death. All Hassan hopes for is a pot of onion soup with four pieces of leavened sangak bread. When he is released, instead of pen and paper, they should give him onion soup. He is one of the more fortunate people in here: with his stocky body, idiot laugh, thuggish neck, bald head, and rough hands as if he was made for hauling bricks. Indeed, every atom of his being testified that this was his life's purpose; his moronic features alone screamed it out loud. If Mohammad Ali was not with us at lunch and dinner, Hasan would probably have sent us all to meet our maker, but Mohammad Ali himself is also a citizen of this strange world. You people can say whatever you want, but this world exists beyond the normal realm of humanity.

One of our doctors here, God preserve him, just hasn't got a clue. If I were in his shoes, one night I would mix poison in with the dinner and serve it to the patients, and the next morning I would stand in the garden with my hands on my waist and watch the corpses being carried away.

When they first brought me here, I was convinced that they were trying to poison me. I wouldn't so much as touch lunch or dinner unless Mohammad Ali had tasted it

and only then would I eat. At night, strange fears would creep up on me as I slept and would make me quake and quiver. All these things have become so distant and blurred now! Always the same people, the same things to eat, the same, blue-painted rooms that become navy halfway up the wall.

Ten months ago, a lunatic they had placed in the depths of the yard tore his own guts open with a ceramic shard, pulled his intestines out of his body, and played with them. They said that he had been a butcher, and thus was used to tearing guts open. But there was another nutcase who pierced his own eyeball with his fingernail. They had tied his hands behind his back while he screamed and the blood dried onto his gouged socket. I know the blame for all these horrible things rests on the shoulders of the administrator.

The people here aren't all this way though. Even the many of them that can be fully rehabilitated and discharged will be ill-fated. Like this one woman, Soghra Sultan, who is in the women's ward. She has tried to escape two or three times, but they apprehended her. She is an old woman, but she rubs chalk from the wall plaster on her face and rouges it with geranium petals. Soghra Sultan thinks that she is a fourteen-year-old girl; if she were fully rehabilitated and looked into a mirror, she'd have a stroke. Worse than all is our Taghi who wants to turn the world upside down and—despite believing that women are the cause of all man's misfortune and that for society's sake all things female should be killed—has fallen in love with this same Soghra Sultan.

The blame for all these things lays on the head of our administrator. He out-crazies all the lunatics here: a man with a bulbous nose and the shifty eyes of an opium smoker. He patrols beneath the tall pine at the rear of the garden. Occasionally he bends down to inspect the foot of the pine. If an unsuspecting person were to see him, they'd say, "What a poor, harmless man to have found himself among all these lunatics." But I know him, and I know that beneath this pine tree three drops of blood stain the dirt. He has a cage hanging under his window. The cage is empty because a cat snatched his canary, but he left it there to lure cats inside and kill them.

Since yesterday he has been stalking a piebald cat. As soon as the animal scampered up the tree in front of his window, he told the guard at the door to shoot it. These three drops of blood belong to the cat, but if anyone asks the administrator, he says they were coughed up by the ill-omened bird of truth—the thieving scops owl.

In this bizarre place there is my friend and neighbor Abbas. Two weeks haven't even passed since they brought him here. He took to me warmly; he thinks of himself as a prophet or poet. He says that all matters, especially those of prophets, are tied to fortune and luck. Anyone who is blessed with great luck, especially if they are profoundly stupid, will turn out alright and anyone who is unlucky, even if they are a great mind of the times, will end up as miserably as Abbas. Abbas imagines that he plays the taar quite well. He has stretched some wires across a wooden board and believes that he has created a taar himself. Eight times a day, he sings me a poem he has written. Perhaps this same poem is why they've brought him to this place. You could call it a poem or perhaps a strange song:

“Evening has fallen once again, alack
The whole of the world is dyed pitch-black
For all creatures the time has come for repose
Besides me, with my growing sorrows and woes

Joy must not exist on this plane
Death is the sole cure for my pain
But beneath the pine in the courtyard's mud
The dirt is stained with three drops of blood”

One day has passed since we went on a stroll in the garden. Abbas was reciting that same poem when a woman, a man, and a young girl approached us. So far they had come to visit Abbas on five occasions. I had seen them before and recognized them. The young girl had brought a handful of flowers. The girl smiled at me; it was clear that she liked me. In fact, she had come just to see me (after all, the pock-marked face of Abbas was far from pleasant) but, while the older woman talked to the doctor, Abbas drew the young girl close and planted a kiss on her.

One year has passed and nobody has come to see me or bring me flowers. The last time it had been Siyavosh who had come to see me. Siyavosh was my best friend. We had been neighbors and would walk to and from our college together every day. We always talked over our lessons with each other and I had been teaching him how to play the taar for fun. Rokhsaareh, Siyavosh's cousin, was my fiancé and she would often come visit us. Siyavosh had designs of ending up with her sister.

As it happened, one month before our engagement party Siyavosh became unwell and was sent away. Once or twice, I came to ask after him, but they always told me that the rules forbade me from speaking to him. Though I insisted, they always gave me the same answer. Eventually I gave up. I clearly remember returning to my home at twilight one day in the period right before exam season. I spread my books and papers across the table, and as soon as I began to change my clothes, the sound of a gunshot echoed through my house. This noise sounded so near that it made my blood chill as our house lay behind a ravine and there had been a wave of robberies in the area. I grabbed my revolver from inside a drawer and came out to the yard. I stood there for a moment, listening, before climbing the ladder up to the roof, but I couldn't see a thing. As I descended, I peered into Siyavosh's compound. I saw Siyavosh in just his pajamas, standing in the middle of the yard. Startled, I asked, "Is that you Siyavosh?"

He noticed me and replied, "Come here. I'm the only one home."

"Did you hear the gunshot?"

He brought a finger to his mouth and motioned me over with his head. I hastily scrambled down and rapped at the gate of his compound.

He let me in himself. Keeping his head averted in a peculiar way and staring sulkily at the ground, he asked, "Why haven't you come to see me?"

"I've tried. I came to ask after you two or three times, but they said the doctor forbade it."

"They think I'm unwell, but they're mistaken."

I asked him twice more if he'd heard the gunshot.

Without answering me, he grabbed my hand, and led me to the foot of the pine to show me something. I peered closely. Three drops of fresh blood stained the ground.

Afterwards, he brought me to his room, shut all the doors, sat down in a chair, and turned on a lamp. I sat down and he pulled his chair up to face me. His room was decorated sparsely. It was painted blue but turned navy halfway up the wall. A taar had been placed in one corner. Several bound books and school papers had been strewn

across the table's surface. Siyavosh reached into a drawer and pulled out a revolver which he showed off to me. It was one of those beautiful, old-fashioned six-shooters with a pearl-inlay. He shoved it into his pants' pocket and began:

"I used to have a female cat. Her name was Foxy. Perhaps you've seen her before; she was one of those typical piebald cats, though with two bulging eyes like those of a woman with kohl-streaked lids. She had a pattern on her back like someone had spilled ink over a steel-gray sheet of blotting paper and then had folded it down the middle. When I'd get home on school days, she would dart straight towards me, mew, and rub herself against me. When I sat down, she would climb atop my head and shoulders and nuzzle her nose against my face. With her bristly tongue, she'd lick my forehead until I kissed her. It's said that female cats are more deceitful, more affectionate, more sentient than tomcats. Besides me, she took a powerful liking to the cook, as that was where her food came from. But, as for the old maid of the house Kiaabaaa, who often prayed and disliked cat hair, she kept her distance. Foxy probably imagined that humans were much shrewder than cats and that they hoarded all the delicious food and cozy places for themselves, while cats had to flatter and fawn so sycophantically just to get a pittance from them.

"The only time her primal instincts awoke and boiled over was when she would get the bloody head of a rooster in her claws. She would then transform into a predatory beast. Her eyes would be electrified with brutality, she would bare her claws and, if anyone came near, they would be met with threatening snarls. Afterwards, as if she had deceived even herself, she would begin to play. With all the powers of her imagination, she would pretend the rooster's head was a real living animal, pinning it beneath her paw, glaring at it menacingly, spying on it, lying in wait to pounce on it, swatting at it twice and then—little by little—with leaps and lunges, attacks and dodges, she would reveal all the innate dexterity and agility of her species. After tiring from this display of force, she gnawed on the bloodied head with more and more of an appetite and, for several minutes afterwards, prowled around the remnants of it, not letting anyone get near her. For one or two hours after that, she forgot all the artificial sophistication she had assumed, not letting a soul approach, not rubbing up against anyone, not reducing herself to flattery at all.

"Actually, even when expressing friendship and affection, she remained wild and aloof, never revealing the secrets of her life. She thought that the house belonged to her, and if an unfamiliar cat found itself nearby, especially a female cat, she would fly into a rage, hissing and wailing for hours.

"The sounds that Foxy would produce at lunchtime and the noise she made to flatter someone were quite different. Her cries of hunger, the yelps she let loose in scuffles, the lust-drunk mews when she was in heat were all distinct from one another. The tone and lilt of each would change. The first was a heart-scratching cry, the second a yowl of abject hatred, the third a painful wail that was pulled from her by the natural order that demanded she seek out a mate. But the most meaningful thing about Foxy were her expressions. Sometimes, she would display a near-human sensitivity that made one ask themselves: in the back of that fuzzy head, behind those secretive green eyes, what thoughts and feelings flowed?

"It was spring of last year when it happened, when something horrible occurred. As I'm sure you know, in that season, all creatures become intoxicated with lust and couple up. It's as if the springtime-wind blows a breath of madness into all living things.

A wave of this witchery got a hold of our Foxy once and, like an earthquake, sent her whole-body trembling. She would wail morosely. The tomcats heard her wails and would gather around our compound to answer. After fights and scuffles among the suitors, Foxy chose from their ranks the most powerful and full-voiced tom to be her mate. In animal courtship, scent has a great deal of special significance. This is why pampered, prim house toms hold no attraction for females. On the other hand, alley cats that prowl on brick walls—thieving, gaunt, vagabond, starving toms whose very flesh emits the primordial stink of their species—these are the cats that attract females. All night long, Foxy and her mate sang their love aloud. Foxy's supple, slender body stretched and quivered back and forth and her tom's body behind her curved like a taut bow, while both let out wails of pleasure. They kept at it until the break of dawn. At that time, Foxy would return home with tangled hair: tired and spent but aglow with satisfaction.

"Foxy's copulation kept me from sleeping at night and eventually drove me into a wild rage. One day I was working in front of the open window. I saw them, the lover and her beloved, swaggering around in the small garden. With this same revolver you see now, I aimed at them from three steps away. I fired the revolver and shot Foxy's mate. It seemed to shatter his back, he made one great leap and, without even making a noise or letting out a cry, darted through the alley, plummeted into the walled garden, and died.

"Bloodstains blotted his path. Foxy eyed him confusedly for a moment before she noticed his paw prints. She sniffed his spilled blood and went to his dead body. For two days and two nights she held vigil over her dead lover. You'd see her tap him with her paw, as if she was saying to him, 'Wake up, spring has sprung. Why do you sleep when it's the time for love? Why aren't you moving? Get up, please get up!' After all, Foxy had no concept of death and did not realize that her lover was no more.

"The next day, Foxy and her mate's corpse vanished. I searched everywhere, I asked everyone, but it was in vain. Was Foxy angry with me? Was she dead? Had she gone off to mate with another? If so, what had become of the corpse of her first love?

"One night, I heard the sound of this same tom mewing. It echoed until morning. The same thing occurred on the following night, but again the sound faded by morning. The third night, I drew my revolver and, with an empty mind, fired into the same pine that stands in front of my window. The tom's eyes flashed in the darkness, he let out a long screech, and the noise stopped. In the morning, three drops of blood stained the foot of the pine.

"Every night since then, he comes and lets loose that same awful screech. The others sleep like the dead; they don't hear it. Every time I tell them what I am telling you, they laugh at me, but I know—I know with complete certainty—that this voice belongs to the cat I killed. Every night since then, sleep does not come to my weary eyes. Wherever I go, whichever room I go to bed in, all night long, this cruel ghostly cat wails with his horrid throaty voice, crying out for his lost mate.

"Today the house was empty, so I came to the place where the cat sits and shrieks each night and took aim. I know where he sits; I can still picture his eyes lighting up in the darkness that night. When I pulled the trigger, I heard the wails of the tom and three drops of blood dripped down from above. You saw it with your own eyes, aren't you my witness?"

Right then the door of the room was opened and Rokhsaareh and her mother stepped in.

Rokhsaareh had a handful of flowers in her hand. I stoop to greet her, but Siyavosh

cut in with a strange smile. Rising, he said "Of course, you all know Mirza Ahmed Khan better than you know me. There's no need for introductions. He can testify that he saw the three drops of blood at the foot of the pine tree with his own eyes."

"Yes, I've seen them."

Siyavosh stepped forward, laughing like a child, and pulled my six-shooter out of my pocket. He placed it down on the table and said, "You know that Mirza Ahmed Khan plays the taar well and is a wonderful poet. He is also a capable hunter; in fact, he is a deadeye marksman."

Then he gestured to me. I stood up and said, "Yes, this evening I came by to get some school papers from Siyavosh. To entertain ourselves, we took shots at the pine tree for a while, but those three drops of blood don't belong to the cat. They belong to the bird of truth. I'm sure you know the old tale about how the bird of truth stole three wheat stalks from a child. Now, it cries out every night until three drops of blood drip from its throat, revealing its crime. Or maybe a cat had snatched the neighbor's canary and was shot, leaving the blood in its wake as it ran away. Hold on a second, I have a new song which I'll sing for you." I grabbed my taar, tuned it, and sang these lines:

“Evening has fallen once again, alack
The whole of the world is dyed pitch-black
For all creatures the time has come for repose
Besides me, with my growing sorrows and woes

It seems joy does not exist on this plane
Death is the sole cure for my pain
But beneath the pine in the courtyard's mud
The dirt is stained with three drops of blood”

When the song reached this point, Rokhsaareh's mother left the room in a befouled mood. Rokhsaareh raised her eyebrows and said, "He's crazy."

Then, she took Siyavosh's hand and, giggling, they stepped through the door and closed it behind them. From behind the glass windowpane, I saw them enter the yard. Beneath the lamplight, they embraced each other and kissed.



EXPLOITATION AND PARTICIPATION Framing State Labor in Early Mesopotamia CHRISTIAN BORGEN

ὥστε τοὺς λέγοντας, ἐν Λακεδαίμονι καὶ τὸν ἐλεύθερον μάλιστα ἐλεύθερον εἶναι
καὶ τὸν δοῦλον μάλιστα δοῦλον, οὐ φαύλως τεθεωρηκέναί τὴν διαφορὰν.

Those who said that in Lacedaemon the freeman is free to extremes and the slave is oppressed to extremes, defined the state of things quite correctly.

Plutarch, *Lycurgus* XXVIII

Thus the Soviet Assyriologist Igor Diakonoff characterized the conditions for laborers on state land in early Mesopotamia by reference to the Spartan helots of a later period.¹ He sought to emphasize what he saw as the fundamental similarity between laborers dependent upon the state and household slaves relative to their social setting; dependent laborers are slaves of the state just as household slaves are slaves of a particular family. This represented a difference of focus within the conception of labor in 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia from that of Diakonoff's contemporary, Polish-American Assyriologist Ignace J. Gelb, who drew a distinction between the productive labor of serfs on state land and the service labor of chattel slaves working in the household.² The disagreement between these scholars was motivated by minor differences in definitions and major differences in theoretical frameworks. Both of these views, however, share their centering on the exploitative nature of labor, but this is not necessarily the only option.

The primary evidence available for studying labor in early Mesopotamia is mainly composed of royal inscriptions and the many tens of thousands of cuneiform tablets inscribed with administrative records that have been excavated within the last century and a half. The vast majority of these records were produced by the estates of temples, royal palaces, and prominent individuals, and as such directly studying labor outside of these contexts is precluded. In fact, it is difficult to discuss labor at all outside of its relation to the institutions administering it. An investigation of state labor which takes this relation as its starting point may prove to be productive for our understanding of early Mesopotamian socio-economic history. In order to explore such a possibility, this paper will give an overview of relevant historiography on both the structure of 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamian society and the models of labor presented by Gelb and Diakonoff before surveying three case studies of state labor in this period and discussing how these might be interpreted not only from within an explicitly exploitative framework, but also from one of participation.

¹ Diakonoff 1976, 65. Translation his own. Though the Greek word in this quote (δοῦλος) is literally translated as "slave," the preceding paragraph makes clear that Plutarch is referring to helots, the "serfs" of Sparta.

² Gelb 1972, 83.

Approaching Terms of Servility

The first difficulty encountered when studying ancient social categories is that of definition. Modern meanings of terms such as “slavery” and “freedom” do not correspond well to ancient conceptions behind the words often translated as those terms.³ In modernity such terms usually imply an absolute state where an individual is either free or enslaved, but in Akkadian and Sumerian-speaking cultures being referred to as “slave/servant”⁴ implied a relative state to another, the nature of which could only be ascertained from the context of the word’s usage. In this way a king’s subservient relation to his patron god was indicated using the same word a man would use for referring to the worker over whom he had complete ownership. Likewise for terms denoting overlordship or ownership; the social setting of the person referred to is not made clear from the individual word used. There are certain less ambiguous cases, as in law codes, which reflect a long tradition of individuals or institutions owning people either temporarily or permanently.⁵

When studying laborers working for the state, the difficulty is further compounded by the fact that texts often use terms aside from “slave/servant” to describe individuals receiving state support such as “man,” “woman,” “boy,” “girl,” or even simply “head.”⁶ To consider all individuals recorded as receiving support from the state, apart from those whose freedom is implied (as in the case of high officials, for example), to be in an enslaved, servile, or dependent relationship with the state is to collapse what is potentially a great diversity of socio-economic arrangements into a handful of categories that are not explicitly demarcated by the primary evidence. The terms used by ancient administrations do not neatly correspond to notions of slave labor and free labor.⁷ With this in mind, labor performed by individuals both for the state and on state land is referred to as “state labor” in this paper. Just what sort of state this was will be explored in the following section.

Conceptualizing the State

A useful point of departure for understanding the evolving conception of the Mesopotamian state in historiographic literature is that of the Temple-State or Temple Economy. This view was first formulated by Anton Deimel and Anna Schneider in the 1920s and was further explored by Adam Falkenstein in the 1950s. While dated in many respects, these ideas have influenced generations of scholarship on the topic. According to their models,

“most or all agricultural land in mid-third millennium Sumer belonged to temples, which thereby controlled the economy of southern Mesopotamia.

3 While it is apparent to a modern reader that a slave is definitely not free, it remains difficult to give the term “slave” a more substantial definition, even when one is solely considering the manifestation of slavery in a specific time and place. This is true of many of the terms used in scholarship on ancient labor, which likely indicates a small set of terms being used to refer to a variety of social arrangements. See Gelb 1979.

4 In Akkadian, wardum for male and amtum for female slaves/servants. In Sumerian, most often arad2 for male and geme2 for female slaves/servants.

5 See Westbrook 1995 for an overview of slavery in law codes from throughout the ancient Near East.

6 See Gelb 1982 for a philological exploration of these uses

7 Diakonoff 1987, 3.

Cities and city states functioned as theocratic manors in which political leaders derived their authority from management of the gods’ households.”⁸

In this view, the temple is the original possessor of land which city rulers, being themselves originally priests, slowly secularized for their own purposes over many centuries.⁹ There is no room left here for private or communal ownership of land outside of the temple or palace. Therefore the temple and, later, the palace effectively controlled all labor in the city-state. Even free men, though they may possess a house, garden, and animals, worked temple land for payment, usually in rations.¹⁰ This theory was based on evidence from Girsu in the city state of Lagash in southern Mesopotamia, in particular the pre-Sargonic (mid-3rd millennium BCE) archives discovered there and a text referred to as the Reforms of Urukagina.¹¹ These were used to determine the size of temple estates and the role of the temples in the city-state, from which the above conclusions were drawn.

Scholarship on the early Mesopotamian state was framed by the Temple-State hypothesis for much of the 20th century.¹² It was attractive for both its socio-economic and cultural narrative. Thorkild Jacobsen expanded on the notion of city-states as divine households and rulers as their stewards to explain all of Mesopotamian political activity as being modeled on divine political activity. According to him, all people living in a city-state are in a hierarchy of subordination beneath the city god, represented by the ruler. When larger territorial states formed and controlled multiple city-states, this mirrored mythic ideas of the divine assembly led by the deity who had been designated its chief, in this case the city god of the capital.¹³ Variations on the models presented by Deimel, Schneider, Falkenstein, and Jacobsen are still to be found in some world history textbooks and works aimed at more general audiences.

Numerous critiques and revisions of the Temple-State hypothesis have been raised since it first appeared.¹⁴ While Deimel and others originally assumed the archives they were studying to be those of a temple, it has since been argued that the institution was in reality a royal household managed by the queen.¹⁵ Additionally, scholarly understanding of the Reforms of Urukagina is conflicted and it is unclear what concrete historical background can be inferred from them.¹⁶ Beyond these evidentiary issues, the Temple-State hypothesis argues for quite far-reaching conclusions based on a single case study. What was true of Girsu was not necessarily the case for the rest of 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia.

Soviet Assyriologists, approaching their studies from Marx and Engel’s materialist conception of history, formed an intellectual tradition mostly isolated from Western

8 Foster 1981, 225.

9 Falkenstein 1974, 10.

10 Ibid. 14.

11 Maekawa 1987, 49. The reading of the name “Urukagina” is uncertain, sometimes read “Uru’inimgina.”

12 For examples, see Gelb 1969, Foster 1981, and Makkay 1983.

13 Jacobsen 1956, 186-197.

14 See note 12.

15 Maekawa 1987, 50.

16 Foster 1981, 230-237.

academics until translations of Russian scholarship became widely accessible in the 1960s.¹⁷ The traditional Marxist division of history into stages marked by their dominant mode of production that every society progresses through is roughly as follows: The Primitive Communal Age, the Slave-holding Age, the Feudal Age, the Capitalistic Age, and the Socialist/Communist Age. In addition to these stages, early Marxist thinkers had postulated the “Asiatic Mode of Production” to encompass those early Asian societies that did not appear to fit the traditional conception of slave-holding states.¹⁸ Against this notion, the preeminent Soviet scholar on the ancient Near East in the 1930s, Vasily Struve, argued that 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamian society was firmly in the Slave-holding Age.¹⁹ In his model, captives taken in raiding became slave laborers for early tribal Mesopotamian communities. These slaves constructed and maintained irrigation works, while the necessity to control water supply over a larger area led tribes to coalesce into larger communities. Slaves were owned by the whole of the community, not individuals, and over time the temple institutions evolved to coordinate the increasingly large number of slaves and the complex work they carried out while the power of family households and communes weakened. By the Ur III Period (22nd-21st century BCE) a territorial state had emerged to better manage productive forces and exploit the slave class, with royal lands functioning as large slave estates.²⁰ Also by this period the practices of the administration had reached a fairly advanced level, with labor being abstractly reckoned and the amount of “man days” required for a given project calculated.²¹ The increasing power of the administration, necessitated by the importance of its ensuring agricultural productivity to perpetuate the slave state, predisposed these societies to despotism. Struve made use of the somewhat limited publications of archival texts from throughout southern Mesopotamia which were available to him, along with a wealth of comparative material, especially from Egypt. It was his historical materialist framework, however, which was most informative for his model. Though Struve’s model became the standard in Soviet Assyriology for decades, his successors came to somewhat different conclusions.

While far from the only respondent to Struve, Igor Diakonoff’s reinterpretation of the evidence, again through the Marxist paradigm, is important for our understanding of the debate around labor in early Mesopotamia. He maintained the importance of kinship groups and communal land throughout the period, arguing that temple and palace-owned land did not necessarily account for even a majority of overall land in the city-states. Correspondingly, the agricultural labor on communal land was overwhelmingly performed by free men, with slaves playing a much less significant role.²² In addition to communal land and small family holdings, Diakonoff contended that documents recording the sale of land indicate the presence of large, hereditary, aristocratic estates that likely operated in a similar fashion to temple and palace estates, with lines between estates managed in an “official” capacity and those held by virtue of familial ties sometimes blurring. He describes

17 See Diakonoff 1969 for a relevant selection of Soviet contributions to Mesopotamian socio-economic history.

18 Gelb 1979, 288.

19 Struve 1934, 20-22. He drew in part upon the same Girsu archives used by Deimel, Schneider, and Falkenstein.

20 Ibid. 49.

21 Struve 1948, 128.

22 Diakonoff 1956, 177-179.

labor on the large estates as being performed by both “clients,” who were nominally free individuals but dependent upon the estates for support or land, and slaves, though again he does not think this group was a major component. These “clients” are said to come from a wide range of backgrounds, from artisans and administrators to the destitute and refugees.²³ Under Diakonoff’s analysis, the only area where a ruler could have been a despot was within his own estate, as rival hereditary estates and the largely autonomous communes, represented respectively by the Council of Elders and Popular Assembly referenced in texts from the Early Dynastic to Old Babylonian periods, exercised their own power and greatly limited the city-state ruler’s authority.²⁴

Diakonoff’s model of society, though also heavily critiqued, provides a useful point from which to move to the debate around the nature of labor in 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia. The conception of the state in the term “state labor” for the remainder of this paper is drawn from his descriptions of society’s largest coordinators of labor; the term “state” encompasses those institutions which organized labor on a scale requiring an administration and record-keeping. Thus, state labor is effectively that labor for which we possess records today. As this may result in institutions not traditionally considered central to notions of the state, such as aristocratic estates, being included within it, this definition may be unpalatable to more politically minded historians. Its usefulness will be in its allowing us to speak of labor organization to the largest extent that evidence allows without struggling with the sometimes unclear relationships between large estates and the traditionally conceived “state.”

Gelb and Diakonoff on State Labor

Beginning in the 1960s, Ignace Gelb wrote extensively on various facets of early Mesopotamian socio-economic history. As his previous work focused heavily on philology, Gelb’s new line of research was informed by a great number of references to primary texts, both published and unpublished. While he developed many theories about the meanings of specific terms in specific, usually administrative, contexts, a treatment of his philological arguments are beyond the scope of this paper and will not be treated critically.²⁵ Two of Gelb’s studies were key contributions to his later classification of labor, so it is worthwhile discussing them individually.

The first of Gelb’s influential studies was on the ration system in early Mesopotamia. In this, he traced the use of terms for barley, oil, and wool rations along with their quantities and recipients in administrative texts throughout the 3rd millennium BCE. These texts are not without their difficulties,²⁶ yet he argued that the existence of a certain social arrangement that applied to a very large number of individuals could be seen in them. He claimed that the major labor force in early Mesopotamia was made up of a class of serfs he termed the

23 Diakonoff 1956, 180.

24 Ibid. 183-185. Diakonoff gives the mentioning of such bodies in the Sumerian tale of Gilgameš and Aka, the Obelisk of Maništušu, an inscription from the reign of Gudea, and the Akkadian Epic of Gilgameš as evidence of their longstanding history in Mesopotamia.

25 See Gelb 1982 for a philological analysis of terms for slaves, for example.

26 It is sometimes impossible to approximate the age of listed individuals or to determine if they received rations for a portion or the entirety of the year, for instance.

“the guruš class,” using a Sumerian word for “man” often found in ration lists to avoid the feudal connotations of the former term. This class were given land by the large temple and palace estates in return for which they owed their labor to the estate for a certain amount of time each year, during which they received rations.²⁷ Gelb believed this semi-free class and the accompanying ration system by which it was supported was the standard form of labor in Mesopotamia throughout the 3rd millennium BCE until it was gradually replaced with wage labor by the Old Babylonian period (19th century BCE).²⁸ Questions about the origins of the guruš class were left undetermined in this study.

In another line of research, Gelb considered several options for the source of guruš laborers: people indigenous to Mesopotamia being subjugated by outside conquerors, people abducted abroad and sold on slave markets, enslaved people bred to produce further enslaved people, native free people taken into debt slavery, and prisoners of war.²⁹ Of these, he thought only prisoners of war could reasonably have supplied the manpower of the guruš class. There is little direct evidence as to what happened to defeated warriors and civilians outside of royal inscriptions, which variously claim to slaughter the enemy on the battlefield, lead them away in bonds, send them to camps (likely to be killed), or grant them life and freedom. The very few administrative texts (numbering in the tens among thousands of records) where prisoners of war appear describe the rations they are given, their numbers, and sometimes their being given to temples.³⁰ Gelb theorized that economic conditions were the decisive factor in whether defeated enemies were killed or taken prisoner. In primitive economies where agricultural production did not provide for more than the subsistence of the population, enemies would be killed as they could not be provided for. In semi-developed economies where limited surpluses were produced, men would often be killed but women and children taken as prisoners. In developed economies with large surpluses, all defeated individuals would become prisoners of war.³¹ According to Gelb, Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium BCE was one of these semi-developed economies with limited surpluses, which explains why women and children feature so prominently in lists of prisoners of war. Furthermore, he saw an important distinction between “the act of taking prisoners of war and their ultimate disposition, enslavement or freedom, full or relative.”³² States with limited surpluses did not have the ability to effectively police huge numbers of slaves to ensure maximum exploitation of labor; this is why prisoners of war became an important source of manpower not as slaves, but as members of the guruš class. Gelb believed that after their capture, though some were put to hard labor on building projects, most prisoners of war were eventually settled on land belonging to temple or royal estates and enjoyed limited freedoms and rights. He argued that the same sentiment that worked against permanent debt slavery of native people would have prohibited the reduction of

27 Gelb 1965, 240.

28 Ibid. 242.

29 Gelb 1972, 84.

30 See Gelb 1973, 73-78. Royal inscriptions, inherently propagandistic in nature, are considered less trustworthy than administrative texts. One inscription of Rīmuš in particular boasts of taking thousands of male prisoners of war, a figure far larger than any in administrative texts of the time record.

31 Gelb 1972, 85.

32 Gelb 1973, 71.

native Mesopotamians captured in battle with other city-states to the state of slaves, so such captives entered the semi-free guruš class while foreigners could become slaves.³³

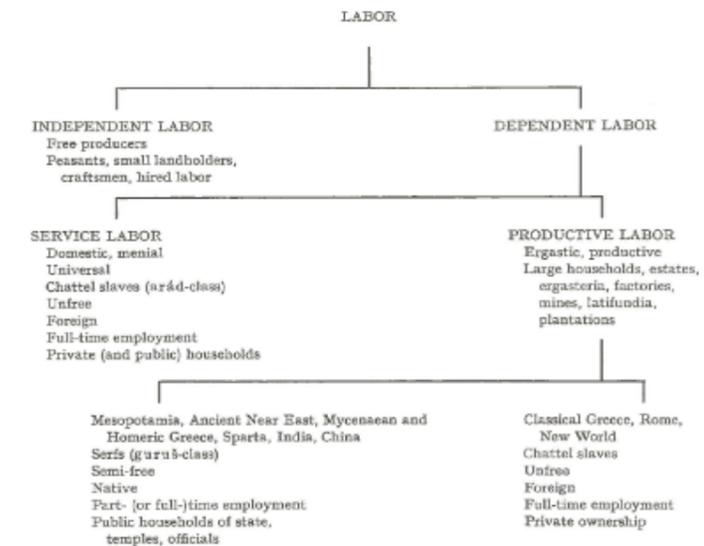


CHART I. TYPES OF LABOR

Gelb’s understanding of the ration system and prisoners of war in early Mesopotamia, along with considerable reference to comparative material, allowed him to construct a comprehensive model of labor in the ancient world primarily based on how labor was utilized, as opposed to a strictly legal interpretation or one concerned with social status or freedom (Chart 1).³⁴ This model placed wage laborers, households possessing small amounts of land, craftsmen, and free farmers into the category of independent labor; with the exception of craftsmen, these are the groups we can say extremely little about because their activities are seldom recorded in our evidence. All other labor falls under some form of dependent labor. The central distinction he makes is that two fundamentally different types of dependent laborers carry out service labor, menial work usually done within households, and productive labor, performed in fields and workshops. For dependent service labor, this type is the chattel slave, a foreigner wholly owned by his master or estate. Dependent productive labor, on the other hand, is where the guruš class is to be found. They worked for large estates of the palace, temples, or high-ranking officials and were responsible for producing agricultural and processed goods. They could also have had their own families and possessed their own property. While steering clear of the feudal setting of the term, thinking of the guruš class as serfs is useful in that it points to the fact that they were often *glebae adscripti*, assigned or bound to the soil on which they worked. Gelb was keen to point out what he saw as the historical peculiarity of the use of chattel slaves for productive labor, a phenomenon he believed only to have occurred in classical Greece and Rome originally, but reappeared during the transatlantic slave trade and continued in the United

33 Ibid. 95.

34 Gelb 1972, 82.

States through the 19th century.³⁵ This model generated much further debate between Gelb and Diakonoff, but Gelb's position remained largely unchanged. His own account of the key differences between slavery and the guruš-type serfdom follows:

“Unfree chattel slaves, foreign born, without family life, without means of production, employed full-time mainly in service type of labor in “primitive societies” and, mainly in the private sector, in Ancient Near East, Mycenaean and Homeric Greece, later Sparta, etc., India, China, etc., but mainly in productive type of labor in Athens, Rome, and Americas.

Semi-free serfs (Mesopotamian guruš, Spartan helots, etc.), native born, with family life and with means of production or without family life and without means of productions, employed part-time or full-time mainly in productive type of labor, mainly in public sector, in Ancient Near East, Mycenaean and Homeric Greece, later Sparta, etc., India, China, etc., but not in Athens, Rome, and Americas.”³⁶

The definition of state labor used in this paper corresponds to that labor which Gelb classified as dependent with the exception of dependent service labor performed by chattel slaves in private households, as small households would not have required the administrative approach to labor management which the large estates employed.

A major point of disagreement between Diakonoff and Gelb concerned what Gelb classified as independent labor and Diakonoff regarded as the labor of communes and small family holdings; Diakonoff argued that this segment of society exercised a great deal of power throughout the 3rd millennium BCE and contributed a significant share to Mesopotamia's economic productivity, while Gelb believed their role to be negligible when compared to the guruš class working for the state institutions. As previously mentioned, the primary evidence does little to illuminate the economic circumstances of those people outside of state institutions, so our focus shall remain on state labor alone.

Returning to the debate from the introduction, Diakonoff felt that there was something of a distinction without a difference in Gelb's model. It was not that the slave and the serf were members of different classes in one economic sector, they were instead members of the same class manifested in two different economic sectors: the small, private household and the large institutional estates.³⁷ Those laboring for the state were slaves whose labor, often performed in fields at a distance from the administration, necessitated a different approach to exploitation than those laboring in the more intimate settings of a small household. The different requirements of these settings account for the superficial difference between slaves and serfs. Any legal distinctions between the two merely disguised their similar position

35 Gelb 1976, 204.

36 Gelb 1979, 294.

37 Diakonoff 1976, 78. Both scholars compiled lists of what they believed to be relevant features of slave and serfs that could be found in the texts or were implied by them. See Gelb 1972, 87 for the original list. Diakonoff later narrowed Gelb's list down to features he thought essential in order to show alleged fundamental similarities between slaves and serfs. See Diakonoff 1976, 58.

as economic slaves. For this reason he favored referring to the guruš class as helots, which were familiar to scholars of antiquity as the distinct lower-class of laborers bound to the land of Sparta.³⁸ In merging these groups, Diakonoff was aware that he was potentially diluting the meaning of ancient slavery to such an extent that it lost much of its heuristic value, yet he did believe there to be many diverse forms of unfree labor in the ancient world that warranted study.³⁹ Under his final analysis, he posited the following classes according to their productivity and relations to the means of production:

1. a class of persons sharing property rights in the means of production but not partaking in any process of production;
2. a class of persons sharing property rights in the means of production and partaking in the process of production in their own interests; and
3. a class devoid of property in means of production and taking part in the process of production in the interests of others.⁴⁰

Essentially all forms of Gelb's dependent labor are subsumed under the final category. My own definition of state labor encompasses the final class, insofar as the process of production in which those laborers partake is that managed by the state, while also including those members of the second class who also labor for the state, even if that is in their own interest. The first class, as it does not perform labor, would not seem a likely subject of an inquiry into state labor, though it is likely that the chief administrators were derived from its members. A final note on the modelling of society and labor in early Mesopotamia is necessary before individual case studies are considered. The scholars discussed previously were all well aware of the limitations of their evidence. Blind chance has allowed texts produced in certain regions and in certain periods to survive for our modern studies while large gaps remain in others. When a model is constructed, it often considers the evidence it uses to be normative for those regions and periods which are poorly textually represented. The solution to this undesirable situation is further research of the sort seen in the following section. These case studies will be examined to discuss how they fit into the Gelbian and Diakonovian models, while asking if there may be yet another productive approach.

Case Studies on Labor in Early Mesopotamia

The first example to be discussed is explicitly introduced as an effort to explore whether Gelb or Diakonoff's model better fits a specific group of laborers. Piotr Steinkeller examined 75 texts relating to a group of around 60 foresters in the province of Umma during the Ur III period. These men gathered wood and plants from growth along the river and forests throughout the province for the state.⁴¹ The texts recorded workers being split into gangs of 1 to 5 men with each gang working 1 of the 30 forests. In gangs of multiple men, the members appear to have come from the same family, with the father or eldest brother designated the lead worker. The entire operation was administrated by an overseer

38 Ibid. 65.

39 Diakonoff 1987, 3.

40 Ibid.

41 Steinkeller 1987, 74.

and 3 foremen. The men are categorized as *erim-2* or *UN-il3*, the first often translated as “soldiers/workers” while the second is uncertain, though appears to indicate a lower rank of workers. Steinkeller argued that they all worked for only part of the year, during which rations were supplied, and lived off the produce of the land allotted to them by the state for the rest of the year.⁴² Notably, the workers who were clearly engaged in the physical labor of gathering wood are sometimes from the same family as those in administrative roles which may not have involved physical labor.⁴³ Steinkeller finds the certain features of the foresters to be better fit by Gelb’s model, as Diakonoff had alleged that serfs would not have a family life, be identified by patronymics, or own property, yet the texts demonstrate that the workers possessed all of these in at least some cases.⁴⁴ The texts paint a picture of the social arrangement of the foresters that is difficult to square with any notion of slavery. Interestingly, one of the foremen who becomes overseer after the death of his father is known to have been a scribe based on his seal. That an educated individual is recorded alongside physical laborers which both Gelb and Diakonoff would undoubtedly have classified as their respective types of serfs indicates a rigidity in their models unsuitable for the less clear-cut social realities they attempt to describe. Steinkeller thoughtfully notes that natural resources seem to be the real victim of state exploitation here, given the number of records and complexity of administration dedicated to the harvesting of rather marginal resources.⁴⁵ Considering the difficulty in determining social status through administrative classifications alone and absence of visibly exploitative practices in this case, a lighter-weight model than those offered by Gelb and Diakonoff may be necessary.

In our second case study Kazuya Maekawa sought to sketch the nature of collective labor service by analyzing texts from Girsu. His research picks out trends that bear on the models of society and labor we previously discussed. He analyzed lists of barley rations given to groups of workers on various projects, from canal maintenance to agricultural work, during the two periods for which he had evidence: the late pre-Sargonic (24th century BCE) and Ur III (21st century BCE).⁴⁶ The large scope of his study precludes detailed discussion of his evidence here, though from it he argues that labor originally performed by men given allotments of land in the pre-Sargonic period was quite often performed by men paid wages instead in the Ur III period.⁴⁷ While Gelb had also described the rise of wage labor in Mesopotamia, he had placed more emphasis on its use in the Old Babylonian period.⁴⁸ It being widespread already in the late 3rd millennium may put into doubt his conviction that the *guruš* class supported by land allotments was the primary labor source for early Mesopotamia, though such a criticism may be hair-splitting. Diakonoff would likely have been untroubled by this development, as he was not beholden to serfs being given land

42 He infers this from the fact that they could not have worked their land allotments if they were employed year-round.

43 Steinkeller 1987, 97.

44 Ibid. 99. That many of the workers are related to one another is made clear by the patronymics. Sheep and cattle owned by supervisors and a worker are used for payments and an offering.

45 Ibid. 101. Steinkeller adds that, though the small woodlands and thickets have been present in the region for all known history, the Ur III state is the only one that has ever systematically exploited them.

46 Maekawa 1987, 49.

47 Ibid. 69.

48 Gelb 1965, 242.

allotments and their payment in rations or wages would merely represent a form which was convenient for their exploiters to support them.⁴⁹ That neither these models are necessarily at odds with Maekawa’s conclusion may be due to the generality of his research. Returning to a more specific case may be enlightening.

In another study by Steinkeller, he examined the use of labor on three national building projects during the Ur III period. Contrary to what one might expect, the administrative textual evidence for these projects is lacking, so evidence of a more secondary nature, such as royal inscriptions, must be used. Such sources, however, do little to elucidate social settings of the laborers outside of their work on a particular project. These undertakings were “national” both in the fact that they were planned by the head of a national, territorial state and in that they required labor and resources from provinces throughout the kingdom.⁵⁰ Steinkeller described the national building projects as a uniquely egalitarian affair, with inscriptions claiming that equal wages were paid to all laborers and much more food provided than one finds for other work. An additional feature which is particularly interesting to us is the role of feasts for workers.⁵¹ Already fed generously, and frequently with meat, laborers were treated to banquets with large amounts of food and performers for entertainment. Steinkeller cited comparative anthropological material which describes the use of feasting for mobilizing mass labor.⁵² It is claimed that feasting is a typical tool in agrarian societies to organize labor for specific projects while helping to create a sense of community and participation among those involved. Thus, the inclusion of feasts throughout these Ur III building projects, especially upon their completion, would have both socialized the laborers in the state’s ideology and celebrated their work. Given the lack of evidence for the socio-economic circumstances of those laboring on Ur III national building projects, the accuracy of Gelb’s model is not easily judged here. It is, however, once again difficult to square Diakonoff’s notion of the exploited slave-serf with the evidence for workers’ experiences on these projects. While they may have been obligated to perform this labor, one could hardly consider such excessive rations and frequent feasting to be a tool for the further exploitation of labor. In light of this, it may be useful to explore a different approach to early Mesopotamian labor that takes more seriously the participation of laborers.

State Labor as Participation

Let us review my definition of state labor in its entirety: “state labor” is that work performed on the land of or on behalf of those institutions which organized labor on a scale requiring an administration and record-keeping, namely the estates of the palace, temples, and high-ranking officials. This encompasses the labor performed in the three case studies discussed above. To this definition, I would add the notion of labor as participation in lieu of exploitation. By “participation” I do not refer to a voluntary partaking, but rather a state of being in relation to a whole. Though at first glance this may appear a vacuous

49 Diakonoff 1976, 61.

50 Steinkeller 2015, 143.

51 Steinkeller 2015, 145.

52 Ibid. 200. Steinkeller drew heavily on M. Dietler and I. Herbich’s 2001 essay, “Feasts and Labor Mobilization: Dissecting a Fundamental Economic Practice,” in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power* edited by M. Dietler and B. Hayden, Smithsonian Institution Press, 240-264.

addition, participatory state labor acknowledges the relationship between the laborer and organizing institution, that relationship which is the only reason we have record of such labor today, while avoiding the overly-generalizing implications of approaching labor as primarily exploitative.⁵³ In this way the great variety of social arrangements within early Mesopotamian labor is appreciated and potential new paths of thinking about these issues are not precluded. It is worth noting that such an approach does not deny that individuals in this period were exploited, sometimes to fatal extremes, for their labor, but readily accepts such characterizations when supported by the evidence.

There are two additional facets of state labor in which a participatory approach may prove productive. The first concerns the idea of state-building, a process of some importance at the dawn of territorial states in 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia. Participation, being conceived as a relationship, can be explored in both directions; just as the socio-economic circumstances of the laborer can be framed in terms of the institution for which he labors, so too can the socio-economic setting of growing state institutions be examined by their relation to those who labor for them.⁵⁴ The second facet is related to the avoidance of generalization in a participatory approach. By adopting an approach that does not attempt to systematize methods of institutional exploitation, room is left for the possibility that labor was not always organized in a systematic way. In fact, it seems likely that administrators would sometimes have adopted ad hoc solutions to emerging conditions, especially among the rising and falling states of early Mesopotamia. Such a possibility can only be corroborated by further research into specific cases of labor where the evidence allows us to explore the relationship between the laborers and their administering institution.⁵⁵

Conclusion

This essay has surveyed previous models of society and labor for 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia in order to test them against three case studies. The models put forth by Ignace Gelb and Igor Diakonoff were met with mixed results, the cause of which was posited to be the centering of their models upon the exploitative nature of labor. The case studies revealed a greater variety of social arrangements within which ancient laborers were situated than fully accounted for in earlier models. A new framing of labor in early Mesopotamia was formulated as a heuristic tool for analyzing primary evidence. Conceiving of state labor as primarily a relationship between laborer and administering institution has been put forth as a potentially productive approach, the usefulness of which would need to be explored through further research.

⁵³ Recall the foreman-turned-overseer of the foresters of Ur III Umma who, despite having a scribal education, was listed alongside physical laborers. Steinkeller 1987, 100.

⁵⁴ This is one sense where the notion of participation as a voluntary partaking may be useful, insofar as any individual could voluntarily choose whether or not to "opt in" to state projects.

⁵⁵ Prosopographic analyses of the kind seen in Steinkeller 1987 would prove especially useful in this regard.

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LOANS FROM THE PEISER ARCHIVE

JOHN MELLING

The Peiser archive is a collection of texts owned and published by F. E. Peiser in 1905. Although Assyriology has come a long way as a field since 1905, there has not been an effort to retranslate this collection of texts.¹ The reinterpretation of these texts would not mean a dramatic change within the field of Assyriology, but would provide an updated and critical analysis to a corpus of texts that will add to our understanding of documents from the Kassite period as a whole by making the corpus more accessible to contemporary Assyriologists. This paper aims to provide modern translations for the loan documents from the Peiser archive, specifically texts P 87, 102, 115, 121, and 131.²

To understand the collection and the tablets within it, the provenance and archival context of the collection must be established. While there is little known about the physical context as the tablets were looted, there are clues to be gained about the geographical location and the time frame from information within the texts themselves. After the context has been established, this paper will provide a transliteration, translation, and textual commentary for all 5 of the texts mentioned above. Following this, this paper will comment on the legal nature of the loan documents by first analyzing the formula that the loans follow and noting the interesting variations and what they could mean. I will be relying heavily on the loan formula described by Sassmannshausen in order to compare how these loans are structured to other loans within the Kassite period.³ Lastly, the legal actors will be identified and any links between actors or roles that they play within these texts will be included.

Provenance and the Archival Context

One of the primary issues with looking into this collection of texts from the Peiser archive is that there is no known provenance to the archive. Of the tablets at the time of Peiser's 1905 publication, 59 were from his own collection and 1 of the texts was from the Königliche museum in Berlin.⁴ There were also 10 tablets associated with this

1 1862-1921 Peiser F. E. (Felix Ernst), *Urkunden Aus Der Zeit Der Dritten Babylonischen Dynastie.*, ed. 1849-1919 Kohler Josef (Berlin,: W. Peiser, 1905).

2 Sassmannshausen does ascribe TCL 9, 47 and 56 as loan documents from this family; however, I did not find enough information throughout those texts to relate them to the 5 loan documents from Peiser's collection. Peiser, 3, 13, 17, 21, 25; Leonhard Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge Zur Verwaltung Und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in Der Kassitenzeit, Baghdader Forschungen.* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2001), 195.

3 Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge Zur Verwaltung Und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in Der Kassitenzeit.*

4 Peiser, *Urkunden Aus Der Zeit Der Dritten Babylonischen Dynastie.*

archive in the Louvre.⁵ Peiser believes that the 60 known texts are likely only half of the actual archive.⁶ Today, the tablets that were in Peiser's personal collection are housed in the Liagre Böhl Collection in Leiden and the remaining tablets are still at the Louvre.⁷ Peiser himself never said where he acquired the tablets, only mentioning the state that the tablets were in when he received them in crates.⁸ This unfortunately means we do not have a proper physical context for this archive, although there are several toponyms noted by Brinkman that could suggest the archive is located somewhere around the city of Babylon.⁹ The documents within the Peiser archives fall within the Kassite period (c. 1475 – 1155 BCE) as early as the 7th regnal year of Kadašman-Enlil to the first regnal year of Kaštiliašu.¹⁰

The archive itself is a private, family archive centered around Nabû-šarraḥ and his descendants. Peiser mentions that the transactions in the archive were both for the families own interests and the interests of the state, but that is difficult to see through the small subsection of documents that this paper discusses.¹¹ The types of contracts and receipts in the archive cover loans, purchases, leases, gifts, cattle contracts, administrative documents, and adoption contracts. There are a total of 5 loans within the Peiser archive, all for sizeable amounts of grain, and most of them are interest-bearing. In the following section, all 5 loans will be analyzed with a transliteration, translation, and commentary.

The Texts

P 87

- O. 1. [x] + 0;1.0.0 ŠE.BAR GIŠ.BAN₂ 5 SILA₃
 O. 2. [KI] ^{md}AG-EN-DINGIR.MEŠ
 O. 3. [DUMU] ^{md}AG-šar-aḥ
 O. 4. ^mMan-di-i-tu₄-DINGIR
 O. 5. [DUM]U ^mSAG.IL₂-MA.AN.SUM
 O. 6. [Š]U.BA.AN.TI
 O. 7. [ŠE] u₃ MAŠ₂.BI
 O. 8. [*i-na*]a 1 ŠE GUR 0;2.2.0
 O. 9. [I₃].AG₂.E
 R. 1. [IGI MA.AN.SU]M?-^dAG
 R. 2. [DUMU ...]-DINGIR-*da-ni*
 R. 3. [IGI mK]*i-din*-^dGIR₃
 R. 4. [DUMU ^m]ŠEŠ-TUR

5 1862-1921 Peiser F. E. (Felix Ernst), *Urkunden Aus Der Zeit Der Dritten Babylonischen Dynastie.*, ed. 1849-1919 Kohler Josef (Berlin,: W. Peiser, 1905), VII.

6 Peiser, VII.

7 J. A. Brinkman, *A Catalogue of Cuneiform Sources Pertaining to Specific Monarchs of the Kassite Dynasty*, ed. J. A. Brinkman, Materials and Studies for Kassite History (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1976), 46.

8 Peiser, *Urkunden Aus Der Zeit Der Dritten Babylonischen Dynastie.*, V.

9 Brinkman, *A Catalogue of Cuneiform Sources Pertaining to Specific Monarchs of the Kassite Dynasty*, 46

10 Brinkman, 46.

11 Peiser, *Urkunden Aus Der Zeit Der Dritten Babylonischen Dynastie.*, VII-VIII.

- R. 5. [iⁱⁱAP]IN.DU₈.A UD.5.KAM
 R. 6. [MU].12.KAM
 R. 7. [Ša-ga-ra]-ak-ti-šur-ia₂-^raš₃⁷
 R. 8. [Š]AR₃ KI.ŠAR₂.RA
 R. 9. [šu-pur] ^mMan-di-i-tu₄-DINGIR
 R. 10. [*ki-m*]a ^{NA4}KIŠIB-š_u₂

(O. 1 – O. 6) x + 60 (*qû*) of barley using the 5 *sûtu* measure, [fr]om Nabû-bêl-ilī, the [so]n of Nabû-šarraḥ, Mandītu-ili, the [so]n of Sagil-iddina, received. (O. 7 – O. 9) [The grain] and its interest, (which is) [fo]r every 1 *kur* (of) grain 140 (*qâ*), he will [mea]sure out. (R. 1 – R. 4) [The witness (is) Iddin]a-Nabû, the son of [...]ili-dani. [The witness (is) Ki]din-Nergal, [the son of] Aḥu-apli. (R. 5 – R. 8) [In the 8th] month, on the 5th day in the 12th [year] of [[Šagara]kti-Šuriaš, [the ki]ng of totality. (R. 9 – R. 10) [The fingernail] of Mandītu-ili, [in place] of his seal.

Comments

- O. 1. The first portion of the amount of the loan is not entirely visible. I initially thought this could be a ŠU (60 *kur*); however, none of the loans in the Peiser archive are that large.
 O. 2. I substituted the KI as part of the sign is visible and all the texts apart from P 131 use KI. All following KI substitutions will use the same reasoning.
 O. 3. I added DUMU to the destroyed section because indicating the father of the creditor, debtor, and witnesses are common throughout these 5 texts. All following DUMU substitutions will use the same reasoning.
 O. 6. I completed the ŠU in my transliteration as a portion of the sign was visible and all texts apart from P 131 use the construction ŠU.BA.AN.TI (*ilqê* he received). All following substitutions within the construction ŠU.BA.AN.TI will use the same reasoning.
 O. 7. I added the ŠE to the destroyed portion of this section as ŠE u₃ MAŠ₂.BI (the grain and its interest) occurs also in P 102 and 121.
 O. 8 I completed the *i-na* from the destroyed section as it would best explain the construction indicating the interest from the loan. There is a parallel in BagM 13, 24 where *i-na* is used to indicate the interest of the loan.¹²
 O. 9 I supplemented the I₃ in the destroyed section of this line as the I3.AG2.E construction is repeated in all other texts.
 R. 1. I substituted IGI for this section as all the other loans use IGI as a means of indicating the witnesses. For the following substitutions of IGI I will be using the same reasoning. Most of the name is not visible in this line. I deferred to Peiser's translation with this line as he had the broader corpus to consult.¹³
 R. 9. I substituted *šu-pur* in the damaged portion of this line because throughout the loans,

12 Kessler, Karlheinz, "Kassitische Tontafeln von Tell Imlihiye," *Baghdader Mitteilungen: Deutsche Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilungen, Baghdader Mitteilungen*, 13 (1982): 95–96.

13 Peiser, *Urkunden Aus Der Zeit Der Dritten Babylonischen Dynastie.*, 2.

when there are 2 lines it is always the fingernail of the debtor followed by GIM or *ki-ma* and ^{na4}KIŠIB-*šu*₂. For the following substitutions surrounding this construction I will use the same reasoning.

R. 10. See the previous comment

P 102

- O. 1. 10;0.0.0 ŠE.BAR ŠE UR5.RA GIŠ.BAN2 5 SILA3
 O. 2. KI ^{md}KUR.GAL-URU₄-iš
 O. 3. DUMU ^{md}AG-šar-ra-^raḥ⁷
 O. 4. ^mKi-din-^dGu-la
 O. 5. DUMU ^mSAG.IL₂-da-a-a-an
 O. 6. ŠU.BA.AN.TI *i-na* UD-mu
 O. 7. ŠE *u*₃ MAŠ₂.BI
 O. 8. 1;2.3.0 I₃.AG₂.E
 R. 1. [...]
 R. 2. [...]
 R. 3. [IG]I ^mu-bar-rum
 R. 4. [DUM]U ^{md}AG-šar-ra-^raḥ⁷
 R. 5. [...]
 R. 6. [...]
 R. 7. [...]
 R. 8. [...]
 R. 9. [...] UD.14.KAM MU.[...]
 R. 10. [*Ku-du*]*r-ri*-^dEn-lil₂ [ŠAR3.E]
 R. 11. [*šu-p*]*ur* ^mKi-din-^dGu-la
 R. 12. GIM ^{na4}KIŠIB-*šu*₂

(O. 1) 3,000 (*qâ*) of barley as a grain, interest-bearing loan using the 5 *sûtu* measure, (O. 2 – O. 6) from Amurru-ēriš, the son of Nabû-šarraḥ, Kidin-Gula, the son of Sagil-dajjān, received. (O. 7 – O. 8) He will measure out the grain and its interest, (which is) 450 (*qâ*). (R.1 – R.8) [... The wit]ness (is) Ubārum [the s]on of Nabû-šarraḥ. (R. 9 – R. 12) [...] on the 14th day in the [...] year of Kudur-Enlil, the King. [The finger]nail of Kidin-Gula, instead of his seal.

Comments

- R. 3. I restored IGI as the first sign as every text, apart from 131, begins with a section of witnesses on the reverse of the tablet and some of the sign is visible on the copy. Peiser also adds an IGI.¹⁴
 R. 4. DUMU was restored as it follows the witness and the common construction among these loans indicates a witness and then follows by indicating his or her father.

¹⁴ Peiser, 12.

Peiser also adds a DUMU.¹⁵ I supplemented the *aḥ* after the personal name as Nabû-šarraḥ appears in every text as the ancestor of multiple actors in these texts and it is constructed the same way.

P 115

- O. 1. [... ŠE.BAR UR5.RA G]IŠ.BAN₂ 5 SILA₃
 O. 2. *i*?-*n*[a ...]
 O. 3. KI ^{rmd}UTU-*ma*-...]
 O. 4. ^{md}Mar-t[*u*-...]
 O. 5. DUMU ^{md}AG-šar-^raḥ⁷
 O. 6. ŠU.BA.AN.TI *i-na* MU.6.KAM
 O. 7. ŠE.BAR GIŠ.BAN₂ 5 SILA₃ I₃.AG₂.^rE⁷
 R. 1. [...]
 R. 2. [...]
 R. 3. [...]
 R. 4. [...]
 R. 5. [^{iti}...] ^rUD⁷.10.KAM MU.5.K[AM]
 R. 6. [*Ku-dur*-^d]^rEn-lil₂ ŠAR3.E⁷
 R. 7. [*šu-pur* ...]
 R. 8. [GIM]^{rna4}KIŠIB⁷-^r[*šu*₂]

(O. 1 – O. 2) [*x* (*qâ*) of barley as an interest-bearing loan] with the 5 *sûtu* measure, in the [...], (O. 3 – O. 6) that from Šamaš-*ma*-[...], Martu-[...], son of Nabû-šarraḥ, received. (O. 7.) He will measure out the barley with the 5 *sûtu* measure. (R. 1 – R. 4) [...] (R. 5 – R. 8.) [In the ... month] on the 10th day in the 5th ye[ar of Kudur-]Enlil, the king. [The fingernail of ..., without his] seal.

Comments

- O. 1. I added ŠE.BAR as it comes up in line O. 7. I added UR₅.RA because this resembles the style of an interest-bearing loan; however, I am not entirely convinced that it could not also be UR₅ SUMⁱⁿ for a given loan, as there is no interest indicated in the visible lines.
 O. 2. Some of this line is visible, but I cannot make any sense of the visible signs. There is also no common line in any of the other loans from the Peiser archive.
 O. 5. I supplemented the rest of Nabû-šarraḥ, as he is a common ancestor of actors in the loans from the Peiser archive.
 R. 6. I added *Ku-dur* to the missing area because there is a visible En-lil₂ following the destroyed portion in the copy. It could have been Kadašman-Enlil II; however, the available space according to the copy seems to be much too small for this name. Peiser favors the reading of Kudur-Enlil, while Brinkman does not make a guess

¹⁵ Peiser, 12.

beyond suggesting that the name may end with Enlil.¹⁶

- R. 7. I added *ṣu-pur* because there are 2 visible lines following the date formula, and as the other texts indicate this almost certainly means that there is a mention of the fingernail of the recipient of the loan followed by the indication that he is substituting his fingernail for his seal.
- R. 8. I added GIM and *ṣu₂* as this is the most common reading of the clause that indicates that the debtor is substituting his fingernail for his seal. However, the reading of the first damaged section could also be *ki-ma* as in P 87.

P 121

- O. 1. 5;3.2.0 ŠE UR₅(.RA) UR5 GIBIL G[IŠ.BAN₂ 5 SIL]A₃
O. 2. KI^{md}AG-EN-DINGIR.MEŠ
O. 3. ʾDUMUʾ^{md}AG-šar-ra-aḥ
O. 4. ^mKi-din-^dGIR₃ DUMU^mLUNGA₃
O. 5. ŠU.BA.AN.TI *i-na* ⁱⁱⁱʾBAR₂.ZAG^ʾ
O. 6. *a-na be-li₂-ša i-nam-din*
O. 7. ʾi^ʾ-na ⁱⁱⁱʾBAR₂.ZAG *ul* SUM-*ma*
O. 8. UD.BURU14.ŠE₃ ŠE *u₃* MAŠ₂.BI
O. 9. 1;2.3.0 I₃.AG₂.E
R. 1. I[GI ...]
R. 2. IGI [...]
R. 3. [...]
R. 4. [Ša-ga-rak-ti-š]u-ri-ia-aš
R. 5. LU[GAL.E] *ṣu-pur* ^mKi-din-^dGIR₃
R. 6. GIM^{na4}KIŠIB-*šu₂*

(O. 1) 1700 (*qâ*) as a grain loan, (which is) a new loan, with the [5 *sûtu* meas]ure, (O. 2 – O. 5) that from Nabû-bêl-ilî, the son of Nabû-šarraḥ, Kidin-Nergal, the son of the brewer, received. (O. 5 – O. 6) In the 1st month, it will be given to its owner. (O. 7 – O. 9) (If) in the 1st month it is not given, on the day of the harvest the grain and its interest, being 450 (*qâ*), will be measured out. (R. 1) The wit[ness (is) ...]. (R. 2)The witness (is) [...]. (R. 3 – R. 5) [... of Šagarakti-Š]uriaš, the King. (R. 5 – R. 6) The fingernail of Kidin-Nergal, without his seal.

Comments

- O. 1. I felt that the best interpretation of the sign construction in this line as an indication of the type of loan followed by a qualifier that the loans is an UR₅.GIBIL (new loan). There are other examples of types of loans in Sassmannshausen; however, I think that this is this construction works best with the visible signs.¹⁷ I completed

16 Brinkman, *A Catalogue of Cuneiform Sources Pertaining to Specific Monarchs of the Kassite Dynasty*, 203; Peiser, *Urkunden Aus Der Zeit Der Dritten Babylonischen Dynastie.*, 16.

17 Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge Zur Verwaltung Und Gesellschaft Babylonians in Der Kassitenzeit*, 196.

GIŠ.BAN₂ 5 SILA₃ as some of the signs were visible and this construction is common throughout the loans in the Peiser archive.

- O. 4. The mLUNGA3 is a great example of a profession being used as a patronym, which is discussed in detail by Brinkman.¹⁸
- O. 6. I agreed with Peiser's reading of NI as *li₂*.¹⁹
- R. 1. I added the IGI, both because the sign is partially visible, and because the reverse of most of the loans in the Peiser archive begins with a brief selection of witnesses introduced by IGI.

P 131

- O. 1. [...] 6;3.4.0 ŠE.BAR GIŠ.BAN₂ 5 SILA₃
O. 2. [ša] *i-na* ŠU^fSag-gi-ia
O. 3. [DUMU].MUNUS^mAl-ba-da^{md}AG-EN-DINGIR.MEŠ
O. 4. [DUMU] ʾ^{md}AG-šar₂-raḥ *im-ḥu-ur-ma*^ʾ
O. 5. [...] ʾBa-^rni^{-ti} lu?-hi-ma?
O. 6. [ʾBa-ni]-tu₄ *i-kul-ma*
O. 7. [...] -a? SAG-du 6 (kur) 1 PI ŠE.BAR
O. 8. [...] UR₅.RA I₃.AG₂.E
O. 9. [*i-na*] 1;2.3.0 ŠE.BAR *mit-ḥar* GIŠ.BAN₂ 5 SILA₃
O. 10. [ʾSag-gi-ia] *u₃* ʾBa-ni-ti
O. 11. [DUM]U.MUNUS^mAl-ba-da
O. 12. ^{md}AG-EN-DINGIR.MEŠ
R. 1. DUMU^{md}AG-šar₂-raḥ *u₂-kin-nu*
R. 2. UD.BURU₁₄.ŠE₃ SAG-du-šu
R. 3. I₃.AG₂.E
R. 4. IGI^mKi-din-^dGIR₃ DUMU^mŠEŠ-TUR.UŠ
R. 5. IGI^mTI.LA-su-^dAMAR.UTU DUMU^mDINGIR-ʾSUM^ʾ-na
R. 6. ʾⁱⁱⁱʾAPIN UD.6.KAM MU.12.KAM
R. 7. ʾŠa₂-gar-ak-ti-šur-ia-aš ŠAR3.E

(O. 1 – O. 4) [...] + 2020 (*qâ*) of barley measured with the 5 *sûtu* measure, [that] from the hand of Saggia, the [daug]hter of Albada, Nabû-bêl-ilî, the [so]n of Nabû-šarraḥ, received. (O. 5 – O. 6) [...] Banîtu (?), and [...] Banîtu consumed. (O. 7 – O. 8) The capital being 1860 (*qâ*) of barley [... she?] will weigh out as an interest-bearing loan. (O. 9 – R. 1) (If) Nabû-bêl-ilî, the son of Nabû-šarraḥ, will [hand] over 450 (*qâ*) of barley equally using the 5 *sûtu* measure to [Saggia] and Banîtu, daughters of Albada, (R. 2 – R. 3) on the day of the harvest, he will weigh out his capital. (R. 4 – R. 7) The witness (is) Kidin-Nergal, the son of Aḥi-apli. The witness (is) Uballissu-Marduk, the son of Ili-iddina. In the 8th month, on the

18 J. A. Brinkman, "The Use of Occupation Names as Patronyms in the Kassite Period: A Forerunner of Neo-Babylonian Ancestral Names?" in *A Catalogue of Cuneiform Sources Pertaining to Specific Monarchs of the Kassite Dynasty*, ed. Tzvi Abusch et al., *Materials and Studies for Kassite History*; (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1976), 30.

19 Peiser, *Urkunden Aus Der Zeit Der Dritten Babylonischen Dynastie.*, 20.

6th day, in the 12th year of Šagarakti-Šuriaš, the King.

Comments

- O. 2. I completed the ša as it is partially visible and is likely not a KI. According to Sassmannshausen, the phrase *ina qāt* can stand in for the KI.²⁰
- O. 5. I cannot make any sense of the broken section before the name Banītu, and I cannot provide an adequate translation for the 3 signs following her name.
- O. 6. I prefer the substitution of the name Banītu here as she appears in the previous line and there is an idea of continuity expressed by the coordinating ma in both verbs from O. 5 and O. 6.
- O. 7. I thought the damaged section of this line could theoretically be Saggia's name, as it potentially ends with an [i]a. However, I do not feel confident in making this interpretation. I am still giving agency in the verb in O. 8 to a female as there are two mentioned throughout the text.
- O. 8. Apart from potentially more information about the amount of the interest-bearing loan carried over from line O. 7, I do not have any possible substitutions for the damaged portion of this line.
- O. 9 *mit-ḥar* could either be a means of saying the amount mentioned earlier in the line is received, or it could be used to mean equally divided. I preferred the latter interpretation.²¹
- O. 10. I replaced the broken section of this line with Saggia's name, as she is already a known daughter of Albada, and can be paired with the new information that Banītu is also a daughter of Albada. However, this is not a perfect interpretation as the information lacking in the missing segments from O. 5 – O. 9 could change this interpretation.
- R. 1. There are many variants of *kānu* according to the CAD. Sassmannshausen gives a possible reading from a similar loan in OIP 97 number 23 where he reads, "hat er übergeben."²² However, in this context it would make more sense for the verb to indicate the confirmation of the outstanding lone.

Legal Commentary

The 5 texts detailed above all have a fairly consistent formula that they follow, although P 131 may not be a traditional loan contract so there will be clear variations.²³ The texts start by mentioning the volume of the capital that they are giving as a loan. In this case, the product is always barley. What comes next is the designation as a loan

and the 5 *sūtu* measurement by which all the loans are weighed out. A majority of the documents classify themselves as an UR₅.RA or a *ḥubullu* which is an interest-bearing loan; however, in P 131 UR₅.RA does not show up until later in the text and P 87 does not directly indicate that it is a loan at all.²⁴ In P 121, the contract is indicated as a grain loan in the first line, but also qualified as a UR₅.GIBIL (a new loan). In contrast to P 121, P 131 is likely the confirmation of a new loan which was only partially repaid. After the amount has been given the creditor and his ancestor are mentioned. Most frequently, the creditor is introduced by KI (from), although text P 131 is introduced by *ina qāt* (from the hand of...)²⁵ The creditor is followed by the debtor and his ancestor.

After the creditor and debtor have been named, the receiving of the amount loaned by the debtor is written normally by ŠU.BA.AN.TI, *ilqê* (he received). The only loan that differentiates from this phrase is P 131, which substitutes *imḥur-ma* (he received) for the amount that has already been paid back. Following the first action, the return clause is given indicating that the barley must be paid back, often with its interest, to the creditor. The return clause generally starts by introducing the date by which the loan must be paid back with UD.BURU₁₄.ŠE₃ (on the day of the harvest). This date can also show up as in P 102 (*i-na UD-mu*) with the same meaning.²⁶ P 115 is an interesting exception to this section as the harvest date is not mentioned at all, but rather the next year (*i-na MU.6.KAM*). It is difficult to say why another year is being mentioned, unless for whatever reason this is a loan at an extended length of time.

The agents of the text are followed by what must be given back, which is indicated consistently by the verb I₃.AG₂.E, *imaddad* (he will measure out). What is given back to the creditor can vary based upon the loan. P 87, 102, and 121 all use the phrase ŠE u₃ MAŠ₂.BI (the grain and its interest) referring to the original barley loan and the interest collected over time. On the other hand, P 115 reiterates that what is given back is the barley measured by the 5 *sūtu* measure, potentially indicating there is no interest or an assumed interest. P 121 and 131 are more interesting yet as they both appear to have a contingency clause along with their return clause. In P 121, line O. 5 can be identified as the initial return clause, whereby the loan must be given in the 1st month. The following lines go on to say that if he does not return the loan in the 1st month, he will have to weigh out the loan and its interest. The first time I₃.AG₂.E shows up in P 131 follows a section that discusses actions by Banītu and the SAG-du (capital) of someone, possibly Saggia.²⁷ The repayment of the SAG-du is analyzed by Sassmannshausen as an indication of the original amount of the loan.²⁸ This would indicate that the loan in question ultimately is not an interest-bearing loan. However, the section is difficult to translate as there is a lot of context lost by the destroyed sections. The returning verb is preceded by UR₅.RA which is unusual compared to the other texts, but as the verb is there following the giving of what

20 Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge Zur Verwaltung Und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in Der Kassitenzeit*, 196.

21 Renger, Johannes M., Stol, Marten, and Elswick, Marjorie, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago: M, Part I*, ed. Oppenheim, Adolph L., Reiner, Erica, and Biggs, Robert D., vol. 10, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1978), 65–66.

22 Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge Zur Verwaltung Und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in Der Kassitenzeit*, 196.

23 I have opted to include P 131 as it details ongoing loans for the family of Nabû-šarraḥ.

24 P 115 may also not be an interest-bearing loan, because the portion that would indicate the UR₅.RA is destroyed. However, the structure of the document resembles the other interest-bearing loans, so my best guess is that it is.

25 The phrase "*ina qāt*" is an acceptable substitution for KI according to Sassmannshausen; Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge Zur Verwaltung Und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in Der Kassitenzeit*, 196.

26 Sassmannshausen, 197.

27 The only visible sign after the broken section is a which is a good candidate for the final sign of Saggia's name: *ia*.

28 Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge Zur Verwaltung Und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in Der Kassitenzeit*, 197.

appears to be a loan it is safe to say there is some level of return happening between at least Banīti and either Saggia or Nabû-bēl-ilī.

After the return clause the witnesses and their ancestors are mentioned, followed by the date. The final section of the formula is the officiation of the document itself. Throughout these 5 texts, the most common way of officiating the document is with fingernail impressions, although no fingernail marks are indicated in the copies. The archetypical phrase can be seen in P 121, R. 5 – 6, *ṣu-pur mKi-din-dGIR₃* R. 6. GIM^{na4}KIŠIB-*ṣu₂* (The fingernail of Kidin-Nergal, in place of his seal.). P 131 does not have this final officiation section. This could mean several things. Administrative records like BE 15 no. 59 also lack any means of officiation, leading to the idea that this may also be simply a record of prior transactions. The clear imperfective element in the return clause verb I₃.AG₂.E, and no totaling of the amounts gained or lost from the loans, suggests that the return clauses in P 131 had not yet been satisfied and these loans were likely ongoing at the time of this text.

These loans contained a lot of actors, some primary agents of a transaction and others simply witnessing the transaction in order to guarantee its legitimacy. The primary actors of these documents are the descendants of Nabû-šarraḥ, specifically: Nabû-bēl-ilī and Amurru-ēriš. There are other descendants within the loans; however, they either come up in the witness section as in P 102 with Ubārum, or their names are not entirely legible like in P 115 (Martu-?). Nabû-šarraḥ is likely not the direct father of all of these men; what is more likely is that he is a common ancestor that allows them to claim legitimacy within the family organization.²⁹ Nabû-bēl-ilī is the individual with the most actions throughout the texts. He is featured in P 87, 121, and 131 acting as the creditor in loans P 87 and P 121, but as the debtor in P 131. Amurru-ēriš, on the other hand, only appears in P 102 as the creditor, yet in his short analysis of the Peiser archive Brinkman notes that Amurru-ēriš is one of the most prevalent individuals throughout the entire corpus.³⁰ All of the loans that Nabû-bēl-ilī is mentioned in happen under the reign of Šagarakti-Šuriaš and the Amurru-ēriš text was written in the 5th year of Kudur-Enlil. With a gap of at least 4 years between the two actors, it is possible that the responsibilities of loaning were given to Nabû-bēl-ilī somewhere during that period.

Kidin-Nergal is another consistent presence within the archive, possibly denoting a long-standing business partner with the family. His ancestor Aḥu-apli, mentioned by name in R. 4 of P 131 and R. 4 of P 87, provides us a little information about what type of clients the family of Nabû-šarraḥ was lending to. In P 121, Kidin-Nergal is listed as a debtor in a transaction with Nabû-bēl-ilī where his ancestor is listed under his occupation as a LUNGA₃ (brewer). This demonstrates a nice private interaction between the family operation with the capital to invest in a family of brewers. The 2 debtors from P 87 and P 102, Mandītu-ilī and Kidin-Gula, both share an ancestor with the name Sigil, although it is unclear if they are the same person. The ancestors name appears as Sagil-iddina in P 87 and either as Sagil-dajjān or Sagil the judge in P 102. If the spelling of the name is the latter, the nature of the transaction could potentially be oriented around the state.

29 There is a parallel to the idea of a common ancestor shared amongst multiple agents in AOAT, MAI 19.

30 Brinkman, *A Catalogue of Cuneiform Sources Pertaining to Specific Monarchs of the Kassite Dynasty*, 46.

Conclusion

Although F. E. Peiser should be commended for his quick work in preserving these tablets with drawings and translations, the field of Assyriology has advanced extensively since 1905. Our modern understanding of the cuneiform signs and the structure of Mesopotamian legal contracts allow for a more detailed and accurate interpretation of these interest-bearing loans and this paper serves as a small part of a much larger and necessary modernization effort for this archive. The updated translations for these texts allowed for a succinct yet enlightening legal analysis that detailed the formulaic construction of the loans in comparison to other Kassite legal contracts, and analyzed the actors of the texts and their relationships to one another and the broader Kassite society. While this legal analysis is quite brief, it is the hope of this paper that the information it provides can be the steppingstone for a broader legal and prosopographical analysis of the contracts and actors within the Peiser archive.

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ASSYRIA:

AMARNA AGE ROOKIE OR VETERAN PLAYER?

TYLER TUMBLETY

1. Introduction

The Amarna Age is usually understood as a time of relative “international” stability and of increased diplomacy in the ancient Near East. Of the Great Powers who formed the core of this age, Assyria is typically considered a late comer, entering only on the heels of the disintegrating Mittani state. Assyria’s two letters, EA 15 and 16, are its contribution to this time of “international” relations. They don’t tell the full story, however, and scholars have been using them to reconstruct the narrative of contemporary Assyria. Artzi’s 1978 work was a pioneer in this respect because he saw these letters as part of a larger process of Assyrian independence. Traditionally, Assyria was considered the vassal of Mittani who was one of the “original” participants in the Amarna correspondence. Newer research, including Reculeau’s forthcoming work in the Oxford History of the Ancient Near East, attempts to combat the misrepresentations of Artzi’s work and of EA 15 and 16 by looking more holistically at the periods leading up to these texts. Now, this paper can argue that EA 15 and 16 represent not only the efforts of one king, Aššur-uballiṭ I, to raise his kingdom to regional and international power, but also the culmination of over a century of Assyrian aspirations for more power.

Following this introduction is a short section on the historical background of the Amarna texts and their context. A full translation of the texts in question will follow that. The fourth section will introduce Artzi’s 1978 work on EA 15 and 16, and its implications for our understand of Assyria. Afterwards, I will review common interpretations of EA 15 and 16 including their misrepresentations of Artzi’s analysis. My contribution will then reconsider the impacts of EA 15 and 16 in light of new research.

2. Background: Amarna Age and Amarna Tablets

The Amarna Age is typically considered the period from about 1403-1306 BCE.¹ It is roughly synchronous with the end of the 18th dynasty in Egypt. Most scholarship around this period centers on Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV), his new capital Akhetaten, and the tablets found there written in Akkadian (195). The tablets, which are the focus of this essay, span

1 Amélie Kuhrt, 1995, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-300 BC Volume 1* (London: Routledge), 194.

only 30 years; some argue only for about 15 years.² The archive begins around the thirtieth year of Amenhotep III (ca. 1373 BCE) who had extended Egypt’s imperial holdings to new heights and ends in around the first year of Tutankhamun (ca. 1345 BCE) when the royal court left Akhetaten. This new capital city was created by Akhenaten to worship the new cult of Aten, which he created. Along with this new cult came new art styles that diverged from the norm as well.³ This new cult, however, excluded the long traditions of other Egyptian gods, which led to conflict and when Akhenaten died, Tutankhamun moved the royal court and rejected the Aten cult.⁴

The texts in question were a part of this partially heretical period in Egypt, but also a part of a larger system of communications between Egypt, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia. This so-called Great Powers’ Club was exclusive to the largest “international” powers who called each other “Great Kings” and used familial language to discuss equals and subordinates.⁵ The tablets have been divided into international correspondence (letters sent between the Great Powers) and vassal correspondence (letters sent to and from the Egyptian vassals).⁶ Most of the letters are written in Akkadian, though there many regional variations and idiosyncrasies.⁷ This historical overview has been very brief, but the focus of this paper is Mesopotamia, not Egypt, and the years leading up to EA 15 and 16.

3. EA 15 and 16

In this essay I will follow Rainey’s translation of Amarna letters 15 and 16 as these are the newest and most updated translations. Rainey’s translations of both works will be given below for reference.

EA 15:

“(1–6) Say to the king of the land of E[gypt]: Thus Aššur-ubal[liṭ, the king of the land of (the god) A]ššur: For you, your house, for your land, for your chariotry and your troops, may all be well. (7–15) I have sent my envoy to you to see you and to see your land. Up to now, my fathers have not written. Today, I have written to you. [I] have sent to you an excellent chariot, two horses and one date-stone of genuine lapis lazuli as your greeting gift. (16–22) Do [n]ot delay the envoy whom I have sent to you for a visit. May he see and may he depart. May he see your behavior (nature) and the behavior (nature) of your land and may he depart.”⁸

EA 16:

“(1–4) Sp[ea]k to Napḫuriya [the great king], king of the land of Egypt, my

2 William L. Moran, 1992, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press), xxxiv.

3 Kuhrt, 199.

4 Kuhrt, 201-202.

5 Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, 2000, “Introduction: The Amarna System,” In *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Westbrook Raymond (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 6. cf. Liverani, “The Great Powers’ Club”, that volume.

6 William L. Moran, 1992, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press), xxii and xxvi.

7 Moran, xix.

8 Anson F. Rainey, 2015, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna based on Collations of all Extant Texts. Vol. 1. HdO 110* ed. Willam M. Schniewind (Leiden: Brill), 129.

brother. Thus (speaks) Ashur-uballit, king of the land of Assyria, the great king, your brother: (5) May it be well with you, with your household and your land. (6–8) When I saw your [am]bassadors I rejoiced greatly. May your envoys dwell in my presence in great ‘solit’itude. (9–12) A beautiful chariot for royalty, accoutered for me and two white horses accoutered for me, one chariot not accoutered and one cylinder seal of real lapis lazuli have I sent to you as your greeting gift. (13–18) Thus is the gift of a great king? Gold in your land is dirt. They gather it up. Why does it delay with your approval? I am engaged in building a new palace. Send as much gold as needed for its adornment and its needs. (19–21) When my father Ashur-nadin-aḫḫē sent to the land of Egypt, they sent to him twenty talents of gold. (22–25) When the Ḫanigalbatian king sent to your father, to the land of Egypt, they sent to him twenty talents of gold. (26–31) [I] am [equ]al to a Ḫanigalbatian king but you send [to me] [x minas of go]ld. It is not sufficient for the going and returning and the wages of my envoys. (32–34) ‘If’ your intention is truly genuine, send much g[ol]d and as for that house of yours, send to me so that they may bring what you need. (35–36) We are countries far apart. May our envoys thus continue to go back and forth. (37–42) That your envoys delayed coming to you, the Sutû who were their guides died. Until I could send (them) and they could take (new) Sutû guides, I delayed them. May my envoys not delay in coming. (43–55) As for the [am]bassadors, why are they continually standing outside so that they will die outside? If their standing outside is profitable to the king, then let them stand outside. Outside, let them die! Profit for the king or no[t], why should they die [outs]ide? As for the envoys that we [continually] se[nd,] then doubly, they should keep the envoys alive. [O]u[ts]ide they are killing (them).⁹

4. Artzi’s Interpretation

Pinḫas Artzi’s 1978 work was the first to look at EA 15 and 16 in the context of the Middle Assyrian period. His chapter set the precedent for how those two letters would be interpreted in the wider context of Assyrian history. Key in his argument is the idea of an “Extended Amarna Period”.¹⁰ The Amarna archive only covers a period of about 30 years, but Artzi wants to see these letters, especially EA 15 and 16, as part of a larger geo-political phase that lasted 250 years. He identifies “cooperation within conflict” between the powers identified in the Amarna letters where, for the first time, the Near East was under the yoke of these polities simultaneously.¹¹ This made the Near East into one geo-political entity. In this entity, kings strove not to compete for supremacy, but for legitimization of their equal “legal” status. Artzi argues that this period emphasized maintained reciprocity between powers that encompassed all human interaction. The “Extended Amarna Period”, he posits, rested on the cooperation of Assyria who broke with the conventions of the period in the 12th century BCE.¹²

Because Assyria, in Artzi’s reconstruction of this period, plays a pivotal role, EA 15

9 Rainey, 131 and 133.

10 Pinḫas Artzi, 1978, “The Rise of the Middle-Assyrian Kingdom, According to El-Amarna Letters 15 & 16,” In *Bar-Ilan Studies in History*, ed. Pinḫas Artzi (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press), 34.

11 Artzi, 34-35.

12 Artzi, 36.

and 16 are crucial to his argument. Artzi finds these letters as evidence of the “liberation” of Assyria from Mittani overlordship and the pressure of Kassite Babylon.¹³ He provides his own transliteration and translation of EA 15, but only refers to EA 16. To him, EA 15 should be considered a “Letter of Credence” sent by Aššur-uballiṭ to the Pharaoh.¹⁴ Here, King Aššur-uballiṭ of Aššur introduces himself to the pharaoh as a part of the kingdom’s debut to the international scene. As Artzi notes though, the header of the letter is short and distinguishes no relationship between the two powers.¹⁵ Absent, also, is the pharaoh’s name. Artzi argues this is because the Assyrian scribes were unsure how to spell it. Mynářová has a different interpretation of this omission (see section 6.). For the first time, however, an Assyrian king gives himself the title “king of the land of Aššur”.¹⁶ Artzi argues that because there is only one other attestation of this phrase from this period, the usage of “king of the land of Aššur” was likely Aššur-uballiṭ trying to follow the conventions of the Amarna letters and the titles of other independent kingdoms.¹⁷

Artzi takes the important lines 9-11 not literally, but as hyperbole. He notes that this letter and the presents that went with it were not the first time a king of Aššur had sent gifts to Egypt.¹⁸ The first time being in the reign of Thutmose III almost a century before. Artzi says that lines 9-11, “...9. That my forefathers until now 10. have not sent, 11. I have sent You today:... [lists of gifts]”,¹⁹ are not a statement of fact, but an argument by Aššur-uballiṭ that none of his forefathers had ever sent gifts of this quality.²⁰ This is an important detail because, as will be seen below, most other scholars take these lines literally and argue that EA 15 and 16 demonstrate an Assyrian debut onto the international scene. Artzi concludes that it was Aššur-uballiṭ’s expectation that the quality of the gifts would lead to “renewed” relations between the two powers.²¹

Artzi’s Extended Amarna Period begins not with the Amarna letters, but with the gifts Aššur sent to Egypt in the time of Thutmose III and hinges on Assyria’s striving to regain its place on the world stage.²² He argues that:

“[t]hroughout this entire period Assyria behaved in keeping with its basic national character, which remained dormant since the fall of the Old Kingdom of Assyria and the Assyrian trade colonies in Kaniš. But after all, throughout this ‘dark period’ too, it was (again) continuously ruled by kings of local dynasties, around whom there was a nucleus of population which had a tradition ready to be revived.”²³

Here Artzi stumbles on various modernist tripwires. To assume that a recognizable “Assyria”

13 Artzi, 25.

14 Artzi, 28.

15 Artzi, 29.

16 Artzi, 28 and 29.

17 Artzi, 29-30.

18 Artzi, 31.

19 Artzi, 28.

20 Artzi, 31-32.

21 Artzi, 32.

22 Artzi, 36.

23 Artzi, 36.

existed in the Old Assyrian period is to ignore the politically fragmented nature of the time. It's also unclear how he determines that these local dynasties and those surrounding them were waiting for Assyria to revive its tradition. Unfortunately, he seems to be projecting the Middle Assyrian kings' ambitions, especially those of Aššur-uballiṭ, onto the kings and people of Aššur in the 17th and 16th centuries BCE. In addition, Artzi seems to contradict himself by arguing that the Middle Assyrians were isolated in the international relations of the time while, at the same time, arguing that the Middle Assyrians were the catalysts, "heir[s]", and those who ended the Extended Amarna Period. His conclusion then makes generalizing claims about the "equality" and "equity" of the Extended Amarna Period and the "domination" that follows.²⁴

One more problematic detail of Artzi's work must be illustrated before moving on to other scholar's interpretations of EA 15 and 16. In Artzi's view, Assyria's move into the geo-political scene was a long process from obscurity to the limelight. Key in Assyria's struggle to reach international prominence again, is its subjugation by Mittani. Artzi argues that Mittani controlled Assyria until Thutmose III began to campaign in Syria, putting pressure on Mittani.²⁵ This was the catalyst for the first gifts sent by the contemporary Assyrian king. Further pressure on Mittani by the Hittites encouraged a second sending of gifts by Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē whose gifts were reciprocated by an Egyptian gift of gold.²⁶ By the time of Aššur-uballiṭ, Mittani was weak enough for him to extend his kingdom into what became known as Hanigalbat and what Artzi calls the "survivor" of Mittani.²⁷ The issue with this interpretation is not necessarily that Aššur is striving for more independence, but the notion of Assyria's vassalship under Mittani. Later scholarship has illustrated a more complex relationship between Mittani/Hanigalbat and Aššur. This will be tackled in section 6.

5. Other Common Interpretations of EA 15 and 16

This section will detail the common interpretations of EA 15 and 16 that came after Artzi's and their implications for our understandings of the Middle Assyrian Kingdom. This section will also discuss how Artzi's original, though fairly contradictory, ideas were misinterpreted by future scholars.

The first perspective in this section is Cohen and his "all in the family" theory. Before Cohen, it should be noted that Moran published updated translations of all the Amarna letters in 1992. His commentary remained mostly philological, though his title for EA 15 "Assyria joins the international scene" suggests a view of Aššur as an isolated polity at this time.²⁸ Cohen's perspective mirrors this view of Assyria. Firstly, he accepts Artzi's view of the Amarna letters as part of an "Extended Amarna Period".²⁹ Secondly, Cohen sees EA 15 as part of Aššur-uballiṭ's bid to enter the "family".³⁰ This family is largely metaphorical and part of the ideology of "Great Kings" as the paternal head of a large family unit (kingdom).³¹ Part of the diplomacy of the time was the recognition of equality by "adoptive kinship" where

two equal kings called each other "brother". Cohen then argues, citing Artzi 1978, that EA 15 was Aššur-uballiṭ's attempt to achieve brotherhood with the pharaoh via the use of "king of Assyria" and "king of Egypt" titles accompanied by greeting gifts.³² EA 16, as Cohen argues, reveals the success of EA 15 because Aššur-uballiṭ addresses Pharaoh by name and as a brother. While it's unclear how Egypt saw Aššur directly before EA 15, Cohen's interpretation implies that until EA 16 Assyria was not an international player. This interpretation flies in the face of Artzi's 1978 idea of Assyria growing in international prestige slowly over time, and his 1997 argument, mostly following his original position,³³ that EA 15 was a request for reentry into the larger geo-political scene.

Five years after Cohen's work, Lafont describes the initiating of diplomatic relations in a similar way. Here he quotes directly from EA 15, arguing that it is a template for how cooperation between two powers begins.³⁴ The basic ingredients are the sending of messengers and the giving of greeting gifts. His argument here only suggests a general scheme for which friendly relations should start but note 15 illustrates his view of the importance of EA 15. In that note he states that Assyria was a candidate for the "Great Powers' Club," initially contacting Pharaoh without the use of familial language. In addition, he argues EA 16 is the evidence that this mission succeeds, using "brother" to identify the two kings. At the end of the note he suggests we look at Artzi 1978 for more information. Artzi 1978, however, argues that this wasn't the first time Pharaoh and an Assyrian king spoke and that Assyria's rise was slower and related more to the weakening of Mittani than its "acceptance" by Egypt.

Feldman also uses Artzi's 1978 work to argue in a similar vein to Cohen. She cites Artzi while arguing that Assyria was rapidly assimilated into the international protocol.³⁵ As was seen in my analysis of Cohen and Lafont, Feldman uses Artzi's argument that EA 16 meant acceptance into the international scene but neglects Artzi's arguments about the history of Assyrian geo-political relations in the so-called Extended Amarna Period. Feldman argues that EA 15 was the first tentative step for Assyria into the international community and EA 16 meant that Egypt had accepted Assyria into the club despite its awkwardness.³⁶ Conversely, Artzi sees EA 16 as the culmination of hundreds of years of struggle with Mittani and Babylonia, and prior forays into the larger world in Thutmose III's time and Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē's time. Though neither Artzi's nor Feldman's assessment of Assyria at the time of the Amarna letters is entirely correct, more modern scholarship is moving in the right direction.

Shigeo Yamada in the Companion to Assyria notes the connections prior Assyrian kings had with Egypt. His understanding of Aššur up to EA 15 and 16 is a slow growth from city-state to a major power in the ancient Near East.³⁷ EA 15 and 16, therefore, represent attempts at independence by Aššur-uballiṭ, which is like Artzi's argument about them. In addition, Yamada sees EA 15 and 16 in the context of Aššur's "Mittanian overlord" and the

32 Cohen, 23.

33 Pinḫas Artzi, 1997, "EA 16," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 24 (2): 336.

34 Bertrand Lafont, 2001, "International Relations in the Ancient Near East: The Birth of a Complete Diplomatic System," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12 (1): 43-44.

35 Marian H. Feldman, 2006, "Assur Tomb 45 and the Birth of the Assyrian Empire," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 343: 39.

36 Feldman, 38-39.

37 Shigeo Yamada, 2017, "The Transition Period (17th to 15th Century BCE)," In *A Companion to Assyria*, ed. Eckhart Frahm (Malden, Massachusetts: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.), 115.

24 Artzi, 40-41.

25 Artzi, 36.

26 Artzi, 36-37 and 39.

27 Artzi, 37.

28 William L. Moran, 1992, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press), 37.

29 Raymond Cohen, 1996, "All in the Family: Ancient Near Eastern Diplomacy," *International Negotiations* 1: 14.

30 Cohen, 23.

31 Cohen, 14.

unclear feelings of Mittani leadership towards Aššur's political moves at that time.³⁸ First, he mentions the Synchronistic History that describes a treaty between the king of Aššur and the king of Babylon in the 15th century, which also resembles an even earlier treaty between the two parties. He then mentions EA 16 that describes Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē's diplomatic foray with Egypt and Pharaoh's return gift of a large amount of gold. It is debated whether it is the first Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē or the second, which has implications for chronology, but the event itself demonstrates good relations between Aššur and Egypt. Yamada believes this shows Aššur's desire for independence. Yamada's more holistic view of contemporary Assyrian political relations shows the development and revival of Artzi's ideas of long-term Assyrian growth.

In Valk's 2018 dissertation on Assyrian collective identity, the Amarna period is one small piece of the puzzle. Valk assigns 14th century BCE Assyria the usual trajectory given to it by scholars of a rapid rise to power and desire to join the "Great Powers' Club."³⁹ He does, however, acknowledge in a footnote that there is an alternate view of Aššur in this period.⁴⁰ He notes that EA 16 reveals a prior engagement between Aššur and Egypt, which he suggests could be "an otherwise undocumented prehistory for Aššur's ascent to great power status, which was punctuated by episodes of subjection to Mittani".⁴¹ Despite the problematic language of an "undocumented prehistory", Valk's proposal here corresponds well with the most recent research analyzed in section 6. Furthermore, Valk points to the Synchronistic History, which argues that parity between Babylonia and Assyria was achieved by the end of the 15th century BCE, not during the time of Aššur-uballiṭ.

6. My Interpretation of EA 15 and 16

Before I analyze the historical context of EA 15 and 16, Mynářová's analysis of the openings of both EA 15 and 16 will be considered. Mynářová's turns the attention towards the openings of the letters in the Amarna corpus. Traditionally, the openings had been viewed as formulae that served mostly as etiquette.⁴² Mynářová argues the opposite; the openings are important legal and diplomatic statements where simple derivations from the norm have important consequences. She considers EA 15 and 16 great examples of the importance of openings and the impacts of the changes to them.⁴³ In EA 15 Aššur-uballiṭ identifies himself only by his personal name and his title and identifies the addressee only by his title.⁴⁴ In EA 16, however, Aššur-uballiṭ identifies himself as a "great king" and identifies the addressee by his name and lifts himself to "brotherhood" with the king of Egypt. Here the difference is stark and suggests a vast improvement of the relationship between the two letters. Mynářová then understands the body of EA 15 in the canonical way as a "embassy mission" that none of Aššur-uballiṭ's forefathers had taken. She does understand EA 16, however, within the context of Aššur's prior contacts with Egypt, though she states that Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē's connection with Egypt hasn't been attested elsewhere.⁴⁵

38 Yamada, 114.

39 Jonathan Valk, 2018, *Assyrian Collective Identity in the Second Millennium BCE: A Social Categories Approach* (PhD dissertation, New York: New York University), 199.

40 Valk, n.448.

41 Valk, n.448.

42 Jana Mynářová, 2007, *Language of Amarna - Language of Diplomacy* (Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology), 53.

43 Mynářová, 131.

44 Mynářová, 132.

45 Mynářová, n.594.

It is from this inconclusive note about Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē's contacts with Egypt that I will begin my analysis. In order to do so, however, the extent to which Mittani controlled Aššur before EA 15 and 16 must be addressed first. The expansion of Mittani appeared to happen simultaneously with a slowly growing Aššur in 15th century BCE (Assyria did not exist at this point).⁴⁶ Aššur's king, Puzur-Aššur III not only built walls for the "new city" growing South of Aššur,⁴⁷ but according to the Synchronistic History and Chronicle P Puzur-Aššur III and Burna-Buriaš I came to a border agreement.⁴⁸ Certainly both "histories" are biased as their authors write on the sides of Assyria and Babylonia respectively.⁴⁹ The concordance of these sources, however, should be taken into account. In addition, we see Aššur founding a new city Habuba in Puzur-Aššur III's time.⁵⁰ For all these reasons Reculeau describes this period as the transition between the city-state of Aššur to the land of Assyria (māt Aššur) despite the lack of attestations of the phrase.

Aššur, or perhaps, Assyria then reached out to Egypt in the time of Thutmose III. There are Egyptian records of three such occasions: once in his 24th year, once in his 33rd year, and again in his 40th year.⁵¹ This adds at least one more diplomatic mission to Egypt, if we follow Artzi's argument that there was a visit during the reign of Thutmose III and then a visit during the reign of Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē I. Reculeau sees these events as happening synchronically. He attributes these visits to the reign Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē who ruled in the mid-15th century BCE. Furthermore, he argues that Mittani would not have accepted these kinds of diplomatic outreaches had Aššur been its vassal. The existence of Mittani's vassalage of Aššur, however, needs to be questioned. Mittani apparently plundered Aššur, taking away its gold and silver door, in the only direct reference to Mittani's conquest of Aššur in the last quarter of the 15th century BCE from a treaty 100 years later between the Hittites and Mittani.⁵² Llop-Raduà dates the plundering of Aššur to the mid-15th century and argues that a vassal of Mittani would neither have contacts with the Egyptian Pharaoh nor settle the border with Babylon as Aššur-bēl-nišēšu did in the Synchronistic History, 1'-4'.⁵³ Reculeau does point out, however, that this could have been done with Mittani approval or encouragement and that areas surrounding Aššur, including Arraphe, Nuzi, and the Middle Euphrates were all solidly under Mittani control at this time.⁵⁴

The situation in Aššur, however, seems completely different. Firstly, no records of tribute to Mittani have been found despite the later complaint by Šattiwaza that the Assyrians had stopped paying.⁵⁵ Tenu suggests this could be a bias in the sources where the

46 Hervé Reculeau, Forthcoming, "Assyria in the Late Bronze Age," In *Oxford History of the Ancient Near East. Vol. 3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 4 and 6.

47 Reculeau, 6.

48 Chronicle 21: 1'-8'; Chronicle 22: 1-3.

49 A. Kirk Grayson, 1975, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, New York: Augustin), 52 and 56-57.

50 Reculeau, 7.

51 Reculeau, 8.

52 Reculeau, 9.

53 Jaume Llop-Raduà, 2015, "Foreign Kings in the Middle Assyrian Archival Documentation," In *Understanding Hegemonic Practices of the Early Assyrian Empire. Essays Dedicated to Frans Wiggerman*, ed. Bleda S. Düring, (Leiden: Netherlands Institute for the Near East), 244.

54 Reculeau Forthcoming, 9-10.

55 Llop-Raduà 2015, 244.

texts documenting Mittani's overlord status have not been discovered.⁵⁶ Tenu, then goes on to question the validity of Aššur's vassalage altogether.⁵⁷ Llop-Raduà mentions the lack of sources as well, but only at the end of the section.⁵⁸ It appears also, that the kings of Aššur in the late-15th century were able to grant land without mentioning their supposed overlord⁵⁹ and had regular diplomatic and economic relations with Arraphe.⁶⁰ This is after Arraphe had taken the city of Habuba mentioned earlier, founded by Puzur-Aššur III.⁶¹

The 14th century BCE and the kingship of Eriba-Adad I (1390-1364 BCE) signal changes to Aššur's kingship and aspirations that would come to fruition in Aššur-uballiṭ's reign. It should be noted that Mittani's power overall was weakening in this time due to internecine conflict. Though the record is sparse for Eriba-Adad I, he does use the title "appointee of Enlil", which had not been used since Samsī-Addu's time, a lapse of almost 400 years.⁶² Reculeau, following Tenu,⁶³ suggests that the reclamation of this title suggests aspirations toward "territorial" rule.⁶⁴ Importantly, Eriba-Adad I also is the first Assyrian king to be identified as the šar māt Aššur, "king of the land of Aššur (Assyria)", predating Aššur-uballiṭ I's attestation. Aššur-uballiṭ's use of the phrase was contemporary, however, unlike Eriba-Adad I's. The uses of the title remain infrequent for many kings afterwards.

Now we arrive at the discussion of Aššur-uballiṭ I (1363-1328 BCE) and EA 15 and 16. Reculeau treats EA 15 and 16 in similar ways to scholars in section 5.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, he doesn't debate the significance of the two letters outside of their consequences for the "Great Powers' Club". Here, I'd like to suggest, based on Reculeau's understanding of the use of šar māt Aššur ("king of the land of Aššur"), that Aššur-uballiṭ's use of the phrase was only in keeping with the "language" of the Amarna letters. In other words, to identify oneself as a "great king, king of the land of x" was what the Great Powers did, and as part of his entrance into the "Great Powers' Club" he needed to recognize himself as the šar māt Aššur. It must be noted that by this time Aššur-uballiṭ had made great military advances in Mittani and Syria at large,⁶⁶ something his predecessors had not achieved. If we follow Maidman's chronology, EA 15 was sent the year after Aššur-uballiṭ sieged Waššukani, the former capital of Mittani, deposed Šattiwaza the Hittite puppet opposed to Assyria, and placed in his stead Šuttarna who was an Assyrian puppet.⁶⁷ The question then becomes: was EA 15 the culmination of years of Assyrian struggle like Artzi proposed or the result of one king's rapid rise to regional and then "international" power?

56 Aline Tenu, 2017, "Naissance de l'assyrie," In *La mésopotamie de Gilgamesh à Artaban 3300-120 av. j.-c.*, by Bertrand Lafont, Aline Tenu, Francis Joannès and Philippe Clancier (Paris: Belin), 540.

57 Tenu, 540-541.

58 Llop-Raduà 2015, 244.

59 Reculeau Forthcoming, 10.

60 Maynard P. Maidman, 2011, "Nuzi, the Club of the Great Powers, and the Chronology of the Fourteenth Century," *KASKAL: Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Antico* 8: 87.

61 Reculeau Forthcoming, 10.

62 Reculeau, 11.

63 Tenu 2017, 535-536.

64 Reculeau Forthcoming, 12.

65 Reculeau, 14-15.

66 Maidman 2011, 105-107.

67 Maidman, 124.

I propose a third option. Based on Reculeau's history of the Middle Assyrian Kingdom leading up to Aššur-uballiṭ, there appear to be aspirations of regional power by every king starting with Puzur-Aššur III. Contacts with Egypt are almost certain in the time of Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē I and Mittanian control of Aššur or Assyria during that period or later is questionable. Eriba-Adad I's desires for greater power set the tone for Aššur-uballiṭ I, but don't match the rapid and wide-ranging campaigns of Aššur-uballiṭ I. EA 15 and 16 are, therefore, the culmination of Assyria's past aspirations, but also the function of an opportunistic and expansionistic king. The suggestion that Assyria was isolated or a "new-comer" to the international scene should be rejected as Aššur's connections with Egypt in Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē's reign, border treaties with Babylon throughout the period, and hostile interactions with Mittani starting in the late 15th century BCE demonstrate Aššur and later Assyria's wide-ranging connections.

7. Conclusion

EA 15 and 16 provide a unique perspective on the growing power of the Assyrian throne in the Middle Assyrian period. Artzi's 1978 interpretation of these texts suggested the dramatic re-entry for Assyria onto the international stage after a century of conflict with Mittani. Later approaches misrepresented his theory, suggesting that Assyria was a politically isolated, upstart under a rapidly rising, militaristic king. Reculeau, and to some extent Valk, open up new *longue durée* approaches that harken back to Artzi, but with a wider perspective that includes the study of previous Assyrian kings and a have a critical eye for the idea of Mittanian overlordship. This produces another viable view for the context of EA 15 and 16. This is that Assyria was not politically isolated, but moving in and out of various extents of regional control in the 15th and 14th centuries BCE, and then expanding quickly with the military successes of Aššur-uballiṭ I. Furthermore, Aššur-uballiṭ was not the first Assyrian king to be identified as the šar māt Aššur, but he used the term sparingly and, in the cases of EA 15 and 16, he likely used the title to assimilate into the diplomatic traditions of the time. In the context of the Amarna Age, Assyria should, therefore, not be seen as a newcomer or under the thumb of Mittani, but as a regional player from the time before.

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ILLUSTRATIONS OF NIZAMI'S HAFT PEYKAR

Artistic Self-Representation and Religious Interpretations

MEGHAN BRADLEY

The *Haft Peykar* is known today as a famous romantic epic by Nizami of Ganja, also known as Nizami Ganjavi, who wrote it in the last decade of the twelfth century as his final work.¹ The title can be translated as "Seven Portraits," although it also has a figurative meaning of "The Seven Beauties".² In roughly AH 931/AD 1524-25, the *Haft Peykar* was illustrated by Shaikh Zada in a series of seven manuscript illustrations. When examining these illustrations, we must keep in mind that the way one views, interprets, and understands art is a process largely influenced by an individual's background and biases. Further, systems of knowledge are oftentimes intertwined with specific art. By focusing on the process of artistic self-representation and religious traditions within Sufi practices, I analyze the *Haft Peykar* illustrations in an attempt to understand how both processes mediate the interpretation of a painting and establish a sense of spiritual authority.

The *Haft Peykar* poem is a romanticized biography of the Sasanian ruler Bahram-e Gur. It begins with Bahram wandering through the palace one day when he comes across a locked room with seven portraits of seven princesses, "one from each of the seven climes," with whom he immediately falls in love.³ After becoming king and establishing his power, Bahram makes them all his brides, and has the architect create seven domes, one for each of them. With this, the architect informs the king that each of the climes is ruled by the seven planets, and "advises him to assure his good fortune by adorning each dome with the color associated with the clime and planet of its occupant".⁴

Thus, the seven domes are constructed, and the king visits a different wife each



Figure 1. "Bahram Gur in the Dark Palace on Saturday"

1 François de Blois, *Haft Peykar* (RSS, 2002).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.



Figure 2. "Bahram Gur in the Yellow Palace on Sunday"



Figure 3. "Bahram Gur in the Green Palace on Monday"



Figure 4. "Bahram Gur in the Red Palace on Tuesday"



Figure 5. "Bahram Gur in the Turquoise Palace on Wednesday"

night of the week.⁵ There are notable similarities and differences within the various paintings. For one, the artist repeatedly uses the main color of the story to highlight important features of the image, including in some the main dome, the robes and clothing of the figures within the painting, and even some smaller features such as tilework and other architectural details. While one color clearly plays a central role in each, it is offset by others to draw clear distinctions and to provide a sense of balance. We can glimpse the courtly luxuries of this period through the various items and goods, mostly vases and bowls of a striking gold color and with intricate patterns and detail, placed in many of the paintings.

One difference between the illustrations is that while some of the paintings take place fully within the dome, others, like the yellow and green domes, offer glimpses of the outside world. Further, while most of the paintings centralize one color, it appears that the artist chose to suppress the color red in the painting of the dome for the daughter of the King of the Slavs, Nasrin-Nush, by incorporating lots of pink and orange as well, in addition to offsetting the colors with black, blue, white, and grey. The sandal dome is striking for a number of reasons. For one, the pavilion within this painting appears larger than the rest, with it filling the entire illustration. Where in the other paintings items are neatly situated on a table or rug, in this painting they appear strewn across the floor and in use by nearly all of the figures. This distinction could represent many things; however, for the purposes of this paper specifically it could highlight the process of human development. This progression is not one that always occurs in a linear and uniform way, and thus this discord could be representative of the variability and unpredictability common in this process. With the sandalwood dome directly preceding the white dome, or the dome of "self-fulfillment" which will be discussed further below, it could represent that one must be willing to enter a process of imbalance before finally achieving development.

⁵ François de Blois, *Haft Peykar* (RSS, 2002).

Finally, the white dome is uniquely important and should be discussed in detail. It is said that Bahram visits this dome on the holy day of Friday.⁶ While in the other paintings the main color plays a central role, except perhaps in the illustration of the red dome, in this specific illustration there appears to be a distinction between two specific colors: black and white. While many of the costumes and some of the architecture are white, the dome and rug upon which Bahram and the princess sit are black. This contrast between black and white may be symbolic and intentional, but it is also visually striking. Still, many of the previous features persist. While white and black play a central role, they are offset by colors of orange, blue and magenta in particular. Further, accents of gold are clear, and the painting includes many luxury goods with characters both attending to the king and princess yet also engrossed in their own activities. Lastly, certain aspects of Nizami's poem are especially highlighted here. In the text, Bahram is described as dressing in the purest white and wearing a white feather in his turban, while the princess is described as having lilies and narcissus at her feet, "their white petals not as white as her skin".⁷

In her book "The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting," author Lamia Balafrej describes the process by which artists began representing themselves through their paintings during the Timurid period. Balafrej argues that late Timurid painters used a number of strategies to shift manuscript painting from an "illustrative device to a self-reflective object, designed to highlight the artist's signature".⁸ These included visual abundance, linear precision, and the incorporation of inscriptions addressing aspects of the painting and the artist's signature.⁹ This change was crucial as it marked a turning

⁶ Imane M. Sadek Abaza, *Color Symbolism in Islamic Book Paintings* (The American University in Cairo, 2017), 71.

⁷ *Bahram Gur in the White Palace on Friday* (Folio 235 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, The Met).

⁸ Lamia Balafrej and Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, *The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Uni-

point upon which paintings became more about the painter and less about the patron - historically a royal or a member of the elite - and turned art into an object upon which the artist could assert their identity and involvement. Although the *Haft Peykar* illustrations by Shaikh Zada were produced during the Safavid period, they display a continuity with the painting styles of Timurid Herat especially through their use of visual abundance and linear precision. All seven paintings feature a pavilion in which the exterior of the structure as well as the walls and details within are defined by linear precision, yet within the pavilions themselves, the inclusion of various figures and items fills the space. In some of the illustrations, this even extends to the exterior of the pavilion as outside features such as trees, flowers, and the sky are included. Thus, as Balafrej informs us, “visual density and technical refinement formed an aesthetics of self-reflection...inviting them [the viewer] to interrogate the painting’s production”.¹⁰ Painter Shaikh Zada has accomplished this by presenting illustrations that are both visually complex and technically refined, urging the viewer to question the artist’s role in the production of the painting.

In chapter three of her text, Balafrej offers an especially interesting argument in which she claims that paintings of the Safavid period began to challenge traditional ideas of representation and perception. First, she comments on the extra-textual figures in the *Cairo Bustan*, the work of analysis for her text. In those illustrations, she argues, each character is absorbed in a distinct, independent activity with no impact on the main narrative scene.¹¹ This is reminiscent of many of the illustrations from the *Haft Peykar*, but

10 Lamia Balafrej and Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, *The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), Introduction, 7.

11 Lamia Balafrej and Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, *The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Uni-

especially the painting of Bahram Gur in the red pavilion where “the attendants, in their relaxed tête-à-tête, pay little attention to the royal couple”.¹² Further, Balafrej notes that this process, instead of projecting a stable, comprehensive whole, turned paintings into a source of relentless images, which were all a result of the painter’s active imagination.¹³ Thus, in the *Cairo Bustan* as in the *Haft Peykar* illustrations, the image is broken up into a constellation of scenes, “representing several moments at once,” therefore complicating linear time.¹⁴ The visual density of these paintings was designed to project an image of variation yet comprehension at the same time. In using proportioned and geometric compositions, artists chose not to reflect the world as we see it in their paintings, but a form of generality which was meant “to raise the medium above its worldly humble status”.¹⁵ Most notably,

In trying to convince viewers that they are looking at a tablet of ideal primordial forms, the painting aspires to resemble, not reality itself, but the matrix from which reality was produced and can be produced again.¹⁶

iversity Press, 2019), Chapter 3, 3.

12 *Bahram Gur in the Red Palace on Tuesday* (Folio 220 from a *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizami, The Met).

13 Lamia Balafrej and Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, *The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), Chapter 3, 2-3.

14 Lamia Balafrej and Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, *The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), Chapter 3, 8.

15 *Ibid*, 11.

16 *Ibid*, 26.

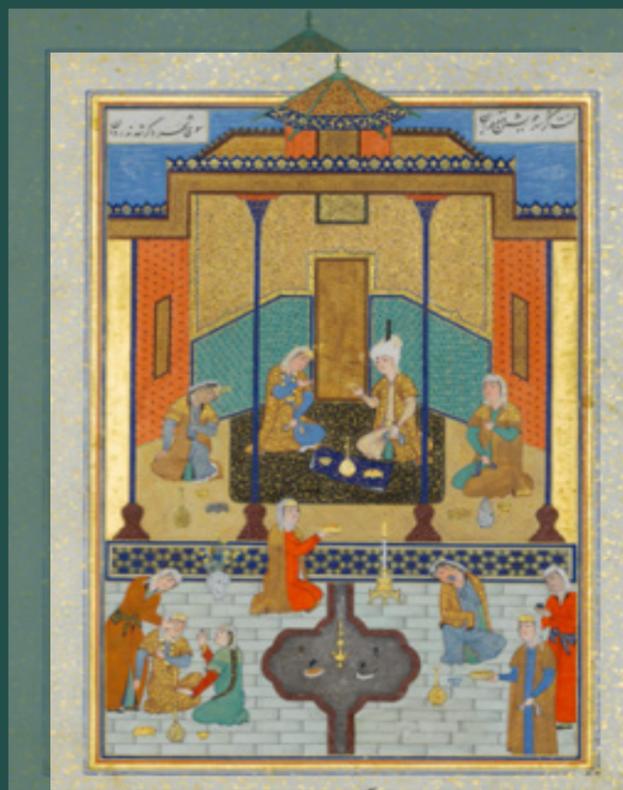


Figure 6. “Bahram Gur in the Sandal Palace on Thursday”

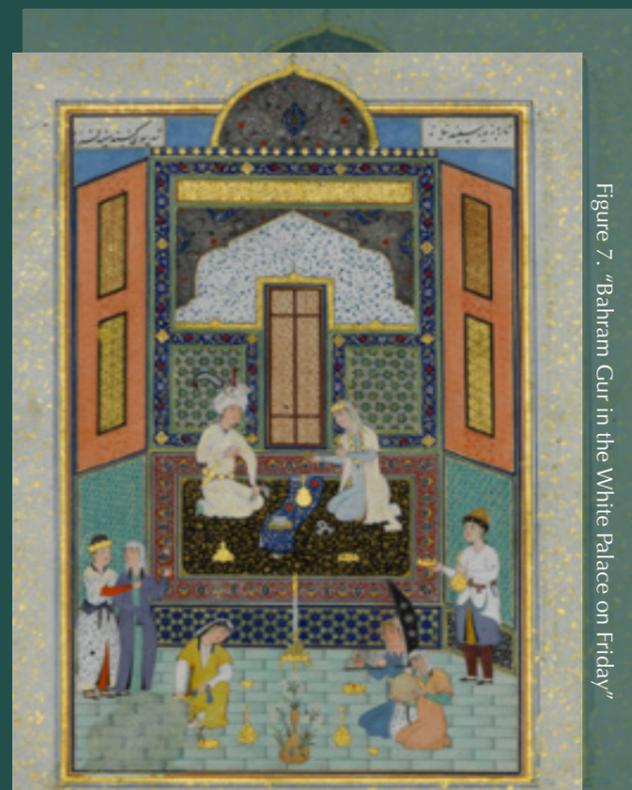


Figure 7. “Bahram Gur in the White Palace on Friday”

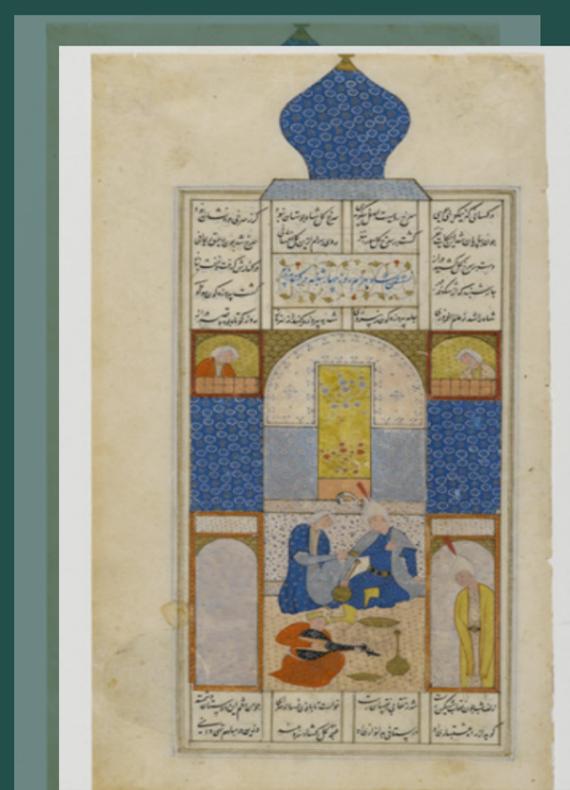


Figure 8. “Bahram Gur Visits the Dome of Piruza on Wednesday”

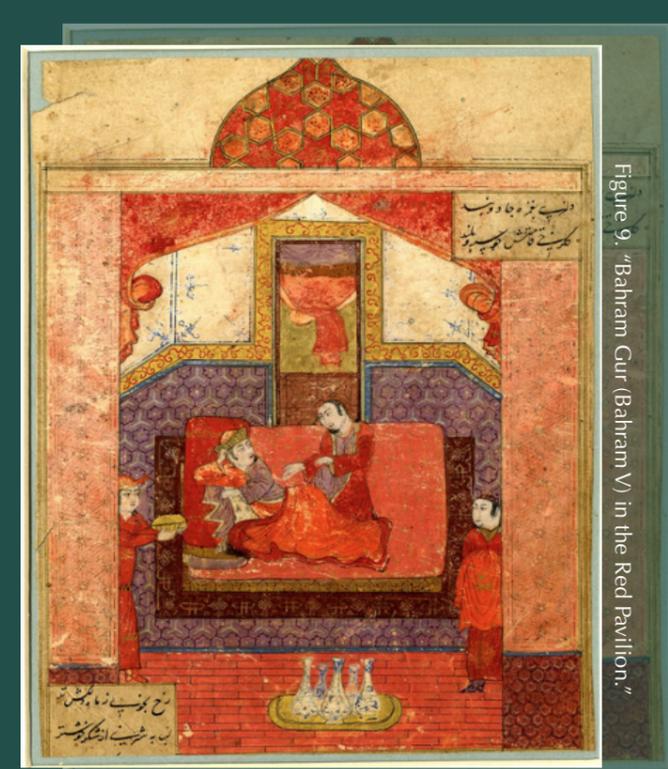


Figure 9. “Bahram Gur (Bahram V) in the Red Pavilion.”

Therefore, illustrations as presented in the Cairo *Bustan* and *Haft Peykar*, through visual abundance and technical refinement, sought to not only clearly situate the artist in the production of the painting, but also to provide specific qualities to the illustrations that forced viewers to question the topics of artist, painting, reality, and perception. In a field that had previously been dominated by the desires and glorification of the patron, artists such as Shaikh Zada reasserted their control and place within this process, while also inviting the viewer to think more critically about the work and the artist's place in it.

We can see Shaikh Zada employing some of the techniques described by Balafrej and asserting his own role in the painting if we compare to other Haft Peykar manuscript illustrations of the period. In both Figure 8 and Figure 9, representing the turquoise and red domes respectively, Bahram and the princess appear at the center, and the few other figures included are largely attending to the royals. This is in stark contrast to Shaikh Zada's illustrations not only of those two domes but all of his work, in which the royal couple form just one aspect of the painting overall and with the other figures largely engaged in their own tasks, thus pulling attention away from the king overall. Further, whereas the other illustrations focus on the royal couple at the center and little else, Shaikh Zada's illustrations project a myriad of images that both project an image of complexity and one of comprehension at the same time. Lastly, it should be noted that neither the British Museum nor the Brooklyn Museum of Art mention the artist with these manuscript paintings. From this, one can infer that Shaikh Zada's tools of self-representation were enduring enough to establish his authority over his work, once again an unusual reality for the time.

The use of color symbolism and the concept of the seven stages of the development of the soul – present in Islamic and especially Sufi traditions – are also important for interpreting these illustrations. As Cameron Cross describes in his article "The Many Colors of Love in Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar*: Beyond the Spectrum," the domes in this poem recreate the classic Indo-Iranian arrangement of the world into seven climes (*haft kishwar*), identified in the text as India, China, Khwārazm (Central Asia), Siqlāb (the Slavic North), the Maghrib (Egypt and North Africa), Rūm (Greece and by extension Europe), and Persia in the center.¹⁷ As Figure 10 highlights, the seven colors of the domes correspond to these climes, as well as the seven days of the week, and the seven heavenly bodies. Some scholars even argue that they correspond to the sum parts of the body, including the head, chest, belly, two arms and two legs.¹⁸ Thus, Cross argues that as the number seven becomes representative of the totality of being – the full spectrum of color, the entirety of our globe, the hierarchy of the heavens, and the body of man – "the summand values of four and three depict its material and spiritual characteristics".¹⁹ Where red, green, blue and yellow represent the physical aspects of the universe, the three neutral colors of black, white, and brown are associated with the ethereal properties of the spirit.²⁰ In Zada's *Haft*

Sequence							
Day of week	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Celestial body	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Mercury	Jupiter	Venus
Sign	Capricorn and Aquarius	Sagittarius and Pisces	Aries and Cancer	Leo	Taurus and Libra	Gemini and Virgo	Cancer
Clime	India	Rome	Khwārazm	Siqlāb	Maghrib	China	Persia
Cycles	Concupiscent	Irrascible	Concupiscent	Irrascible	Concupiscent	Irrascible	Concupiscent
Color	Black	Yellow	Green	Red	Blue	Brown	White
Trajectory							
Najm al-dīn	Ecstatic love	Faith	Tranquility	Gnosis	Certitude	Beneficence	Islam
ʿAnār	Desire	Love	Insight	Detachment	Unity	Awe	Self-gloss
Krotkoff	Earth	Fire	Water	Air	Body	Spirit	Soul
Chelkowski	Spirit	Primary (material) colors				Spirit	Soul

Figure 10. "Love Color, and the Universe," A visual summary of the relationships and connections that link the Seven Domes with the universal schemata. The "trajectories" section demonstrates a few of the various progressive "journeys" that stories in the Islamic tradition can be said to enact. From Cross, Cameron. 2017

Peykar illustrations we can see this connection with the physical aspects of the universe in the illustrations of the green, blue and yellow domes where a glimpse is offered of the outside and natural world.

Within this context of color, spirit, and development, we are presented with the poles of black and white. As Cross reminds us, looking at the narratives of the seven beauties in the *Haft Peykar*, "the sequence of stories, starting in black and ending in white, represent – and perform – a transcendental journey of some kind, a rite of passage through the four material elements into the three aspects of the spiritual realm".²¹ These poles and the process by which one begins at one end and achieves some sense of fulfillment by ending at the other hints to a process of development, or rather one's ability to achieve perfection. This widespread idea was not new when Nizami wrote his poem. Many scholars during this time were also writing on this topic, including the idea of the "universal man" (*al-insān al-kullī*) of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, the "perfect nature" (*al-ṭibā' al-tāmm*) theorized by the mystical philosopher Shihāb al-dīn Suhrawardī, or the "perfect man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) of Ibn ʿArabī and Naṣīr al-dīn Ṭūsī.²² The sequence of seven is also evocative of similar seven-staged journeys found in other medieval Islamic texts that also produced their own versions of this course, with each stage marked by a distinctive color.²³ Regardless of its origin, the resulting spiritual trajectory is one and the same:

A story of progress from one pole to another, from dark to light, material to spiritual, ignorance to gnosis, caprice to wisdom, initiated when Bahram grasps the underlying truths of the world that are reflected by and embedded within the stories of the seven domes.²⁴

This process relies on the movement from one pole to another, and thus two distinct poles must be established. In Zada's illustrations, special significance is given to the black and

17 Cameron Cross, *The Many Colors of Nizāmī's 'Haft Peykar': Beyond the Spectrum* (A Journal of Medieval European Literatures, 2017), 59.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, 59-60.

20 Cameron Cross, *The Many Colors of Nizāmī's 'Haft Peykar': Beyond the Spectrum* (A Journal of Medieval European

Literatures, 2017), 60.

21 Ibid, 61-62.

22 Ibid, 62.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

white paintings in a way that mirrors the importance of these poles. The starting point of this development is the black pole, whose main theme revolves around repentance and punishment.²⁵ Notably, scholars have drawn connections between the color black and its significance in the Muslim tradition, focusing on the passage from the Qur'an that states "Blackness will cover them; Those are the disbelievers, the wicked ones (Q. 80: 42)".²⁶ At the opposite pole is the white dome, which appears to provide "the perfect corrective to the king's personal shortcomings of unchecked desire and concupiscence".²⁷ Further, Bahram visits the Perisan princess on the last day. We could infer that this not only represents the full circle of human and religious development from the various princesses of distant locations to the return of the princess of Nizami's home, but it could also be representative of Persia as the center of spiritual awakening and enlightenment. Thus, in the end, the contrast between the two tales of the white and black pavilions symbolizes the purification and awakening of Bahram's soul, with each dome in between acting as a step in the stage of this development.²⁸

As should be clear, the illustrations by Shaikh Zada of Nizami's *Haft Peykar* can be interpreted in a number of ways. And, while discussions of perception and knowledge are important, the artistic achievements should also be recognized. These paintings offer beautifully detailed images of the text, offering a glimpse into 16th century society. The offsetting of contrasting colors and detailed patterns found in the tilework, walls, and domes present readers with a myriad of images to observe and analyze. Yet, the establishment of one central color in each image, found mainly in the costumes and architecture, unifies each painting as a composition.

With the visual density and technical refinement presented in these illustrations of Nizami's *Haft Peykar*, viewers can understand the paintings as a medium in which the artist represented not only himself, but also the matrix of reality, attempting to raise the illustrations above their worldly status. Taken together, the illustrations can also be understood as representing the symbolism of color and the seven stages of development, central themes in many Islamic traditions. Or, viewers could choose to focus on the poles of black and white, focusing not on the process but rather the beginning and ending points of human progress and perfection. The knowledge that is intertwined in every artistic object we view shapes our perceptions and understandings of art, even if we may not always be aware of it.

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25 Imane M. Sadek Abaza, *Color Symbolism in Islamic Book Paintings* (The American University in Cairo, 2017), 62.

26 Ibid.

27 Cameron Cross, *The Many Colors of Nizami's 'Haft Peykar: Beyond the Spectrum* (A Journal of Medieval European Literatures, 2017), 59-80.

28 Imane M. Sadek Abaza, *Color Symbolism in Islamic Book Paintings* (The American University in Cairo, 2017), 71.

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IMAGES

Figure 1. "Bahram Gur in the Dark Palace on Saturday", Folio 207 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami A.H. 931/A.D. 1524-25. Dimensions of the page: H. 12 1/2 in. (31.9 cm) and W. 8 3/4 in. (22.2 cm). Nizami (Ganja 1141-1209 Ganja), Haft Peykar. Produced by Shaikh Zada in present-day Afghanistan, Herat, A.H. 931/A.D. 1524-25. Located at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Codices, 13.228.7.8).

Figure 2. "Bahram Gur in the Yellow Palace on Sunday", Folio 213 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami A.H. 931/A.D. 1524-25. Dimensions of the page: H. 12 5/8 in. (32.1 cm) and W. 8 3/4 in. (22.2 cm). Nizami (Ganja 1141-1209 Ganja), Haft Peykar. Produced

by Shaikh Zada in present-day Afghanistan, Herat, A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Located at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Codices, 13.228.7.9).

Figure 3. “Bahram Gur in the Green Palace on Monday”, Folio from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Dimensions of the page: H. 12 ¾ in. (32.4 cm) and W. 8 5/8 in. (21.9 cm). Nizami (Ganja 1141–1209 Ganja), Haft Peykar. Produced by Shaikh Zada in present-day Afghanistan, Herat, A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Located at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Codices, 13.228.7.12).

Figure 4. “Bahram Gur in the Red Palace on Tuesday”, Folio 220 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Dimensions of the page: H. 12 5/8 in. (32.1 cm) and W. 8 ¾ in. (22.2 cm). Nizami (Ganja 1141–1209 Ganja), Haft Peykar. Produced by Shaikh Zada in present-day Afghanistan, Herat, A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Located at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Codices, 13.228.7.11).

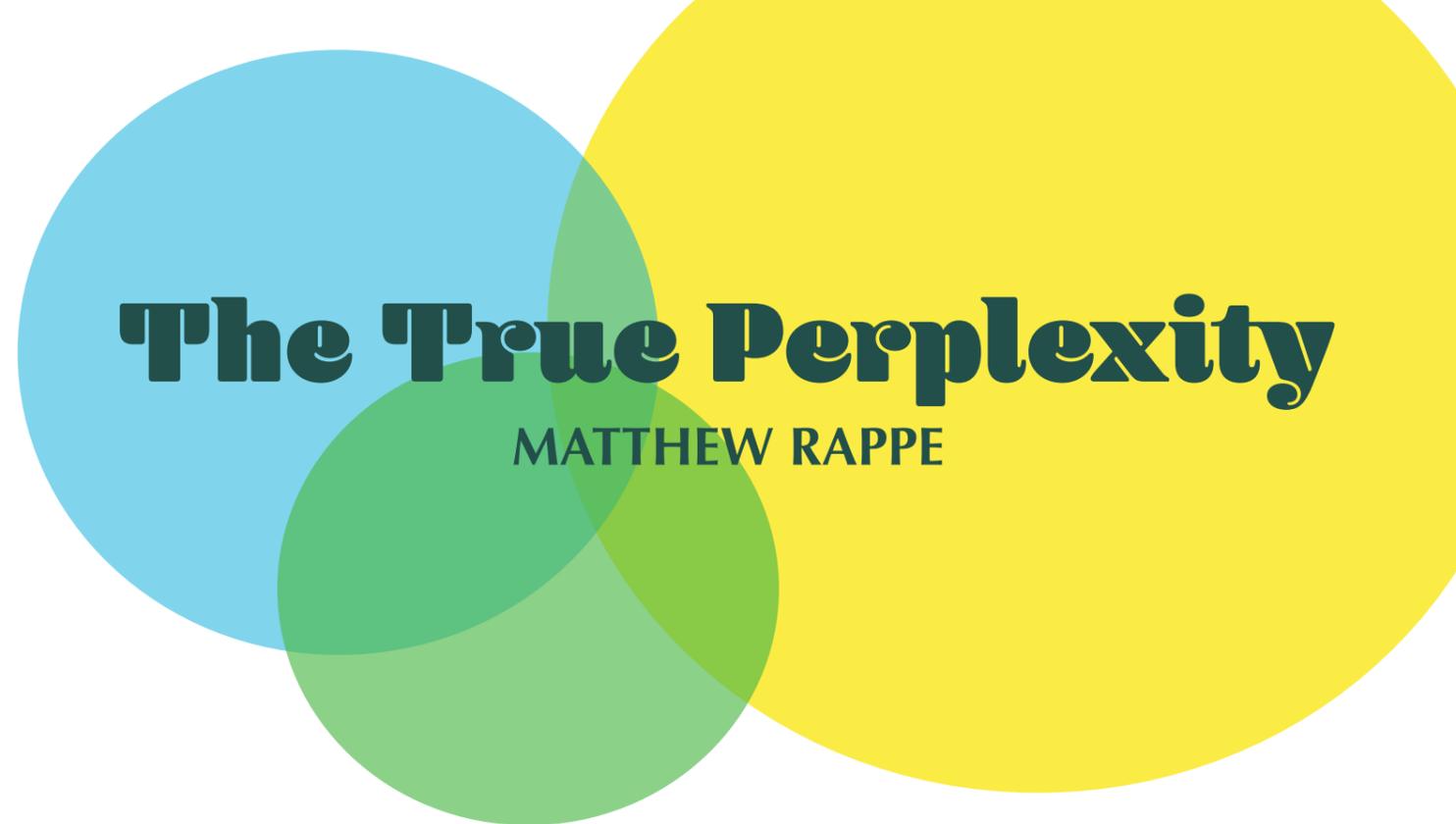
Figure 5. “Bahram Gur in the Turquoise Palace on Wednesday”, Folio 216 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami dated A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Dimensions of the page: H. 12 11/16 in. (32.2 cm) and W. 8 ¾ in. (22.2 cm). Nizami (Ganja 1141–1209 Ganja), Haft Peykar. Produced by Shaikh Zada in present-day Afghanistan, Herat, A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Located at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Codices, 13.228.7.10).

Figure 6. “Bahram Gur in the Sandal Palace on Thursday”, Folio 230 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Dimensions of the page: H. 12 5/8 in. (32.1 cm) and W. 8 ¾ in. (22.2 cm). Nizami (Ganja 1141–1209 Ganja), Haft Peykar. Produced by Shaikh Zada in present-day Afghanistan, Herat, A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Located at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Codices, 13.228.7.13).

Figure 7. “Bahram Gur in the White Palace on Friday”, Folio 235 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Dimensions of the page: H. 12 5/8 in. (32.1 cm) and W. 8 ¾ in. (22.2 cm). Nizami (Ganja 1141–1209 Ganja), Haft Peykar. Produced by Shaikh Zada in present-day Afghanistan, Herat, A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25. Located at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Codices, 13.228.7.14).

Figure 8. “Bahram Gur Visits the Dome of Piruza on Wednesday”, Page from the Haft paykar (Seven Portraits), from a manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami (d. 1209). Dimensions of the page: H. 10 1/8 in. (25.7cm) and W. 5 11/16 in. (14.5 cm). Nizami. 16th Century. Located at The Brooklyn Museum (Codices, 36.273.2).

Figure 9. “Bahram Gur (Bahram V) in the Red Pavilion.” Page from the Haft Paykar. Dimensions of the page: H. 16 cm and W. 11.6 cm. Iran, 15th Century. Located at The British Museum (Codices, 1977,0228,0.13).



The True Perplexity

MATTHEW RAPPE

Moses ben Maimon or Maimonides was a twelfth century rabbi and philosopher born in Cordobá. He authored a commanding work of Jewish law known as the *Mishnah Torah* that he completed while in exile in Morocco. He later moved to Egypt and wrote on numerous subjects, including medicine. His late composition, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, is an enigmatic work that interprets the Bible and reexamines philosophy. The contradictions between Judaism and Greek philosophy as recovered by the Arabic translation movement are the causes of this perplexity. The *Guide* defies any general statement as to how these contradictions are resolved. In chapter 24 of the second volume (II 24) of the *Guide* Maimonides refers to the “true perplexity” as the contradiction between Aristotle’s astronomical premises and the working astronomical model of Ptolemy’s *Almagest* since developed by Thabit Ibn Qurra and al-Qabisi. Reading the *Guide* with this chapter in mind reveals a persistent theme of philosophy falling short of demonstration, the gold standard of truth to which some philosophy was said to be held. Maimonides casts doubt on what has been held to be true. I will begin by laying out the importance Maimonides ascribes to this chapter (II 24), then expose the “grave matters” of the chapter, and then connect the hints of this chapter to other parts of the *Guide*. The *Guide* complicates the relationship between philosophy, demonstration, and mathematics, leading to the conclusion that another science must govern the knowledge of things which we cannot possibly know.

One question where Maimonides differentiates himself from Aristotle and the Rabbis is that of the eternity or creation of the world. Here he claims to side with the Sages but rejects the arguments of the Mutakallimun or theologians. The arguments of the Mutakallimun are not particular to any religion but are shared across Christianity, Judaism, and Islam because, according to Maimonides they all originated in John Philoponus’s attempt at a Christian apology employing the methods of philosophy. Maimonides criticizes that these theologians have begun with their conclusions and then rationalized arguments to support these conclusions. With regards to the creation of the world, the Mutakallimun argue all

things must have a point of creation, things are created by things which are created, but at some point, in the past there is a single creator, God, who has created things by will and with a purpose. On the other hand, Aristotle argued that the universe is the way it is, by necessity, and it has come about in the only way it was possible to be. This means that it is impossible for it to be any other way and thus is unchanging and permanent. There was no creation of the world, or end of the world for that matter.

On this question Maimonides takes the side of the Mutakallimun but disagrees on one major point, saying “all things exist in virtue of a purpose and not of necessity, and that He who purposed them may change them and conceive another purpose, though not absolutely any purpose whatever. For the nature of impossibility is stable and cannot be abolished.”¹ Maimonides insists that there are impossibilities not determined by God, which allows for reasoning in divine matters.² Maimonides attempts to prove that all things exist in virtue of a purpose through a constructed dialogue with Aristotle culminating in him asking whether there is something beyond “the sphere” (the universe was imagined as concentric spheres) that could have particularized the different movements of the planets besides God.³ Aristotle tried to assign causes to the movements of the sun, moon, and planets to show that they adhere to a natural order, but “he has accomplished none of these undertakings.”⁴ When Aristotle does make assertions regarding the causes of unexplained spatial phenomena he qualifies them by saying that they are made for the sake of speculation, not to pretend to know something. The different speeds of the rotation of the planets, as well as the irregular concentration of stars in the sky is enough to refute the natural necessity of Aristotle. Maimonides regards this argument as “close to being a demonstration, that what exists indicates to us of necessity that it exists in virtue of the purpose of One who purposed.”⁵ Yet, this is really only an argument against necessity, and the lack of a natural order does nothing to support the argument that there is a purpose behind it. The most direct answer Maimonides gives to this doubt is that there is a need for something to particularize the desires of the spheres,⁶ so that they move in their various ways.

That the proof of the creation of the world rests on the intellect of the spheres is not a satisfactory state and Maimonides is aware of this shortcoming. Elsewhere he writes “the opinions held by Aristotle regarding the causes of the motion of the spheres – from which opinions he deduced the existence of separate intellects – are simple assertions for which no demonstration has been made, yet they are, of all the opinions put forward on this subject, those that are exposed to the smallest number of doubts.”⁷ This raises two problematic points. The first is that Aristotle’s astronomical model is only an assertion, not demonstration, and there are doubts in it. The fact that there are a small number of doubts should not assuage any fears since “one should not take into account the number of the doubts but rather consider how great is their incongruity and what is their disagreement with

1 Maimonides, Moses, and Shlomo Pines. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Volume 2. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010. Part II, Chapter 19, p.303.

2 III 15 p.461

3 II 19 p.306

4 II 19 p.306-7

5 II 19 p.303

6 II 19 p.311

7 II 3 p.254

what exists.”⁸ As we will see, the doubt in Aristotle’s astronomical model is true perplexity.

The second problematic point is that the existence of separate intellects has been based on Aristotle’s astronomical model. Even if the doubts are ignored, this makes Maimonides’s earlier argument for creation unsound since Maimonides’s critique of Aristotle’s theories relies on the assumption that the spheres have desires. In the constructed dialogue of II 19 Aristotle argued that the intellect of a sphere was the cause of its motion. Maimonides then challenged that by asking what but God could have instilled different desires in these spheres’ intellects. If Aristotle’s argument that the spheres have intellects is “simple assertions for which no demonstration”⁹ exists, as Maimonides argues, then the reader should understand his question as a hypothetical argument: if the spheres are intellects, then the earth has been created. Maimonides may not be convinced by Aristotle’s astronomical model, meaning his belief that the spheres have intellects comes from another source.

Arguments for the creation of the earth, the deity, and the spheres’ intellects hinge on this question of Aristotle’s astronomical model. Perhaps this is why Maimonides writes, “There are also other very grave matters if regarded from the point of view that these things are as they are in virtue of necessity. I shall deal with these points in a special chapter of this Treatise.”¹⁰ We will turn to this special chapter now.

The Grave Matters of II 24

This chapter begins with “you know” addressing Rabbi Joseph ben Judah, to whom the whole *Guide* is dedicated. He writes that his student has studied astronomy from Ptolemy’s *Almagest*, but now Maimonides must inform him that the astronomical principles on which the book relies are opposed to reason and natural science. “All of this I did not explain to you when you read under my guidance, for fear of confusing you with regard to that which it was my purpose to make you understand.”¹¹ He taught his student mathematics, science, and logic respectively; perhaps this means that his student learned the *Almagest* before learning Aristotle through the study of logic. Then Maimonides saw Joseph was “worthy to have the secrets of the prophetic books revealed” to him, whereupon he let him “see certain flashes.”¹² Under this new study, Maimonides found it necessary to explain these contradictions.

These problematic principles are epicycles and eccentric circles. Epicycles describe the orbit of an object around a point that is itself tracing a larger circle. Eccentric circles are non-concentric circles; any circle that has a center other than that of a circle that it is inscribed within or that it circumscribes. These theories contradict two premises of Aristotle, the first is that nothing in the heavens changes its place. By this Maimonides certainly does not mean that the planets stay in one place, but that the spheres that carry them do. (The orbit of planets, the sun, and the moon were conceived of as solid, transparent spheres). An epicycle would mean that the sphere of a planet is rolling around, and thus, changing its place. Epicycles would also mean orbit around something other than Earth, whereas Aristotle said there must be a stationary object around which things move. This is the second premise

8 II 23 p.321

9 II 3 p.254

10 II 19 p.307

11 II 24 p.325

12 Maimonides, Moses, and Shlomo Pines. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Volume 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010. Epistle Dedicatory.

in contradiction. Even a system that only uses eccentric circles would not work because the spheres would orbit around something other than the center of Earth. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that there are spaces in between the spheres, whereas the spheres were previously imagined as concentric shells with no gaps in between.

Maimonides does not raise these contradictions so that he can discard Ptolemy, after all, this is a working model of the solar system; “if one accepts everything stated by Ptolemy concerning the epicycle of the moon and its [eccentricity] ... it will be found that what is calculated on the hypothesis of the two principles is not at fault by even a minute.”¹³ Rather, Maimonides raises these inconsistencies to show the limits of Aristotle, whose model cannot explain retrograde planets, nor how epicycles circle around a mobile point. “This is the true perplexity.”¹⁴ Maimonides cannot deny the effectiveness of Ptolemy’s system at predicting the movements of the moon, but he also knows Ptolemy’s theories lack demonstration, though Aristotle’s do as well. The perplexity expressed in this chapter is probably among the “number of doubts” in II 3 regarding Aristotle’s opinions, and the immensity of this doubt, the fact that his premises contradict a working model of the moon “not at fault by even a minute,” should lead to a conclusion that the premises of Aristotle are incomplete.

Instead, Maimonides stands by the premises saying, “All this does not affect the astronomer. For his purpose is not to tell us in which way the spheres truly are, but to posit an astronomical system in which it would be possible for the motions to be circular and uniform and to correspond to what is apprehended through sight, regardless of whether or not things are thus in fact,”¹⁵ meaning that the astronomer’s purpose is to conform to Aristotle’s premises, though they are faulty. Taken literally, this sentence does not follow from the preceding argument; despite Aristotle’s inability to explain retrogradation, and that Aristotle’s premises regarding the spheres are mere assertions, the astronomer ought to give this account, though he knows it is false. Astronomer, as it appears here, could be serving as an equivocal term for prophet, as the sentence introduces a section on prophecy. Maimonides tells the reader to notice equivocal terms that he has not specified. This kind of substitution would be common for Alfarabi who uses, king, prophet, philosopher, and imam interchangeably and employs the physician as a metaphor for these. The astronomer, like the prophet, gives similitudes of the truth, when the truth is beyond people’s comprehension.

Maimonides returns to the expected conclusion on the limits of reason. Neither Aristotle nor the astronomers can know the truth of these matters because “regarding all that is in the heavens, man grasps nothing but a small measure of what is mathematical.”¹⁶ So little knowledge do humans have of the spheres that “even the general conclusion that may be drawn from them, namely, that they prove the existence of their Mover, is a matter the knowledge of which cannot be reached by human intellects,”¹⁷ at least not without divine guidance. This confirms that Maimonides does not see his own arguments expressed in *The Guide* as demonstrating that all things exist in virtue of a purpose. Instead of employing reason to this end, “let us give over the things that cannot be grasped by reasoning to him

13 II 24 p.

14 II 24 p.326

15 II 24 p.326

16 Ibid.

17 II 24 p.327. Pines’s note 12: “In Ibn Tibbon’s translation the passage has a different meaning: “The general proof from them is that they indicate the existence of their Mover, but the knowledge of other matters concerning them cannot be reached by human intellects.”

who was reached by the mighty divine overflow” – a prophet.¹⁸ There is a limit to reason, and the role of the prophet is to go beyond this limit and assert an undemonstrated God, like how the astronomer proposes a cosmology. A prophet is the closest thing that exists to a demonstration of God.

Although perfect knowledge of the universe beyond the moon is temporarily beyond apprehension, Maimonides does not believe that this is necessarily the case. He does believe there is an order to nature that permits reasoning; this is what differentiates him from the Mutakallimun. Maimonides gives two alternatives. First, he says it is a defect and a temptation “to fatigue the minds with notions that cannot be grasped by them and for the grasp of which they have no instrument.”¹⁹ Thus an instrument, like the telescope, may allow people to grasp what they could not before. The second possibility is “that someone else may find a demonstration by means of which the true reality of what is obscure for me will become clear to him.”²⁰ Thus the heliocentric model, which better described the motion of the planets than Ptolemy, while dispensing with Ptolemy’s hypotheses of epicycles and eccentric circles.

The Limits of Imagination

There is a similar perplexity that Maimonides does not identify as such in the theory of the spheres’ motion. He recommends not fatiguing the mind in these matters, but he does not take his own advice. For him it is clear spheres are endowed with souls because of their unique, unceasing, circular movement. “It is absurd that the circular motion of the sphere should be similar to the rectilinear motion of the stone downwards.”²¹ Circular motion can only come about as the result of mental representation, which is for the spheres “a notion that is most exceedingly simple, in which there is no change and no coming-about of a new state, and from which good always overflows. This [endeavor to achieve the likeness of God] is impossible for the sphere qua a body unless its activity be a circular motion and nothing else.”²² This is somewhat complicated by Ptolemy’s model, although Ptolemy did not dispute the spheres as intellects, the rolling of an epicycle may challenge the idea that there is no change or new states for the spheres. Maimonides does not record the possibility that the spheres have an imperfect mental representation of the deity, or a perfect mental representation but an imperfect faculty to achieve this likeness through motion. It could be that the spheres are not so different from people.

Rather, Maimonides exposes the kernel of a contradiction to the most basic assumption of the spheres: that their motion is not like earthly motion. It has been since demonstrated that there is no meaningful distinction between “circular motion” or “rectilinear motion” whereas all things are attracted to massive physical bodies as described by the theory of gravity. Maimonides approaches this theory when he describes the inability of the imagination to grasp what intellect has demonstrated:

Now it has been demonstrated that the earth is spherical in form and that portions of the inhabited part of it lie at both extremities of its diameter. Thus

18 Ibid.

19 II 24 p.327

20 Ibid.

21 II 4 p.255

22 II 4 p.256

the head of every individual from among the inhabitants of the two extremities is near heaven while his feet are near the feet of another individual who is opposite him. It is thus impossible in every way that either of them would fall. This cannot even be represented to oneself; for one of them is not placed above and the other below, but each of them is both above and below in relation to the other.²³

This is a small clue that the motion of the spheres may not be so different from earthly motion. Maimonides is not limited by reason here, since he has already reasoned this to be true, but his imagination prevents him from representing it to himself. If he could, then he may be able to see that there really is no “rectilinear motion” as he conceived of it. People moving around on the ground that we perceive as flat is, in truth, movement around an imperceptible curve. I illustrate this to show that it is not only reason which limits our ability to answer a perplexity, in some cases a lack of imagination denies us from even conceiving of a perplexity. Copernicus’s conception of the heliocentric model was a great feat of imagination.

The Number of Spheres

If Maimonides considers it impossible to know with certainty about the heavens, it does not stop him from writing a great deal about it throughout *The Guide of the Perplexed*. “The things about which there is this perplexity are very numerous in divine matters, few in matters pertaining to natural science, and nonexistent in matters pertaining to mathematics.”²⁴ Astronomy pertains to all three and has very numerous perplexities, evident in the variety of numbers of spheres that Maimonides gives.

Near the end of the first volume Maimonides sets down “a chapter in which I would explain to you that which exists as a whole by informing you of what is demonstrated and is indubitably correct.”²⁵ The following chapter then describes a universe of eighteen solid spheres that surround each other, some having centers other than Earth.²⁶ Maimonides reports that Aristotle never determined a number of spheres but in his time, it was thought there were fifty, while later philosophers counted ten.²⁷ Elsewhere, Maimonides says that the ancients counted five spheres: (1) the sphere of the moon, (2) the sun, (3) the planets, (4) the fixed stars, and (5) the all-encompassing sphere.²⁸ He claims “there are seven spheres in all.”²⁹ He also gives the possibility of a sphere for each star in the sky.³⁰ Yet in the following chapter “it is likewise possible that the arrangement of the universe should be as follows. The spheres are four; the elements moved by the spheres are four; and the forces proceeding from the spheres into that which exists in general are four, as we have made clear.”³¹

These various descriptions of the numbers of spheres serve to emphasize the perplexity

23 I 73 p.210
24 I 31 p.66
25 I 71 p.183
26 I 72
27 II 4 p.257
28 II 9 p.269
29 III 14 p.458
30 II 11 p.274
31 II 10 p.271

of astronomical matters, but Maimonides emphasizes that the astronomical matters discussed in the second volume are not to be taken as purely factual trivia. “A mathematical-minded man will read these astronomical matters and take it as a demonstration of the number of spheres. Now things are not like this, and this is not what is sought in the science of astronomy.”³² The theories of eccentric spheres and epicycles have no demonstrations. Astronomers simply seek to create a predictive system that corresponds to what is observable, then to simplify that system by reducing the number of spheres.³³ It is fundamentally a practical science. Maimonides takes this multiplicity of models to show what is common between them, so that no matter which is actually proven to be accurate, his conclusions will be preserved. His purpose is to “show that the existents that are below the Creator, may He be exalted, are divided into three parts: one of them being constituted by the separate intellects; the second, by the bodies of the spheres... and the third, by the bodies subject to generation and corruption.”³⁴ This supports a cosmology that reconciles Aristotle with the Sages.

However, in light of the startling conclusion of II 24 that his knowledge of the heavens is too limited to reason anything from it, Maimonides must be employing something other than reason in drawing these conclusions. This is most obvious in II 10, where Maimonides offers the possibility that there are four spheres and then offers philosophic language in a non-philosophical explanation. Maimonides argues that the shape of a sphere is a sphere because its movement is continuously circular. It must have a soul because it has motion, and it must have an intellect because it is spurred to motion. There also must be a separate intellect which it desires. These are the four forces which cause the motion of a sphere. There are also four forces overflowing from the spheres: the force generating minerals, the vegetable, the animal, and the rational souls.³⁵ This is not an argument for why there are four spheres, it is noting coincidental appearances of the number four. The number of causes of motion of a sphere and the number of forces that overflow from a sphere are totally independent variables. Maimonides does not base any conclusions off of these premises; he notes them.

Then Maimonides moves to a religious argument. In the *Midrashim* there are four camps of angels mentioned, four angels ascending and descending appeared to Jacob, and Zechariah describes four chariots.³⁶ It is not so much an argument, as a reflection on the number four in the oral tradition. He concludes with asserting that purpose he intends to show: that creation is divided into intellects, the bodies of the spheres, and the bodies subject to generation and corruption. This is his stated purpose of discussing all astronomical matters.³⁷ This conclusion is not arrived at through demonstration, dialectic, but an appeal to reflection on a number. He finds religious commentary that corresponds to the philosophy and “in this way will he who wants to understand the prophetic riddles understand them.”³⁸ In the case of matters that cannot be reasoned with certainty, such as astronomy, arguments depart from logic, and instead appeal to a sense of wonder at the harmony of philosophy

32 II 11 p.273
33 II 11 p.274
34 II 11 p.274-5
35 II 10 p.271-2
36 II 10 p.272-3
37 II 11 p.274-5
38 II 10 p.273

and religion.

Conclusion

This method of argument in which logic is minimized could explain the curriculum of Joseph ben Judah. In a discussion on the why knowledge is limited, Maimonides writes that to achieve human perfection it is necessary for one “to train himself at first in the art of logic, then in the mathematical sciences according to the proper order, then in the natural sciences, and after that in the divine science.”³⁹ Then his instruction of Joseph in mathematics, then natural science, then logic, and then the secrets of the prophetic books, is a departure. For Maimonides’ purpose, logic is not a panacea, because the subjects of the divine science will require going outside of the limits of reason to understand. Maimonides writes to Joseph, “Know, my son, that as long as you are engaged in studying the mathematical sciences and the art of logic, you are one of those who walk around the house searching for its gate.”⁴⁰ In order to be in the presence of God, something beyond logic is necessary – revelation. However, this is not because divine matters are necessarily unreasonable. This state of affairs was temporarily brought on by the limitations of instruments and imagination which have since been overcome enough to elucidate the composition and movement of the planets and stars. On one hand, this conception of God is ever-shrinking as humans will continue to develop better instruments, and solve questions that were once unanswerable. But on the other, to believe that all our questions about the nature of the universe and the origins of life can be explained within the limits of reason, is faith of another kind.

39 I 34 p.75

40 III 51 p.619

Language In and Of Hurufism

The Arrival of Persian Exegetical Literature

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Fadl Allāh Astarābādī was a fourteenth century Islamic religious leader, whose teachings developed amid the mystical and messianic currents that were resurgent in the period between the disintegration of the Mongol Ilkhanate and the rise of the Safavids in Iran.¹ Born in 1340 to an elite family in Astarābādī, Fadl Allāh received a traditional religious education, including training in Islamic jurisprudence.² While he would ultimately be condemned as a heretic by the *‘ulamā* and executed in 1394 by Timur, his writings do not attempt to abrogate the fundamental precepts of the *sharī‘a*, but rather to interpret them according to his doctrine of ontological hermeneutics.³

Fadl Allāh’s major work, the *Jāwidān-nāma* (*Book of Eternity*), treats the origin and evolution of the macrocosm (the entirety of the created world) and microcosm (human beings) as fundamentally linguistic phenomena that were literally articulated into existence through God’s command “be.”⁴ This command was not articulated in any particular human language, but in a sort of metalanguage based on an alphabet of 32 sound-letter pairs. These pairs constituted the “names” that God taught to Adam in primordial time and that Qur’ānic exegetes have since sought to enumerate. Now, they lie dormant within every human being, as evidenced by our ability to comprehend and vocalize ordinary languages.⁵ As a result of Fadl Allāh’s emphasis on a universal ontological language whose alphabet does not merely represent reality but is its very essence, his followers came to be known as “Hurūfīs,” or “letterists.”⁶ Clearly, the role and nature of language frames the content of Fadl Allāh’s doctrine. However, it also frames the context in which that doctrine emerged. Hurūfī teachings are both the result and culmination of linguistic trends in the middle periods: they draw upon the rich tradition of Sufi mystical poetry to integrate Persian-language exegetical literature into the religious sciences and signal a shift toward

1 Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Hurūfī Teachings between Shi’ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam: The Original Doctrine of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī*, 6 and 388.

2 Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 3.

3 Bashir, 1; Mir-Kasimov, 394.

4 Bashir, 48.

5 Bashir, 55.

6 Bashir, x.

universalist reforms while still asserting the Perso-centrism of medieval Islamic thought.

From Arabic to Persian: Through the Sufi Intermediary

As Islam spread in the centuries following the Prophet's death, so too did the Arabic language. The 690s in particular saw the institution of Arabizing policies under the Umayyad caliph, 'Abd al-Malik. Throughout the vast region conquered by the Arabs, Arabic was not only the preeminent language of religion (as the language of the Qur'an), but also became the primary language of administration, commerce, and literature.⁷ By the ninth century, Arabic had even displaced most of the spoken languages west of the Iranian plateau.⁸ However, resentment against Arab domination was similarly spreading in those regions, and the ninth and tenth centuries saw more and more instances of ethnic assertion, including the revival of Persian (as epitomized by Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*). Dynasties such as the Tahirids, Saffarids, Samanids, Ghaznavids, and Saljuqs adopted Persian culture in their courts and began patronizing Persian literature.⁹ While Persian increasingly became the lingua franca of administration (except in the *shari'a* courts), commerce, and literature in the medieval Islamic world, Arabic remained the principal language of religion and religious scholarship. As a result, it was in the secular—and largely literary—fields that Persian flourished.¹⁰

By the thirteenth century, Persian predominated the vibrant literary field of Sufi poetry.¹¹ As mystical literature, this poetry represented an intermediary step toward the Persian language's integration into the religious sciences. While many members of the *'ulamā* found its allusive imagery—and certainly the commentary on hypocrisy and empty religiosity that it often conveyed—reprehensible and wholly inappropriate as a form of worship,¹² the use of Islamic terminology to couch materialistic themes (as well as the use of materialistic terminology to couch Islamic themes) began to cross the secular-religious divide that still governed which languages could be used in which contexts. It was this divide that Fadl Allāh's *Jāwidān-nāma*, as Qur'anic exegesis in Persian, would ultimately bridge.

It is clear that Fadl Allāh was influenced by the Persian mystical poets, given not only that his spiritual journey began after hearing a wandering dervish recite a verse from Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī but also that much of their technical vocabulary figures extensively in the *Jāwidān-nāma*.¹³ In this way, Fadl Allāh's teachings are made possible by both the linguistic trends of the middle periods and the linguistic infrastructure resulting from those trends. It is also clear, however, that Fadl Allāh does not simply rely on the tradition established by the Sufi poets but also expands upon their ideas. For instance, Fadl Allāh holds the common Sufi belief that God created the world in order to be known,¹⁴ yet he adds that to satisfy God's desire to be known, humans must acquire and embody the

metalanguage.¹⁵ As will be discussed later in greater detail, Fadl Allāh believed Persian to be the human language that most closely correlates with the metalanguage. Thus, Persian is a necessary vehicle for knowing God, as it facilitates the acquisition and embodiment of the metalanguage. In this light, and in much the same way that Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* can be read as an assertion of Persian ethnic pride in the face of the Arabic language's cultural hegemony, Fadl Allāh's *Jāwidān-nāma* can be read as an assertion of Persian religiosity in the face of the Arabic language's religious hegemony.

While the impressive canon of Sufi literature in Persian constituted a step toward the language's eventual incorporation into the canon of religious commentaries, it also provoked strong opposition among the *'ulamā*. Literal-minded interpreters of the Qur'an accused the mystically-inclined in Persia, where some elements of Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism still held popular appeal well into the middle periods, of being seduced by the older religions.¹⁶ Fadl Allāh's rationalization of the standard Islamic rituals (which many middle-period mystical and messianic movements considered superfluous) then stands in stark contrast to such accusations. His *Jāwidān-nāma* contains extensive discussions of the steps involved in ritual prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and the pilgrimage. For example, Fadl Allāh explains that the three postures assumed during prayer (*qiyam*, *ruku'*, and *sujud*) reflect the shapes of the three letters that form the word Allah (*alif*, *lam*, and *ha*), and thereby articulate God's name through the human body, just as the speech component of prayer does so through the tongue.¹⁷

Fadl Allāh does not only uphold aspects of orthodox Islam through his interpretation (and promotion) of the religion's central rituals but also interweaves his doctrine with Qur'anic verses and *hadith* materials, followed by his explanations and interpretations.¹⁸ The presence of these citations then serves both to legitimize the *Jāwidān-nāma* as a text situated within Muslim tradition and point to its function as an extended Persian commentary on the Arabic scripture.¹⁹ Despite the presence of these citations, or perhaps because of the purposes they served, Fadl Allāh was ultimately executed on charges of heresy. While Fadl Allāh attempted to legitimize his text with scriptural materials, he did not do so according to the traditionalist approach; that is, he did not attempt to link his interpretations to trustworthy sources by either referencing previous Qur'anic commentaries or by establishing solid chains of transmission.²⁰ As a result, he did not appear concerned with establishing his legitimacy on the basis of formal criteria of authenticity, but rather on the basis of his own inspiration's compatibility with Muhammad's revelation.²¹

Fadl Allāh's claims to direct inspiration were not only objectionable to the *'ulamā* in that they challenged the legalistic paradigm of religious authority that legitimized them, but also in that they were tied to his belief that he was to inaugurate a new dispensation called the cycle of divinity. This dispensation marked the end of the cycle of prophecy. Therefore, Fadl Allāh did not receive a new scripture (as prophets did), but

7 Egger, *A History of the Muslim World to 1750: The Making of a Civilization*, 56.

8 Egger, 63.

9 Egger, 262.

10 Egger, 249.

11 Egger, 262.

12 Egger, 236.

13 Mir-Kasimov, 404.

14 Bashir, 48.

15 Bashir, 59.

16 Egger, 323.

17 Bashir, 75-76.

18 Mir-Kasimov, 390.

19 Bashir, 59.

20 Mir-Kasimov, 390.

21 Mir-Kasimov, 391.

instead received the key to complete understanding of the existing scriptures. This key was the transition from Arabic to Persian.²² The idea that Persian transcended Arabic was problematic for the *'ulamā*, as mastery of Arabic, which had heretofore maintained its status as the language of the Qur'ān and of the religions sciences, had been a valued skill that could lead to high-status careers.²³ Now, Fadl Allāh claimed not only that Persian was the paramount language of Qur'ānic exegesis, but also that the Qur'ān itself could be read as if it were written in Persian.²⁴ By dissociating the Qur'ān from its conventional reading and consequently from its conventional interpretation, Fadl Allāh undermined the stability of the text to which the *'ulamā* looked for guidance and upon which the entire religious system was founded.²⁵ It appears then that the charges against him were largely politically—not purely doctrinally—motivated.

The charges against him also appear politically motivated as Fadl Allāh does not seem to have attempted to conceal the more contentious elements of his doctrine, despite the fact that *taqiyya*, or the deliberate dissimulation of doctrinal positions, was a commonplace practice in the middle periods. It is possible that the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s hybrid language or fragmentary structure was intended to function as *taqiyya*, as some of Fadl Allāh's followers (namely, Sayyid Ishāq Astarābādī) suggested after his execution. After all, the *Jāwidān-nāma* was written in a puzzling mixture of standard Persian and the obscure Astarābādī dialect. However, if this were an attempt to veil the meaning of the text by introducing its important ideas in a “secret” language, then the Hurūfīs would not have compiled a basic glossary of the dialect and included it in later manuscripts as an appendix.²⁶ Moreover, not only is the fragmentary structure more convincingly justified by elements of Fadl Allāh's actual doctrine (as will be discussed later), but it is also more likely to effect—rather than prevent—a superficial reading of the text and therefore lead to the type of misinterpretations or misrepresentations *taqiyya* would be expected to preclude in the first place.²⁷

It is also possible that Fadl Allāh's claims to direct inspiration and to have inaugurated the cycle of divinity could be misunderstood as claims to divinity itself (especially since some of his followers addressed him with titles usually reserved for God) and could therefore be doctrinally offensive to 'orthodox' Muslims.²⁸ However, such claims were not founded upon innate traits unique to Fadl Allāh, but upon his cultivation—and subsequent understanding—of the metalanguage, the potential for which is innate to *all* humans, as endowed by God.

Perso-Centric Universalism

The *Jāwidān-nāma* is not organized thematically, as one would expect a doctrinal treatise to be. Rather, its structure forms a “corpus of fragments,” related not through their order of succession, but through their network of mutual allusions and references.²⁹ As

22 Bashir, 70.

23 Egger, 251.

24 Bashir, 70.

25 Bashir, 72.

26 Mir-Kasimov, 24 and 39.

27 Mir-Kasimov, 40.

28 Bashir, 46.

29 Mir-Kasimov, 33 and 37.

mentioned previously, it is possible to interpret this fragmentary structure as a strategy of *taqiyya*, but by considering it in terms of the text's relation to the Qur'ān, it appears to serve a distinct doctrinal—and not political—function. Attempts at grouping the *Jāwidān-nāmas* fragments univocally or linearly fail to reflect the text's seemingly infinite semantic potential. The reader is then called upon not to reconstruct the text, but to assimilate it gradually and on several levels.³⁰

Because the Qur'ān is similarly fragmented, with verses on comparable topics scattered throughout different suras, its reader would also be called upon to engage with the resultant multivalence.³¹ Indeed it is a common idea within the mystical conception of Qur'ānic exegesis that the Qur'ān can be understood on different levels and that progression through those levels is necessary to arrive at the scripture's deepest meaning.³² The *Jāwidān-nāma*, as Qur'ānic exegesis, certainly articulates this idea. According to Fadl Allāh, the Qur'ān has seven levels of meaning, and only the least significant level is attainable by understanding the literal Arabic words.³³ This dissociation of the Qur'ān's deeper meanings from the Arabic language is evident in Fadl Allāh's assertion that the Arabic scripture can be read as a Persian text (as already discussed) but is perhaps most evident in Fadl Allāh's explanation of the so-called “mysterious letters.”

The Qur'ān contains fourteen “mysterious letters” (eliminating repetition) that precede a number of its suras. These letters, whether alone or in combination, do not constitute actual words and are consequently free of any rational meaning. For centuries, many have speculated as to their true significance, but little consensus has been reached.³⁴ According to Fadl Allāh, the presence of these disjointed letters in the Revelation, alongside compound words with conventional meaning in Arabic, signals the Prophet's literacy with regards to the metalanguage and his illiteracy with regards to that conventional meaning. In other words, the letters' presence reveals Muhammad's ability to perceive metaphysical truths through the universal ontological language and indicates the necessity of reading the compound words independently of their arbitrary Arabic meanings.³⁵ The structural fragmentation of the *Jāwidān-nāma* then mirrors both the structural and linguistic fragmentation of the Qur'ān, and thereby points to the insufficiency of any particular human language in conveying the divine message.

Reading the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s fragmentary structure as a reflection of the Hurūfī doctrine of ontological hermeneutics is not only supported by the text's exegesis of the Qur'ān, but also by the text's interpretation of the biblical episode of the broken tablets of Moses. According to the *Jāwidān-nāma* the breaking—or fragmenting—of the tablets of Moses was essential because it manifested the disjointed letters of the Law.³⁶ The broken tablets, having broken the conventions of ordinary human language, thus manifested the metaphysical truths of the ontological language. It is clear then that the structure of the *Jāwidān-nāma* reveals a fundamental aspect of its doctrine: the universalism of the metalanguage.

30 Mir-Kasimov, 37.

31 Mir-Kasimov, 35.

32 Mir-Kasimov, 391.

33 Bashir, 58.

34 Bashir, 52.

35 Mir-Kasimov, 291.

36 Mir-Kasimov, 41.

The metalanguage operates on ontological principles and is therefore independent of the socially-constructed meanings of any particular human language. As a result, it is also referred to as the “original language of Unity.”³⁷ The metalanguage is a language of Unity not only because its meaning is constructed without having to combine phonemes, as ordinary human languages must, but also because it contains no duality or differentiation of any kind. Language and being are one and the same; that is, the name is the named. While the metalanguage’s 32 sound-letter pairs forebodes its eventual differentiation into numerous human languages with numerous alphabets, in its most original form, it is pure sound and therefore completely universal.³⁸

Ordinary human languages, on the other hand, are inherently dual and clearly differentiated. Names are attributed to objects on the basis of social agreement, not ontological principles, and so those names change from one language to another.³⁹ According to Fadl Allāh, the arbitrary nature of human language is problematic not simply because people who speak different languages refer to the same object with different names, but because social agreement is often tenuous even within a particular language community, as evidenced by the many conflicts that emerged early in Islamic history and that were subsequently amplified by the diversification of the middle periods.⁴⁰ The *Jāwidān-nāma*’s doctrine of a universal language is then a move towards synthesis and conciliation, signaling the early modern trend of universalist reforms.

Despite this shift towards universalism, the *Jāwidān-nāma* still asserts the Perso-centrism characteristic of the middle periods. In fact, Sayyid Ishāq Astarābādī, one of Fadl Allāh’s more prominent followers, indicated that he had been attracted to Hurūfī thought because of its high regard for Persian ethnicity.⁴¹ This Perso-centrism, however, does not contradict the universalism advanced by Fadl Allāh’s doctrine of ontological hermeneutics. The two are reconciled in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, wherein Fadl Allāh explains that differentiation is necessary for humans to know God as He intended. Human beings are set apart from God’s other creations in that they bear language both universally (in the forms of their bodies) and particularly (in their ability to acquire speech). While that speech is limited in scope compared to the metalanguage, it enables humans to communicate with one another through symbolic means, and ultimately to comprehend the world.⁴² In other words, only a differentiated manifestation of the language of Unity is accessible to created beings. Undifferentiated, the divine truths remain unknowable.⁴³

The necessity of differentiation, however, does not make all human languages equal. Human beings bear signs of the metalanguage in the form of their bodies, specifically in the lines of their faces. Fadl Allāh identified fourteen such lines, which he saw as seals atop the fourteen actual places where they occurred. Consequently, he identified 28 significant entities inhabiting the face, the same number as letters in the Arabic alphabet.⁴⁴ While all languages are related to the metalanguage, Arabic is closer to

the ultimate truth, as it is universally borne in the human form.⁴⁵ These 28 “Arabic” entities are innate to human beings, but there are another four lines with which humans adorned themselves as they became more refined. These lines, the two hair parts (of the head and of the beard) and their two seals, then bring the number of significant entities inhabiting the face to 32, the same number of “names” God taught to Adam in primordial time and of letters in the Persian alphabet.⁴⁶ The underlying correlation between divine language and the human body is similarly affirmed by the fact that the human mouth (our speech organ) contains 32 teeth.⁴⁷ As a result of this numerical parallel with the primordial alphabet, Persian was seen as the closest correlate to the metalanguage and a necessary vehicle for acquiring it.⁴⁸ As previously discussed, Faḍl Allāh consequently saw Persian as the paramount language of Qur’ānic exegesis.

Conclusion

The Persian revival of the ninth and tenth centuries saw the displacement of Arabic as the lingua franca of administration, commerce, and literature in much of the Islamic world. By the thirteenth century, much of the world’s most celebrated Sufi literature was written in Persian. As mystical literature, these works constituted an intermediary step towards the Persian-language’s integration into the religious sciences. Ultimately, Fadl Allāh’s *Jāwidān-nāma* would bridge this linguistic divide not only as Qur’ānic exegesis written in Persian, but also as a text asserting the preeminence of Persian for exegesis. In this way, the *Jāwidān-nāma* can be read as an assertion of Persian religiosity in the face of the Arabic language’s religious hegemony and in the face of persecution by the *‘ulamā*. Indeed despite Fadl Allāh’s concern with upholding and explaining the fundamental rituals of Islam (at a time when mystical and messianic movements had eschewed them), his claims to direct inspiration and to inaugurating the cycle of divinity provoked the condemnation of more ‘orthodox’ Muslims and ultimately led to his execution on charges of heresy.

Regardless of those charges, we should not read the structural fragmentation of the *Jāwidān-nāma* as a political device to dissimulate the Hurūfī doctrine, but as a structural component of the doctrine itself. Fadl Allāh’s teachings on ontological hermeneutics emphasize the importance of disjointed letters in manifesting metaphysical truths. Consequently, those disjointed letters, free of the arbitrary conventions of any particular human language, reveal the universalism of Hurūfī thought, and signal the universalist reforms that will come to characterize the late middle and early modern periods. Despite its universalism, Hurūfī thought maintains the Perso-centric orientation of medieval Islamic thought by asserting that, since differentiation is necessary to make the divine truth knowable, the Persian language is best suited to facilitate that knowledge. Thus, Fadl Allāh’s *Jāwidān-nāma* is both the result and culmination of linguistic trends in the middle periods.

37 Mir-Kasimov, 51.

38 Mir-Kasimov, 51.

39 Mir-Kasimov, 60

40 Mir-Kasimov, 388.

41 Bashir, 99.

42 Bashir, 54.

43 Mir-Kasimov, 74.

44 Bashir, 53.

45 Bashir, 69.

46 Bashir, 53.

47 Bashir, 54.

48 Bashir, 59.

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A REVOLUTIONARY CENTER IN THE EAST?

EARLY TURKISH SOCIALIST
THOUGHT BETWEEN THE THIRD
INTERNATIONAL AND THE TURKISH
NATIONAL MOVEMENT



THEO KNIGHTS

For historians of global socialism Baku, Azerbaijan in the summer of 1920 is often remembered as the site of the First Congress of the Peoples of the East. It was a meeting that the Soviet dominated Third Communist International hoped would bring together the disparate anti-imperial movements of the colonial nations that emerged in the wake of the Great War to form a unified alliance with Western communist parties. Yet, it was a far less well-known meeting in the wake of the First Congress of the People of the East that would play a defining role on the political and intellectual trajectory of Turkish Communism. The First Congress of Turkish Communist Organizations, began on September 10, 1920, just three days after the conclusion of the Congress of the East, and was organized by Turkish political exile, columnist, and economics professor Mustafa Suphi. By most counts 74 official delegates took part in Suphi's congress, some of whom were undoubtedly Ottoman prisoners of war taken by the Russians on the Caucasus Front and still unable to return to Turkey, while others were spies sent by the Anatolian national movement to keep tabs on the socialists.¹ Despite this, a substantial portion of the delegates were committed socialists and communists representing three distinct socialist organizations then active in Turkey; the first was the political wing of Çerkes Ethem's Green Army, the second was Ethem Nejat's Istanbul-based Turkish Workers and Peasants Socialist Party sometimes known as the *Kurtuluş* Group after the party's publication, and the third was Suphi's own Bolshevik backed Turkish Communist Organization.² With the congress Suphi hoped to unite the representatives of these various groups under the single banner of the Turkish Communist Party (*Türkiye Komünist Fırkası* or TKF), and have the congress approve a new party platform that would enable their admission at the next meeting of the Third International. In this regard, the First Congress of Turkish Communist Organizations was a major success, with the political wing of the Anatolian Green Army and Ethem Nejat's Turkish Workers and Peasants Socialist Party agreeing to merge into Suphi's Turkish Communist Party.³ By the end of the congress Suphi was elected as the party's first chairman and Nejat the party secretary.⁴

It was only a few months later at the end of December 1920 that Suphi along with Ethem Nejat and 14 other members of the new Turkish Communist Party set off from Baku to establish themselves within Turkey and hopefully reach Ankara.⁵ After traveling first to Kars and then to Trabzon the group appears to have encountered stiff local resistance while awaiting permission to continue to Ankara and decided to return to Baku. However, on the night of January 28, 1921 while on their way back across the Black Sea, their boat was seized by

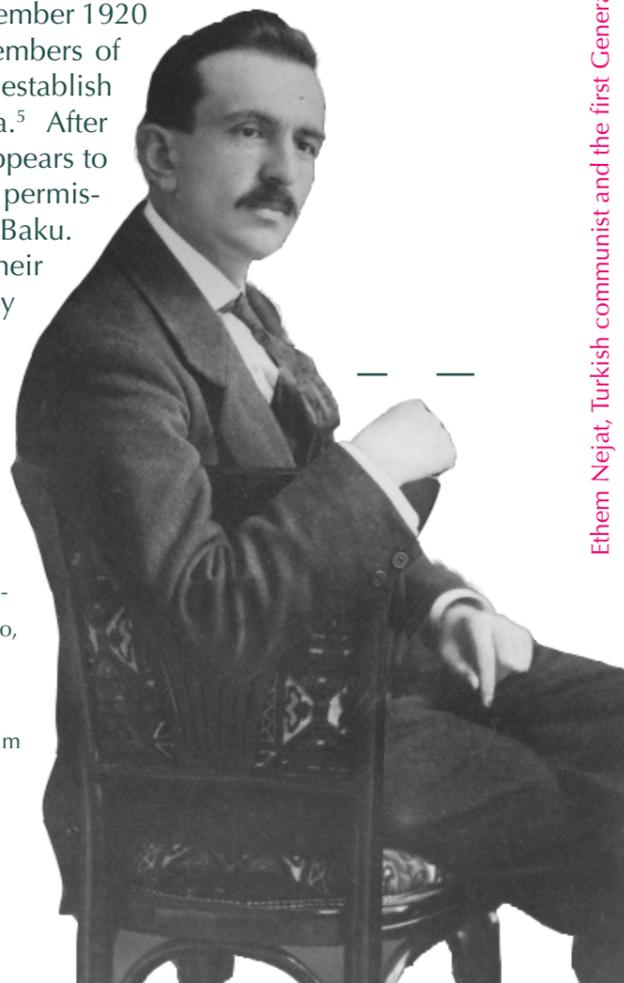
1 Emel Seyhan Atasoy and Meral Bayülgen, eds., *Türkiye İştirakiyun Teşkilatlarının Birinci Kongresi (TKP Kuruluş Kongresi)* (İstanbul: Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2008), 20; George Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution, 1967), 61, 64–5.

2 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 64–5.

3 Erol Ülker, "Sultanists, Republicans, Communists: The Turkish National Movement in Istanbul, 1918–1923" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), 116.

4 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 65.

5 Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, Cilt 1: 1908-1925* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), 341–3.



Ethem Nejat, Turkish communist and the first General Secretary of the Turkish Communist Party (TKF)

an armed gang—likely with orders either from the Ankara government or the Enverists—and the group was drowned.⁶ But the tragedy did not extinguish the Turkish Communist Party. Even though they encountered periods of illegality and exile, the party, and the memory of their fifteen lost comrades, remained a formidable influence shaping the emerging Turkish left.

Despite this, socialist thought as an ideological alternative to Mustafa Kemal's nationalism in the immediate post war period has at best been overlooked by the existing scholarship and at worst been erased as a result of nationalist revisionism. In the dominant European historiography of modern Turkey the communists headed by Suphi are dismissed as Soviet stooges. Bernard Lewis includes only the briefest of references to the Turkish Communist Party in *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* as part of a discussion of Russian influence on the early Republic.⁷ The various communists and socialist movements do not fare much better in more recent analyses, with Erik Jan Zürcher's *Turkey: A Modern History* dedicating just one page to summarizing the various socialist revolutionary movements of the 1920s, concluding that the "extreme left" did not constitute a "real" threat to Mustafa Kemal's leadership.⁸ One of the only English language monographs systematically addressing communism in Turkey, written by George Harris and titled *The Communists and the Kadro Movement*, describes Mustafa Suphi as squarely "under the Kremlin's guidance and control."⁹ And prominent French scholar of Turkish socialism, Paul Dumont, dismissed Mustafa Suphi as a mere Soviet propagandist with a "virulent pen" but who was "hardly good at doctrinal debates."¹⁰ What all these treatments of Suphi and his movement reflect is the prevailing wisdom in the historiography of the Comintern, most famously articulated by E.H. Carr in his study of the later history of the organization, of a "Moscow line" which was transmitted in a single direction from the core to the communist periphery.¹¹

The Turkish socialist movement might have hoped to receive a more fair-minded and intensive investigation from socialist historians of the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic. But too often their analyses are beset by their own myopic focus on the role of nationalism in the ideology of socialist thinkers. Mete Tunçay—the doyen of the academic study of the Turkish left—in one such volume reflects disappointedly that, "during the late years of the Ottoman Empire, socialism and communism were used as instruments of clashing nationalisms by members of diverse groups."¹² He concludes that, despite the party's more internationalist impulses in the late 1920s, "In the earlier phase of its founding congress in Baku, the TKF [] was under the spell of nationalism."¹³ But to accept such a binary is to impose a much later official Soviet line on the contradiction between Comintern condoned communist activism and self-determination as well as foists modern Marxists'

6 Ülker, "Sultanists, Republicans, Communists," 116–117.

7 Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1968), 284.

8 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3rd edition (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 157.

9 George Harris, *The Communists and the Kadro Movement: Shaping Ideology in Atatürk's Turkey*, (Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 2002), 40

10 Paul Dumont, *Du Socialisme Ottoman À L'Internationalisme Anatolien* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2011), 256.

11 Oleksa Drachewych and Ian McKay, *Left Transnationalism: The Communist International and the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020) 5.

12 Mete Tunçay, "In Lieu of a Conclusion," in *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1923* eds. Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher (London: British Academic Press, 1995), 168.

13 Tunçay, "In Lieu of a Conclusion," 163.

disdain for nationalism upon a period when the Comintern's official ideology was hotly contested and it is not at all clear that it was deviational to attempt to be both nationalist and communist.¹⁴ Other well-regarded treatments, following orthodox Marxist interpretations of socialist revolution, interpret the lack of communist and socialist activism in the region as a result of inadequate industrial development. In his preface to *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1923*, which was envisioned as an overview of the field and produced by the International Institute of Social History, Erik Jan Zürcher declares that, "The project was undertaken originally in order to trace the earliest development of socialism in the Levant. A concentration on the non-Muslim communities was unavoidable in this context, given the much slower development of an industrial working class among the Muslims."¹⁵ In his own contribution to the same volume Feroz Ahmad, despite recognizing the diverse interpretations of socialism in the period before 1914, declares:

[O]ne might well ask whether Ottoman society had the objective conditions necessary to receive socialism. Among these conditions one might list: the existence of a working class and trade unions; a class society with class struggle; universal suffrage; internationalism; and sympathetic intellectuals. Of these factors, the Ottomans were well endowed with the fifth. There was as yet no significant working class—either numerically large or militantly conscious—capable of providing the basis for a dynamic and vibrant trade-union movement.¹⁶

Yet in insisting on these doctrinaire Marxist interpretations of the path to socialist revolution, Ahmed and the rest of the contributors to the volume largely erase Turkish socialists in the immediate post-war period who, like socialists in other agrarian societies, were in no way convinced of the necessity of these "objective conditions."¹⁷

In response to this dominant historiographic gloss, I offer an examination of the thought and ideological influences present among two circles of Turkish intellectuals that came to be subsumed within the Turkish Communist Party—namely those affiliated with the Turkish Workers and Peasants Socialist Party and members of Suphi's own Turkish Communist Organization. Through a careful rereading of *Kurtuluş*, Suphi's speech before the Third International, and the debates that animated the First Congress of Turkish Communist Organizations this paper demonstrates that far from the movement's characterization in the historiography as variably Soviet stooges or closet nationalists, the Turkish communist movement in the two-year period of 1919 and 1920 was intellectually vibrant, of diverse opinion on the major debates of the day, and substantively contested the Comintern's emerging "Moscow line" on global revolution while still opposing the bourgeois nationalism of Mustafa

Kemal's Turkish National Movement.

To understand just how intellectually distant the Turkish socialists that would come to be involved in the Turkish Communist Party were from the dominant theoretical line of the Third International it is necessary to first offer some basic historical context of those associated with the Turkish Workers and Peasants Socialist Party. The group emerged from Ottoman students and workers in Germany at the end of the Great War who gained experience with the revolutionary socialism of the German Spartacus League and then returned to Istanbul at the start of the armistice with a far more theoretically developed understanding of Marxism than was present among the previous generations of activists in the Ottoman Empire. Chief among these returnees was Ethem Nejat, who was an outspoken educational reformer and Turkist before the Great War.¹⁸ In September of 1918 he traveled to Berlin on behalf of the Ministry of Education and there was swayed by the leftism of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacist League, which instigated a communist uprising in January of 1919.¹⁹ The influence of the League was powerful enough on Nejat and others that they founded a derivative organization for émigré Turks in Germany known as the Turkish Spartacists, which reorganized in 1919 under Nejat's leadership as the Turkish Workers and Peasants Party (*Türkiye İşçi ve Çiftçi Fırkası*).²⁰ In Berlin, Nejat and others launched the party's official organ, *Kurtuluş* on May Day of 1919.²¹ At the time of *Kurtuluş*'s first issue Ethem Nejat and his fellow party members were already making plans for their return to Istanbul.²² Once publication resumed in Istanbul in September 1919 it quickly attracted several additional writers who would prove to be politically and intellectually influential on the development of Turkish socialism. Among them was Doctor Şefik Hüsnü (Değmer), who studied neurology in France before the war where —like earlier Turkish leftists— he came under the influence of French socialist Jean Juarés. Another educator, Hilmioğlu "Arap" İsmail Hakkı, who received his higher education, likely a doctorate, in Germany during the war also swiftly gained importance in Nejat's circle upon its return to Istanbul.²³ With the dissolution of the Ottoman Parliament and occupation of Istanbul by the Entente Powers in March of 1920, political activity was severely curtailed and *Kurtuluş* was shut down.²⁴ In order to escape this stifling atmosphere, Ethem Nejat and Hilmioğlu Hakkı appear to have left Istanbul together heading to Baku, via Çerkes Ethem's Green Army in Eskişehir, with the intent of attending the first Congress of the Peoples of the East.²⁵

Considering the editorial decisions of *Kurtuluş* in light of the historical context discussed above and contemporaneous developments in the global communist movement evince some of how Ethem Nejat and his group negotiated, and by and large resisted, the pressures of the increasingly radical Third International. The Berlin-based writers and editors of the first issue of *Kurtuluş* would have been unable to ignore that only months prior the German Spartacist movement was brutally suppressed by reactionary forces, which enjoyed the tacit support of the ruling German Social Democratic Party, and culminated in the summary

14 Drachewych and McKay, *Left Transnationalism*, 6.

15 Erik Jan Zürcher, "Introduction," in *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1923* eds. Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher (London: British Academic Press, 1995), 9.

16 Feroz Ahmad, "Some Thoughts on the Role of Ethnic and Religious Minorities in the Genesis and Development of the Socialist Movement in Turkey (1876–1923)," in *Socialism and Nationalisms in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1923* eds. Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher (London: British Academic Press, 1995), 14–5.

17 For a recent discussion of the successful appeal of socialism in an agrarian society see Maria Todorova, *The Lost World of Socialists at Europe's Margins: Imagining Utopia, 1870s - 1920s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

18 Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, Cilt 1*, 336.

19 Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, Cilt 1*, 336.

20 Ülker, "Sultanists, Republicans, Communists," 110.

21 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 40.

22 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 41.

23 Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, Cilt 1: 1908-1925*, 716.

24 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 49.

25 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 60.

execution of German Communist Party leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.²⁶ In fact, a year later at Suphi's First Congress of Turkish Communist Organizations the delegates would even commemorate those Turkish socialists who lost their lives fighting during the uprising.²⁷ Yet, the publication's contributors, who had so recently self-described as Spartacists, appeared disinterested in using their publication to trumpet the revolutionary zeal of the German Spartacists, particularly Rosa Luxemburg's unapologetically activist and anti-parliamentarian politics in the wake of the Great War.²⁸ This first issue of *Kurtuluş* makes no mention of the Spartacist's cause or of Luxemburg's murder. Indeed, a section titled "World News" promised on the cover of the journal did not even make it to print.²⁹ Instead, this early issue contains—alongside a brief biography of Marx—a translated letter from Anatole France, written five years prior, on the passing of socialist Jean Jaurès.³⁰ Jaurès was a particularly unusual choice for an otherwise accelerationist moment. As a founding member of the French Socialist Party and a social democrat, Jaurès was a decidedly less than radical figure, well known for his insistence upon a reformist and parliamentary path to socialist revolution.³¹ This is striking because *Kurtuluş* and the Turkish Workers and Peasants Party emerged at a time when Lenin and the Bolsheviks were convening the Third International and were publicly insisting on "a socialist revolution now" leading to the "dictatorship of the proletariat."³² For the communists of the Third International this meant abandoning the democratic politics of the socialist parties, whom they now derided as "social-patriots" for their betrayal of internationalism during the Great War.³³ The increasing power of the Bolsheviks in the international movement also meant that post-war socialist parties who wanted to rejoin the international movement were expected to distance themselves from their wartime betrayal by adopting the title "communist."³⁴ Yet, the intellectuals around *Kurtuluş* avoided placing any partisan terminology in the title of their new political party when it was declared in Berlin.³⁵ And even when they opened a legally recognized version of the organization in Istanbul in August of 1919, Nejat and others chose to add only the term "socialist" to the preexisting title, becoming the Turkish Workers and Peasants Socialist Party (*Türkiye İşçi ve Çiftçi Sosyalist Fırkası* or TİÇSF).³⁶

Continuing the trend of upholding moderate social democrats like Jaurès, *Kurtuluş* carried numerous instalments of a translation of American socialist Morris Hillquit's *Social-*

ism in Theory and Practice.³⁷ Again, this was an unusual decision for a group supposedly radicalized by their experience of the Spartacist uprising that so ardently rejected the reformism of the social democrats. Hillquit had also been quite publicly denounced by the Bolsheviks for being too tepid. Despite opposing the Great War, Hillquit was listed by the Second Congress of the Comintern in the seventh of their 21 conditions for admission as an example of the type of "opportunist" that should not be tolerated among communist parties.³⁸ Leon Trotsky's description of Hillquit in his autobiography, as "the ideal Socialist leader for successful dentists" perhaps best encapsulates the international communist movement's general distaste for the American socialist.³⁹ Thus, the *Kurtuluş* group was certainly plying its own path when it came to their ideological direction, one that contravened the emerging orthodoxies of the Comintern and contradicts their characterization, less than a year later, as mere tools of Soviet influence.

In those issues of *Kurtuluş* printed in Turkey, which appeared until February of 1920, both Ethem Nejat and Şefik Hüsnü published their own analysis and interpretation of socialist doctrine that they hoped would support the party's political goals. Their articles evince not a doctrinaire Marxism, as is sometimes suggested, but rather a commitment to creating a socialist revolution within the Turkish reality. The two thinkers did not view their insistence on a socialist reorganizing of society in the largely un-industrialized Ottoman Empire as "paradoxical," nor were they convinced that Ottoman society was missing any of the "objective conditions" necessary for the reception of socialism, despite the fact that Western socialists, located at the movement's center, often argued as much. Even Rosa Luxemburg, who famously opposed national self-determination, declared in 1896 that the "dead weight of Turkish rule was even incapable of generating capitalism—and thus, ultimately socialism; the sooner it was destroyed and split up into constituent national parts the better—and then this backward area might catch up with the normal process of historical dialectic."⁴⁰ This was decidedly not the position of the Turkish socialists. In an article titled "Who are the Proletariat?," from the first issue of *Kurtuluş* published after relocating to Istanbul, Ethem Nejat's response to the essay's titular question demonstrates he did not view socialist consciousness as purely the preserve of the Empire's nascent working class as many historians of socialism have presumed, and instead was committed to developing socialist consciousness outside of an industrial working class. He informs the reader: "The proletariat is the class which works, which dedicates its life to working, but which cannot derive a profit at the rate that they work and always struggles in life. ...The Proletariat is not only factory workers; in a more general description they are the classes who labored during the 19th century."⁴¹ And Nejat concludes the article unequivocal on the question of the appropriateness of a Turkish socialism: "The search for the interest and welfare of the Turks, whose population is 95%

26 Klaus Gietinger, "The Man Who Murdered Rosa Luxemburg," *Jacobin*, January 15, 2020, <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/01/rosa-luxemburg-murder-waldemar-pabst-germany>.

27 Ülker, "Sultanists, Republicans, Communists," 110.

28 Alec Hudson, "Rosa Lives: An Interview With Paul Buhle," *Jacobin*, January 29, 2016, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/01/rosa-luxemburg-paul-buhle-clr-james-reform-revolution-german-spdl/>.

29 "Mündericat," *Kurtuluş*, no: 1, May 1, 1919.

30 Anatole France, "Jaurès Ayrılış," trans. Sadık Ahi, in Rasih Nuri İleri, *Kurtuluş: Türkiye İşçi ve Çiftçi Sosyalist Fırkası Organı, 1 Mayıs 1919–Şubat 1920* (İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2007), 50–51.

31 Geoffrey Kurtz, *Jean Jaurès: The Inner Life of Social Democracy* (Penn State University Press, 2014), 124–5.

32 John Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress, March 1919* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1987), 8.

33 Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International*, 8.

34 Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International*, 5.

35 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 40.

36 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 41.

37 Morris Hillquit, "Sosyalizm Nazariye ve Uygulaması," trans. Mehmed Vehbi, in Rasih Nuri İleri, *Kurtuluş: Türkiye İşçi ve Çiftçi Sosyalist Fırkası Organı, 1 Mayıs 1919–Şubat 1920* (İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2007), 61.

38 John Riddell, *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991), 282.

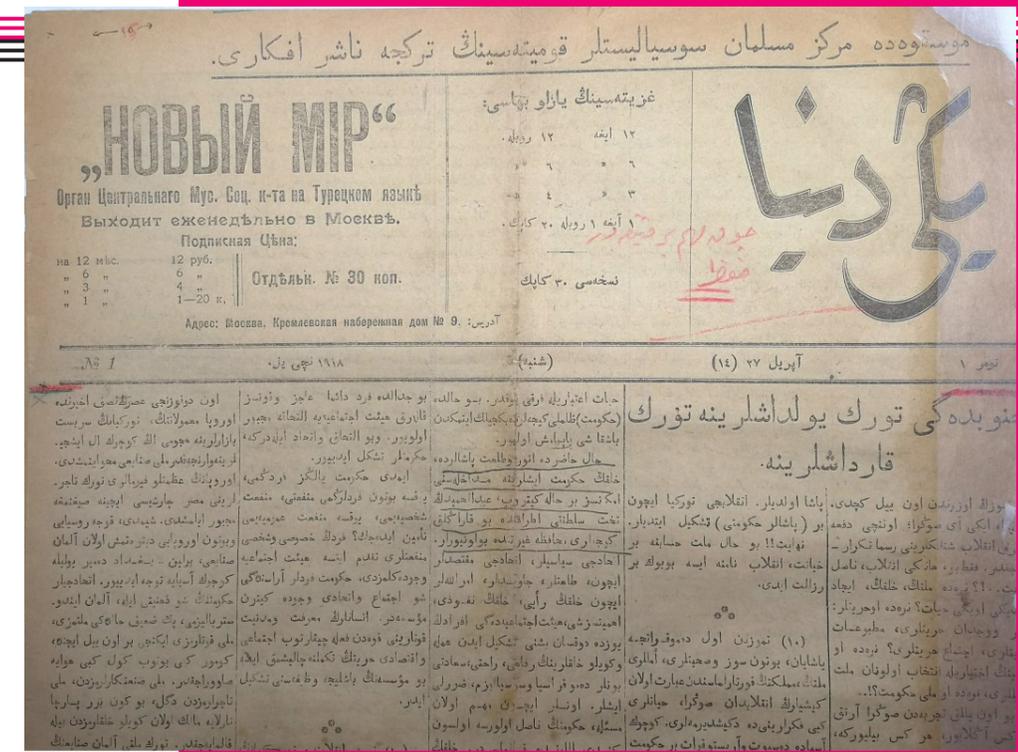
39 Kenneth D. Ackerman, *Trotsky in New York, 1917: A Radical on the Eve of Revolution*, (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2017), 175.

40 John P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg, vol. 1* (London: Oxford UP, 1966), 100.

41 Ethem Nejat, "Proletarya Kimlerdir?," in Rasih Nuri İleri, *Kurtuluş: Türkiye İşçi ve Çiftçi Sosyalist Fırkası Organı, 1 Mayıs 1919–Şubat 1920* (İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2007), 71.

proletariat, in socialism is a very sensible and correct means of deliverance.”⁴² In a subsequent *Kurtuluş* issue Şefik Hüsnü sought to fend off the suggestion that Turkey’s agrarian laborers were somehow not the concern of the socialist movement, arguing in the essay “The Proletariat of Today and Class Consciousness,” that, “Many foster the misconception that the currents of socialism are directed to find a remedy only to the poverty of the great masses of workers who work...in factories. A very false supposition which was invented in order to shrink and restrict the high and wide [socialist] ideal...”⁴³ Thus, in these early years both Ethem Nejat and Şefik Hüsnü’s more theoretically inclined writings demonstrate that Turkish socialists saw socialist revolution as suitable for Anatolia’s predominantly agrarian society.

It was in Baku in 1920 that Ethem Nejat and Hilmioğlu Hakkı of the *Kurtuluş* group would first meet Mustafa Suphi, whose own vision of Anatolia, and the “East” more generally, as the lynchpin of world socialist revolution challenged European socialists’ perceptions about societies with incipient working classes and guaranteed, despite his close working relationship with the Soviets, an intellectual independence that led him to directly challenge the emerging ideology of the Communist International. Suphi, who studied political science in Paris and had for a time served as editor of the organ of Yusuf Akçura and Ahmet Ferit Tek’s explicitly Turkist National Constitutional Party (*Millî Meşrutiyet Fırkası*), was exiled to Sinop in 1913 as the CUP triumvirate tightened its grip on power.⁴⁴ After escaping to Russian Crimea in a perilous journey across the Black Sea, he had briefly harbored hopes of founding a Turkist newspaper in Baku but with the outbreak of the First World War he was arrested by Russian authorities and forcibly relocated alongside Ottoman prisoners of war to the Urals.⁴⁵ It was here, during the early years of the war, that he was exposed to the thought of the Russian communist movement.⁴⁶ In the wake of the October Revolution Suphi joined the Bolshevik Party’s People’s Commissariat of Nationalities as part of the Central Commissariat of Muslim affairs (Muskom) and in 1919 attended the founding congress of the Third International as the representative for Turkey.⁴⁷ In this period Suphi worked tirelessly to organize and promote the communist cause through his Turkish language newspaper, *Yeni Dünya*, which he distributed throughout the Turkic speaking world.⁴⁸ Yet, leading a socialist movement in Anatolia seems to have remained Suphi’s primary objective and he constantly sought to move closer to the Turkish heartland, relocating his publishing activities in 1919 to Crimea, where trade networks across the Black Sea ensured he could smuggle the paper into Turkey.⁴⁹ With the recapture of Crimea by the White Army in the summer of 1919, Suphi fled to Turkestan where he spent a year assisting in Soviet efforts to propagandize the communist cause among Turkic peoples.⁵⁰ With his work complete in Turkestan and the liberation of Azerbaijan by the Bolsheviks in April of 1920, Suphi moved even closer to the Turkish



The first cover of *Yeni Dünya* (1919)

frontier. After arriving in Azerbaijan in late May of 1920, he took over the Baku-based Turkish Communist Party (TKF).⁵¹ The party in Baku was initially founded by former Unionists, sympathetic to Enver Paşa, earlier in 1920 with the hope of using it as a platform to win Soviet support for the Unionist cause.⁵² With the arrival of the Red Army these hopes were dashed and Suphi quickly set about purging the TKF of its Unionist inclined members and establishing new institutions, including a publishing house and volunteer army, with which to promote communism in Anatolia.⁵³ From his new base in Baku Suphi was able to more effectively distribute copies of *Yeni Dünya* in Anatolia, and for the first time undertook an extensive project of translating communist texts for a Turkish audience.⁵⁴

A close analysis of Suphi’s speech before an early meeting of the First Congress of the Comintern demonstrates that he was no mere foot soldier of the international communist movement and shows a clear interest in shaping and criticizing the Third International’s approach to world revolution. In this speech, published as the “Report on Turkey,” he declared that, “I am deeply convinced that the revolution in the East is directly related to the revolution in the West,” before going on to explain the connection:

Comrades, you all know that if the head of Anglo-French imperialism is located in Europe, then its belly rests on the rich fields of Asia. And for us, the Turkish socialists, the first and main task is to tear out capitalism by the roots in the East. Only in this way will Anglo-French production be deprived of raw materials. If Turkey, Persia, India, China, and others close their doors to An-

51 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 58.

52 Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher, eds. *Socialism and Nationalisms in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1923* (London: British Academic Press, 1995) 206–7.

53 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 59.

54 Dumont, *Du Socialisme Ottoman À L’Internationalisme Anatolien*, 269–70.

42 Nejat, “Proletarya Kimlerdir?,” 74.

43 Şefik Hüsnü, “Bügünkü Proletarya ve Sınıf Şuuru,” in Rasih Nuri İleri, *Kurtuluş: Türkiye İşçi ve Çiftçi Sosyalist Fırkası Organı, 1 Mayıs 1919–Şubat 1920* (İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2007), 143.

44 Yavuz Aslan, *Türkiye Komünist Fırkası’nın Kuruluşu ve Mustafa Suphi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1997), 6-11.

45 Aslan, *Türkiye Komünist Fırkası’nın Kuruluşu ve Mustafa Suphi*, 13-24.

46 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 52

47 Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International*, 42.

48 Dumont, *Du Socialisme Ottoman À L’Internationalisme Anatolien*, 262–3.

49 Dumont, *Du Socialisme Ottoman À L’Internationalisme Anatolien*, 262–3.

50 Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, 55–56.

glo-French industry, they will prevent it from selling its stocks on the European exchanges and thus provoke an unavoidable crisis.⁵⁵

Suphi's formulation is remarkable for its inversion of the expected flow of the revolutionary tide from West to East, a preconception that was prevalent among socialist thinkers of the time, and best summed up by Vladimir Lenin's own contributions to the congress, in which he proclaimed "Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia: the hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your liberation!"⁵⁶ Despite this, in Suphi's plea for the Comintern to place greater emphasis on the East in the world socialist revolution, it is possible to detect theoretical developments first articulated by Lenin in his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, which characterizes capitalism as a world system that was made possible in part by the uneven development of the colonizing core and the colonized and semi-colonized periphery.⁵⁷ Lenin's understanding of capitalism as a global system led him to support nationalist revolutions led by elites in the semi-colonial and colonial countries in the hope that doing so might exacerbate proletarian revolution in the colonizing core.⁵⁸ However, he still viewed these anti-colonial national revolutions as bourgeoisie in nature because he believed that these societies must pass through a bourgeoisie industrial phase before they were prepared for proletarian revolution aimed at socialism.⁵⁹ Because Lenin's formulation still relied on society passing through two distinct revolutionary stages he never abandoned his belief that a true socialist society was most likely to emerge first in the highly developed European center, for example in Germany, where he saw a bourgeoisie republic as already well established.⁶⁰ And as such, the focus of the First Congress of the Third International reflected the excitement over what was seen as the actualization of a socialist revolution in Germany, leaving a revolution in the "East" as an afterthought. Thus, despite drawing on Lenin's theory, Suphi's speech must be viewed as a critique of the congress' Eurocentric focus, particularly because of the primacy he places on social revolution in the "East" for the success of both the Russian and German revolutions. In Moscow the year prior at the conference of Turkish Left Socialists Suphi had gone even further, declaring that the Turkish socialists must "sever its ties with capitalism and enter into no alliance with it."⁶¹ In this way Suphi rejected Lenin's call for Eastern communists to support strategic cooperation with the bourgeoisie nationalist parties. Indeed, as historian Bulent Gökay notes, in the wake of Suphi's murder the Russian Communist Party issued a statement to party members that heavily implied that Suphi and his fellow party members had been guilty of the left-wing deviation of overexuberance, pre-maturely seeking to launch a communist revolution before an adequate foundation was laid.⁶²

55 Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International*, 208.

56 Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International*, 227–8.

57 Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939).

58 Branko M. Lazić and Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Lenin and the Comintern* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 367–8.

59 Lazić and Drachkovitch, *Lenin and the Comintern*, 367–8.

60 Tamás Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Balint Bethlenfalvy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015), 285.

61 Lazić and Drachkovitch, *Lenin and the Comintern*, 372.

62 Bulent Gokay, *Soviet Eastern Policy and Turkey, 1920-1991: Soviet Foreign Policy, Turkey and Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 26–27.

With his emphasis on the role and readiness of the "East" for world revolution Suphi's thought appears to most closely parallel Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev's theory of social revolution. Sultan-Galiev, a Volga Tatar and prominent Bolshevik, came to know Suphi through their joint work for the Muslim Commissariat in Turkestan.⁶³ Sultan Galiev is often credited as the idealogue of a heterodox ideology often termed "national communism" based on his theoretical work to outline the role of the East in world revolution in the Russian language journal *Life of the Nationalities* (*Zhizn' Natsional'nostei*), which he edited.⁶⁴ Over the course of a series of articles published in October and November of 1919—notably after Suphi's Comintern speech—he repeatedly criticized the Bolsheviks and the rest of the international communist movement for failing to acknowledge the importance of the East to their aims. In the essay "The Social Revolution and the East" he proclaims that:

In attacking international imperialism only with the West European proletariat, we leave it full freedom of action and maneuver in the East. As long as international imperialism, represented by the Entente, dominates the East, where it is the absolute master of all-natural wealth, then so long is it guaranteed of a successful outcome in all its clashes in the economic field with the working masses of the home countries.⁶⁵

At the end of November at the Second All Russian Congress of Communist Organizations of Eastern Peoples, Sultan-Galiev, like Suphi, went further and made explicit his objection to Lenin's stage-based understanding of revolution and his relegation of the anti-colonial resistance in the East to the status of bourgeoisie revolution stating, "The East is a revolutionary cauldron capable of putting a revolutionary torch to all of Western Europe."⁶⁶ Douglas Northrop, a historian of Soviet Central Asia, compellingly argues that Sultan-Galiev has been persistently misrepresented and misread by both Stalinist and anti-Stalinist historians alike as a nationalist who saw the western proletariat as almost as much of a threat to the colonized peoples of the east as the western bourgeoisie.⁶⁷ In the Stalinist imaginary he possessed only a "vegetarian communism" for which he was purged from the Bolshevik party and ultimately executed.⁶⁸ In much the same way, the Turkish language historiography of Suphi, driven by the influential work of Turkish socialist historian Mete Tunçay, has characterized him as "a Turkish intellectual who shared nationalist views in accordance with the conditions of the period and who remained as such until the end" on the basis of Suphi's preoccupation with the colonized East and his pre-War Turkist affiliations.⁶⁹ If we abandon the received picture of either figure and instead return—as Northrop has done with Sultan-Galiev—to their actual writings, quoted above, we find that both intellectuals argue for integrating the East into the world revolution and "call for Eastern equality, not superi-

63 Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 207–8.

64 Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union*, 207–208.

65 Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union*, 134.

66 Lazić and Drachkovitch, *Lenin and the Comintern*, 379.

67 Douglas Northrop, "Reconsidering Sultan-Galiev," in *Selected Topics in Soviet Ethnopolitics*, ed. Gail Lapidus and Corbin Lyday (Berkeley-Stanford Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, 1992), 7–8.

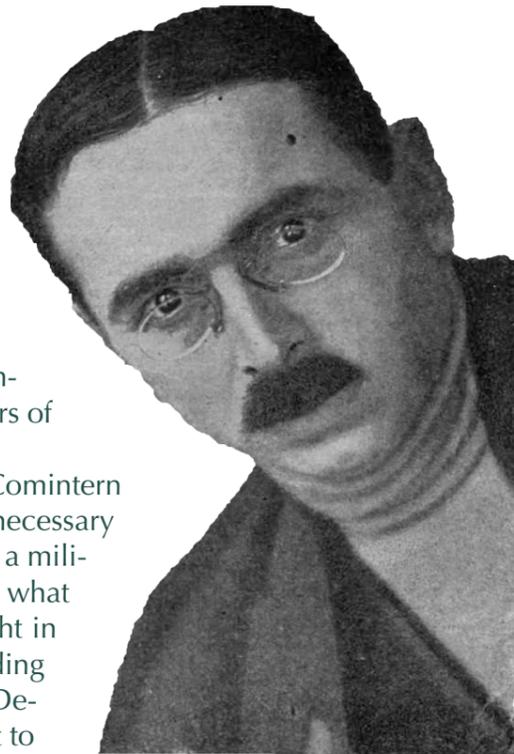
68 Northrop, "Reconsidering Sultan-Galiev," 6.

69 Mete Tunçay, *Mustafa Suphi'nin Yeni Dünya'sı* (Istanbul: BDS Yayınları, 1995), 7.

ority” that was squarely within the Leninist tradition outlined in *Imperialism*.⁷⁰ At the same time, if we accept Northrup’s view that Sultan-Galiev’s main theoretical contribution “lay in the imperialist analysis of the East” first articulated in his article “The Social Revolution and the East” then it is also necessary to revisit western scholars’ more dismissive view of Mustafa Suphi’s intellectual credentials.⁷¹ His role in articulating ideas about the necessity of the East to world revolution, even before Sultan-Galiev, suggest that far from a passive recipient of Soviet communist orthodoxy, Suphi was an active, if ultimately under-appreciated, participant in developing the ideological contours of the Third International.

Analyzing the rest of Mustafa Suphi’s speech before the Comintern also reveals that he was both convinced that Turkey had the necessary framework to accept a socialist revolution and already organizing a military force for such an action. In his speech, Suphi calls attention to what he sees as evidence of the existing penetration of socialist thought in the country, noting that “After the October revolution, the awarding of the Nobel prize was discussed at the University of Istanbul. Despite the pressure of their professors, the Turkish youth awarded it to Comrade Lenin, and thus showed once more that the ideas of socialist revolution have firmly taken root in the East.”⁷² Further, Suphi’s work with Muskom to rally Turkish prisoners of war to the communist cause suggests that his call at the end of the speech that “we [the people of the East] must grasp our weapons firmly and not let our goal slip from view” was intended as more than rhetorical vigor.⁷³ By the summer of 1920 Suphi had armed some 700 volunteers and distributed more than 4,000 copies of *Yeni Dünya* with many of the copies being smuggled into Turkey.⁷⁴

Finally, having shown Suphi to be neither a simple Soviet stooge nor a Turkish nationalist, it is possible to turn to the larger implications of Mete Tunçay’s accusation that the Turkish Communist Party employed communist and socialist thought as little more than a vehicle of their nationalism at the party’s founding congress. A careful examination of the debates of the congress reveals that many party members exhibited, like Suphi, a sincere commitment to communist internationalism alongside a fierce anti-colonialism that called for Turkey’s national liberation. However, most crucially their framework remained, for the time, to the left of the Comintern and Lenin’s line, opposing the necessity of communist cooperation with local bourgeoisie forces of national liberation. On the morning of the third day of the congress, Hilmioğlu Hakkı, of the *Kurtuluş* group, delivered a report to the delegates on the issue of colonialism in which these currents begin to become evident.⁷⁵ Hakkı’s speech con-



Mustafa Suphi, 1920

demned in no uncertain terms the Second International for its embrace of reformist thinkers and their pro-colonial positions, which unabashedly defended the maintenance of existing colonies as well as the expansion and inclusion of new ones.⁷⁶ Hakkı’s moral outrage at the reformist position was evident in his sardonic assertion that:

According to [Hendrik] Van Kol and his ilk, the populations of Dutch India and German Cameroon, for instance, should be grateful for civilization being imported from Europe to their countries with armed and overwhelming force; just as wild animals in circuses—who are shoved into iron cages upon being trapped in the wilderness—are forced to be grateful to their trainer for the applause and money that they collect from the tricks that they manage to perform under the threat of the whip and prod. These original socialists of the Stuttgart Congress finally did not forget the art of placing their reasoning, which defended the capitalist colonial policy, inside a Marxist framework: the colonies cannot constitute an exception to the law of development; they are compelled to pass through the agonizing path of capitalism in order to reach socialism!⁷⁷

Notably, although Hakkı does not name Jaurès in his speech, Jaurès was among the most prominent advocates of such a colonial policy and his reformist politics undoubtedly loomed large for other well-read Turkish socialists. Thus, with this address Hakkı appears to break from his fellow members of the *Kurtuluş* group who were sympathetic in their journal to Jaurès and the social democrats who belonged to the Second International. Hakkı’s speech was also a forceful denunciation of the concept of stage-based development and the premise, from which even Lenin could not fully escape, that proletarian revolution and socialism would necessarily arise first in a more developed West. Despite the novel implications of parts of Hilmioğlu Hakkı’s speech, other sections clearly display the rhetorical and intellectual influence of Lenin’s internationalism. Hakkı insults the social democratic traitors who backed bourgeois parties in the Great War by calling them—as Lenin did—“social-patriots, social-imperialists, [and] social-opportunists.”⁷⁸ Hakkı, then, was not exactly friendly to the ideas of those advocating for communist cooperation with the national parties.

Hilmioğlu Hakkı also links Turkish liberation to world socialist revolution, declaring that, “During the Battle of Crimea, Karl Marx upheld the side of Turkey against the Russian

serili” İsmail Hakkı who during a debate on the national and colonial questions and declared plainly the TKF’s intent to cooperate with Mustafa Kemal’s National Liberation Movement. Notably, Hilmioğlu İsmail Hakkı was also the older brother of Naciye Hanım who delivered a well-known address to the Congress of the Peoples of the East on the issue of women’s rights.

76 Atasoy and Bayülgen, eds., *Türkiye İştirakiyun Teşkilatlarının Birinci Kongresi*, 29.

77 Hilmioğlu Hakkı, “Müstemlekât Meselesi” in Emel Seyhan Atasoy and Meral Bayülgen, eds., *Türkiye İştirakiyun Teşkilatlarının Birinci Kongresi (TKP Kuruluş Kongresi)* (İstanbul: Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2008), 96.

Hendrik Van Kol was a Dutch socialist and plantation owner in Java. As a delegate of the 1907 world congress in Stuttgart he was a prominent proponent of a narrowly defeated pro-colonial motion. For more see: John Riddell, “How Socialists of Lenin’s Time Responded to Colonialism,” John Riddell: Marxist Essays and Commentary, last modified December 14, 2014, <https://johnriddell.com/2014/12/14/how-socialists-of-lenins-time-responded-to-colonialism>.

78 Hakkı, “Müstemlekât Meselesi,” 98.

70 Northrop, “Reconsidering Sultan-Galiev,” 29–30.

71 Northrop, “Reconsidering Sultan-Galiev,” 34.

72 John Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International*, 207.

73 John Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International*, 208.

74 Dumont, *Du Socialisme Ottoman À L’Internationalisme Anatolien*, 270.

75 Harris’ *The Origins of Communism in Turkey* confuses Hilmioğlu “Arap” İsmail Hakkı (d. 1921) with the similarly named “Kayserili” İsmail Hakkı, a confidant of Suphi’s also in attendance at the First Congress of the Turkish Communist Party. Both men had attended had traveled to Petrograd to attend the Second Congress of the Comintern but it was “Kay-

Empire and had thought of Turkey's peasants as being Europe's most pure and moral type of peasant. Today Russia's Soviet government, in its capacity as the heir of Marx himself, unites with the Turkish peasant in opposition to the European imperialists."⁷⁹ Before stating again even more bluntly at the end of the speech that, "Turkey's liberation may be [able to be] possible with world liberation, that is to say with the destruction of capital."⁸⁰ And his high regard for the international aspects of socialism is also on display elsewhere in the speech when he states—again echoing Lenin—that: "If today's great revolution goes without the ability to take hold of the whole world, in other words, if the whole world...abstains from participating in the sacred fight which has been opened against capital, then without a doubt many more destructive world wars than that which occurred yesterday will arise."⁸¹ Thus, in his speech Hilmioğlu Hakkı must be seen as part of a persistent attempt to internationalize Turkey's ongoing struggle for national liberation, positioning it as part of a greater fight for the liberation of the worker.

Following Hilmioğlu Hakkı's discussion of imperialism another delegate, known only as Comrade Nazmi, a communist from Anatolia, delivered a speech on the topic of "nationalities" (*Milliyetler*). Nazmi blamed the national issues that arose in the Ottoman Empire on the "colonial politics" of the capitalist states and quickly turned his speech toward the topic of the conflict between the Turks and Armenians. For Nazmi the bloodshed could be explained as the result of imperial machinations inflaming nationalist sentiments:

During the world war, which was a result of European imperialism, the wretched and poor Armenian villagers again became tools of English deception and the incitement of the Dashnak [Armenian revolutionaries] and priests. In the area of Van and Bitlis they started to kill Muslim poor people, burn their homes, and loot their property... As a response the government of Union and Progress acted without mercy, the Armenians were deported; their assets were taken and a large portion were killed by secret order.⁸²

As begins to become apparent in the above quote, what is curious about Nazmi's speech is that although he attempts to blame the Armenians in part for their awful predicament, he does not obfuscate Turkish responsibility. He decries the CUP government and their own enchantment with nationalism stating, "The bigwigs and bullies who administer the Turkish government and the Turkish poor people and peasants should not be confused with one another. The important ones certainly played a sinister role in order to defend their personal interests under the veil of Islamism [*İslâmiyet*] and nationalism [*milliyet*]."⁸³ And perhaps even more tellingly he views the Ottoman ruling class as no different from their Armenian counterparts, admonishing that, "the Committee on Union and Progress and Turkish statistes [*devletçiler*] also had served German politics under the flag of nationality and sect. As a result, Turkish and Armenian poor were obliterated by the millions."⁸⁴

79 Hakkı, "Müstemlekât Meselesi," 100.

80 Hakkı, "Müstemlekât Meselesi," 102.

81 Hakkı, "Müstemlekât Meselesi," 100.

82 Nazmi Yoldaş, "Milliyetler Hakkında" in Atasoy and Bayülgen, *Türkiye İştirakiyun Teşkilatlarının Birinci Kongresi (TKP Kuruluş Kongresi)*, 102.

83 Nazmi Yoldaş, "Milliyetler Hakkında," 102.

84 Nazmi Yoldaş, "Milliyetler Hakkında," 102.

Although in his speech Nazmi makes no mention of the national movement, his criticism of the statistes (*devletçiler*) was likely not intended to be understood as limited to the Ottoman monarchy and CUP. Throughout the speech he appears to allude to criticisms of the Turkish nationalists enshrined in a resolution carried by the Congress of the People of the East a few days prior in response to a controversial written address from Enver Pasha, who had been invited to speak on behalf of the Turkish national movement.⁸⁵ Despite supporting the movement against the imperialists, the resolution of the Presiding Committee of the Congress of the Peoples of the East, on which Suphi sat, declared:

[T]he congress notes that the broad national-revolutionary movement in Turkey is directed only against foreign oppressors. Success for this movement would in no way signify the emancipation of the Turkish peasants and workers from oppression and exploitation of every kind... The congress finds it necessary to act with special caution toward leaders of the movement who in the past led the Turkish peasants and workers to the slaughter in the interests of one of the imperialist groups, thereby subjected the toiling masses of Turkey to twofold ruin in the interests of a small group of rich men and high-ranking officers.... In calling on the toiling masses of Turkey and the entire East to support the national-revolutionary movement in Turkey, the congress urges the peasants and workers of Turkey to come together in independent organizations, to be ready to carry the cause of emancipation through to the end.⁸⁶

Nazmi's allusion to these sentiments is strongest at the end of the speech when he declared, "As the poor people of Turkey are prisoners in the hands of the European bourgeoisie so too are they prisoners in the hands of their own rich and statistes... There is only one solution. The fall of the bourgeoisie that brought [the Eastern question] to light...and the flourishing of social revolution in Turkey and the establishing of soviet [*şûrâ*] government. Long live the Government of Independent Turkish Socialist Soviets."⁸⁷ Thus, in his indictment of the question of nationalities, Nazmi, like the Presiding Committee of the Congress of the Peoples of the East, is dissatisfied with the bourgeois nationalist leaders of the anti-imperial movement in Turkey and is determined not to let the social revolution go unfinished.

Nazmi's speech, particularly his formulation of the Armenian issue, provoked passionate discussion from the delegates at the congress. First to follow up was a Crimean delegate by the name of Kiremitçi, who began by asking the delegates to forgive his poor Turkish. On the basis of this description and a much later report by a Crimean Tatar journalist, it appears possible to identify this speaker was Gavril Andeviç Keremitçi, a Crimean Armenian who had acted as Suphi's translator in Russia.⁸⁸ He affirmed Nazmi's claims about the Armenians and shared in his frustration at support for bourgeoisie revolutionaries whose only aim was national liberation, proclaiming—in line with the position of the Comintern at the time—that in Armenia the Dashnaks were responsible for the continued exploitation of the Armenian worker, and like other bourgeois nationalist parties had persecuted Arme-

85 *Congress of the Peoples of the East: Stenographic Report*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: New Park Publications, 1977), 75-83.

86 Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn*, 129-30.

87 Nazmi Yoldaş, "Milliyetler Hakkında," 104.

88 Hamit Erdem, *Mustafa Suphi: Bir Yaşam Bir Ölüm* (Istanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 1999), 51.

nian communists who truly had the interests of the Armenian workers at heart.⁸⁹ Keremitçi's brief addition to the debate concluded with the declaration that, "Our freedom [azatlık] is in the union of Turks, Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds. The salvation of every nation is in the administration of the soviets."⁹⁰ Keremitçi's concluding comment marks the most explicit articulation at this congress of the sort of national federation that many envisioned would be put in place after the success of soviet social revolutions in the various successor states of the Ottoman Empire.⁹¹

The fact that the congress' debates on colonialism and nationalism often paired opposition to imperialism with opposition to local bourgeoisie nationalist revolutionaries suggests that the early Turkish communists' relationship with nationalism was far more complex than the straightforward preoccupation that was posited by Tunçay. Despite this, at the end of this debate Mustafa Suphi did successfully propose and pass a resolution that articulated the newly formed Turkish Communist Party's commitment to support Mustafa Kemal's national movement against imperial forces.⁹² Yet, this resolution is not evidence for Mete Tunçay's dismissal of the communist movement in the early Turkish Republic as in thrall to clashing nationalisms. Instead, as Paul Dumont proposes in his own brief analysis of the congress, this concession to the Turkish nationalists was motivated by Suphi's desire to ensure that the Turkish Communist Party would be admitted to the next congress of the Comintern.⁹³ This desire forced Suphi to ensure that the TKF's platform conformed to the 21 conditions laid out by the Comintern, which required communist parties to support movements for national liberation in the colonies, even if they were directed by bourgeois elements.

What this analysis of the political thought of two circles of early Turkish leftists reveals is that despite their position between the increasingly dogmatic "Moscow line" of the Third International on the one hand, and a national movement consolidating around Mustafa Kemal on the other, these intellectuals successfully articulated their own unique political projects based in socialist principles. These projects challenged both the ideological dominance of both bourgeoisie nationalism in the scramble to construct the post-Ottoman world and European socialists' pre-conceptions about the nature of socialist revolution. Certainly, there remains a great deal more from these groups that merits analysis in the sparse English language literature on the early Turkish socialists. Particularly, their discussions of the agrarian question should be surveyed in light of the prominent debates on the subject at the early congresses of the Comintern and its potential influence upon the emerging ideology of peasantism among the Turkish nationalists. At the same time, more fully excavating the utopian and internationalist visions of these Turkish intellectuals offers historians the opportunity to decenter the nationalist lens through which the history of the late Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic is so often perceived, while investigating their unique view of world socialist revolution might also contribute to our understanding of the role that non-European intellectuals played in shaping the ideology of the early Third International.

89 Atasoy and Bayülgen, eds., *Türkiye İştirakiyun Teşkilatlarının Birinci Kongresi*, 105.

90 Atasoy and Bayülgen, eds., *Türkiye İştirakiyun Teşkilatlarının Birinci Kongresi*, 105.

91 At the Congress of the Peoples of the East, Mikhail Pavlovich, one of the official representatives of the Russian Communist Party, had proposed just such a federation in report before the congress on the National and Colonial questions. See Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn*, 155.

92 Atasoy and Bayülgen, eds., *Türkiye İştirakiyun Teşkilatlarının Birinci Kongresi*, 104.

93 Dumont, *Du Socialisme Ottoman À L'Internationalisme Anatolien*, 274.

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The Monk Dreams in Mozárabe



ALEXANDER ESTRADA

*Ill while traveling,
my dreams go wandering
over withered fields.*
—The death poem of Matsuo Bashō.

Omniscient clouds gathered over the escarpment of Córdoba where a lone monk was sitting beside the shepherd's path. The river flowed, the mosque glimmered, and in that April morning haze he saw the first markets awaken. A muezzin's call slapped from his mind the idle thought of ablution: here was Pablo Álvaro, on his way to see the mind-rending mystic of the mountains.

The site of his peregrination was hidden in the old-growth of al-Andalus and stone-grey like the crags and clouds; it was classically mysterious and occult. A stranger to the temple, Pablo (soon a martyr) was determined to uncover its esotericisms. He trod forth, tightening the robe on his skeletal body while savoring the spring drizzle on his scalp. On that day by the hearth of the stone refuge lay prostrate the great Ibn Masarra of Córdoba (*al-Jabali*: alias, the mountain dweller), attended by a menagerie of disciples in the recently denuded library. He was fifty years old, dying, and the dawn had just given way. This room where prognostications once billowed like smoke from the fire of a damp log was suffocating, sour with the stress and silence of six desperate men and a lone monk shuffling in to see the sick Sufi.

The old mystic was hag-born with the shimmering eyes of the devil. One, blue on the left, seemed to be in a permanent connoption under the lobe of his gnarled face. From it, whispered the spies and the curious, was a powerful emanation: its azure-veiled void could procure intimations from the subject for al-Jabali, revealing the dreams of all who met his gaze. The mystic himself referred to it as the "supreme remembrance." The exchange was imperceptible, occurring only in the mind of the diviner, but its penetrations were nothing short of revelatory. Long ago, when al-Jabali was but a novice, he described to a traveler the process of his vision:

The whole world is a book; its letters are His speech; I take your mind into my own: together we remember.

But the traveler, unsure if this was a conspiracy or just heresy, pressed for more detail, as if the mountain dweller could translate to words the ethereal mystique of his gift.

In the shadow of my eye we are One: the totality of your existence, beholden to my own, is engorged.

And so, that inconspicuous Toledano, something of a traveling sleuth, conflated prognostication with interrogation, demanded a demonstration, and implored by the Emir's Word that the beardless al-Jabali reveal what his mind had concealed. The temperamental mystic blinked. His face was unchanged and in not even a moment he launched forth:

We have just taken a pleasant stroll about the country toward a place viscerally unfamiliar to you and, hesitant at first, you kindly spoke of the merchants of Toledo, of the besieged walls and wants of your interminable youth and the nauseating desire you felt long ago for that portly slave girl who, belonging to your wicked uncle, perished under the moonlight by his bloody cane, blow

after blow shattering your heart, a jewel meets marble, broken, her righteous body and mind disintegrated too, but you never forgot her eyes, did you, how those two globes delimited your existence, your very being a figment of her imagination; you told me this and so much more, yes, you told me of your travels, we dreamed them, dreams of the Maghreb and the holy cities in the East, of the bandits who once stole everything from you in the tantalizing darkness of the Hijaz: these memories were dreams, unfettered fictions, dust lost against the mirage of time...

Pablo had not heard this story. He had nothing to do with the mystical *muwallad*, a pariah like him, but he was called to this ruined temple as one is to wine before battle, or to confession before martyrdom: he stood at the precipice of knowing and unknowing, dreaming of vindication and the tonic of telepathy. *Convivencia*. With the library animated by the flickering shadows of the hearth, all the monk could think of was the master's other eye, dead on the right, which could have belonged to a blind tomcat. It was lazy, drooping downwards with a pale film over the green iris, a stagnant pond against an ocean. These thoughts played in the mind of Pablo as al-Jabali wheezed on his straw mattress, lost in the labyrinth of spiritual perception.

One look at this spectacle told Pablo: here is a cult. But water is blind to the tree it sustains. The disciples, parting like the Red Sea, took calm measure while the monk, never one for bereavement, reciprocated their looks. He was the only foreign body. Al-Jabali, insensate on his back, was enwreathed by his mourners, some with reputations that preceded them in the heretical milieu of Córdoba. Facing the foot of the mattress was a black beard hiding a mid-sized fellow in a modest tunic, Ruiz the Doleful (the picaresque poet), who stared in empty resignation at the ether and unknown before him. Mumbling aside him in prayer was Carlos the Bewitched (the apocryphal acolyte), of whom it is said survives on one meal a year despite being as big and burley as an oak. Aloof on the stone wall was Mariano Cienfuegos (the stately Saracen), a well-known troubadour standing square in his snow-white robe and jaded collar. The other three were congruently cloaked in vermilion robes, had meticulous lines drawn on their forearms, and showed nothing else. A feeling of humiliation and terror, maybe even relief, shot through Pablo's heart. In that crescent of sorrow, mourning in the morning, the time had come to meet the senescent seer and finally unravel the mysteries of the monk's mind and memory.

No one spoke. Six steps shuffled him closer to the fore. Each moment felt protracted, as if the stares of the disciples had collectively pinned the ephemerality of time to space, with Pablo caught in-between. "My name is Pablo Álvaro de Córdoba. I am Christian and most curious about your dead eye, al-Jabali," he said, by way of introduction. The seer stirred. Evidently, one does not speak of that dismal right eye. The cadaverous skull raised itself as if seized by a sneeze, building slowly, painfully slowly, until in exuberant release the scum-green eye came alive like an emerald in light. The disciples braced and the monkish Mozarab, once called Pablito, was caught in the center of a supernatural vision. He felt nothing as his mind's book fell open, waiting to be read.

The scene stayed the same—sad, solemn, slightly surreal—until Pablo's mind unstilled. It was the disorientation of sipping coffee only to find bitter juice in the cup: reality was not a pain, it was just different, distorted, oversaturated, purplish, and pushed adrift. Swaying his head from side to side, the declension of a drunk, he felt the fuzziness of an oncoming illness that smothered the particularities of his known life. This turgid nausea was unfamiliar to him. He

saw only blank spaces in the faces of the dispossessed disciples. Ruiz (once the spitting image of sorrowful rectitude) became the desiccated husk of a man, his soul hollowed. Mariano (a dying eye-star) was nothing but an afterglow in the room, hardly even a blotch against wall. The very being of Pablo Álvaro de Córdoba, a river which after the storm disavows the banks of its fluvial destiny, was slipping from this earthly realm, untethered from reason but now elevated by the obscure logic of a new natural law. Only the mumblings of Carlos (a bewitched behemoth) echoed with the timbre of a shameless sob. From that library of shifting sand, the vermillion voyeurs (three poppies plucked by the wind) had been de-materialized, erased by Pablo's throbbing eyes.

Cease your sobs, Carlito; the supreme remembrance is upon us.

The sound of al-Jabali was unlike anything he had ever heard. It was as if the holy melisma of plainchant and the torpor of insomnia achieved fission: he felt the liminality of closed eyes before sleep. The voice came from nowhere but the weird mind of Pablo, a wizened monk with both feet sinking into the quicksand of a fever-dream; his fever, someone else's dream. The situation was increasingly dire since Carlos, a dim and desultory silhouette, was his only companion as another aura took shape, something ancient which enclosed them both, swallowed them whole, fish slipping into the abyss of a whale's smile, tossing in turmoil and fright until, righteous but not yet on the shores of Nineveh, they were vomited out, Pablo's mind asunder, and he felt like a child lost in the waking dream of long-ago days.

He was a Cordovan lost in Córdoba, letters scribbled on a palimpsest, greeted not by cruel April but instead by the embellished color of a prosthetic memory. They were alone together—Pablo and Carlos, bright and cold—paralyzed with the comfort of a shared bed on a frigid night. Dreaming, however, is a solitary endeavor. The monk did not know what Carlos thought, if he was really there or frozen like some pre-historic beast trapped under deep ice. But Pablo's vision was visceral and clarifying by the moment: his blood coursed, his heart thumped, and a wintry thrush braced his baldness. He was physically unchanged but mentally detached, the tattered robe still on his back. Everything was unfolding the way stars do over an ocean. He prayed that the desperate shore could be found from the glimmers of galaxies, but Al-Jabali crashed into him like ice out of the dark water:

This is the ghost of a pleasant memory, one of a thousand traces of the past, the re-inscription of remembrance, the transcendent art of blindness, the Truth of the unreal, the miasma of nostalgia, and the first time you felt happy, Pablo, when your unconscious innocence made you kind, when they intrigued rather than repulsed you, a young Mozarab dying to live in a Golden Age, the spirit of astral enlightenment, in faith you became enlaced, a devotion which leaped from the shadows and seized you, a God to be murdered by, the fraying threads of Hispania, not even a century after Tariq at the dawn of al-Andalus, something was happening but you didn't know what it was, change was afoot and there were no more Visigoths, if you ever were one, the people chosen in tandem, they taught you the Arab's spindly tongue though your father was Latin and called al-Quti, the humiliation of erasure, roots unearthed from the tender forest of your heart, the withering of an idea you never lived but always loved, the violence of forgotten dreams, the tearing of lineage as if you were split between two dimensions of culture and thought, estranged from both, more alienated

as you aged, the unbearable bitterness of tea over-steeped until you found your mission, your fatal cause, and you interminably remember: memories are the dying embers of time, dim lights in a dark forest, in which we find only the sorrowful ashes of desire...

Pablo's head sank low, stunned by the intimation, the incisive if innate idea of his formation, and all the while prophetic snow began falling around him. He stood in the same spot as that morning, the vantage above town, and soon the scene came into focus. He was looking at Córdoba as if it were a mirage, the ethereal image of imagination, projected from a pin-hole in darkness. He couldn't stand being alone, outside of the physical world, trapped in this implanted labyrinth, unsure of his own eyes, a victim of mind-rending and mis-memory. "Carlos! Carlos! Can you feel me, Carlos?" A voice into the wilderness, a cry from the whiteness, and he heard nothing. Only the eternal presence of the mystic stayed true.

"Córdoba really is a splayed thing, a lovely white beast, taut between us crooked beams."

These words preceded the speck figure of the poet, Ruiz the Doleful, gliding down the shepherd's path toward Pablo, humming closer, first faint and finally found. His beard was frosted, the tunic was stiff over his impish body, but gone was the grief of their last encounter. As he came closer, Ruiz seemed hollow-eyed and sedate, a sleepwalker dripping in beige.

"Poet Ruiz! What happened to Carlos, the big sated one? I felt the fellow traveler before, but now he's lost... Is he still dreaming in my youth?"

"No, Pablo, no. He's gone home, as shall I, as shall the others, as shall the Master. To dream is to be alone. But I am with you now, it is me, undistilled. I am in here."

They stood together against the wind, Pablo, Ruiz, and Córdoba. Despite the century-unseen snow and the city's veneer, Pablo was at ease. He said nothing and so the poet continued:

"Dreams are absurdity made real; memories are reality made absurd. While many have been taken into the mind of al-Jabali, only you have seen the green eye. His mind swallowed yours, spit it out, and, now from you, he can remember. In the boundless sea of memories and forgotten time, you are flotsam in the horizon, Jonah far from shore, bobbing and pushed and pulled by something outside you. Be disarticulated and rearranged, let him remember you."

He did not hear Ruiz so much as he absorbed the words with the indifference of a pasture in hail. He gazed upon his manifested city, with its ice-topped water and frost-crested grass and the people he could not see. The solitude of winter becalmed Pablo. Between his faded autumn and the far spring of his journey's end, he was in the doldrums, unmoving, waiting, dreaming, thinking the mind of the mystic.

Remember Eulogius? The one who said let there be no other Álvaro but

Eulogius, who prayed that the whole love of Eulogius be settled nowhere but in Álvaro, God was the window between your worlds, two raindrops falling on the pane, stained by the decadent Muslims and their courtly exuberance, the castration of your culture, the feeling of loss in situ, he beckoned you toward the shadows made by light, the eternal other which gives light shape, the tempestuous trade of protection and preservation, polemics, you Pablo, the erudite monk, unblemished, he said to mark his words, follow his mind, drink his thoughts into the moment of crisis, when the words came to life and scores of martyrs flashed by your deed and dismay, pig-talk in abject absolutes, you and Eulogius, guardians of the faith, harbingers of the coming, cursed precursors, ivy clung to dilapidation, heartless but in your mind and the trickery of your soul, brokering deceit in the fiction of your dreams: lost is the home blown by time.

He stands in the library, dazed by the motion of memories and revelation. Without a guide, he doesn't know what to feel, whether his eyes are real or still glazed by sleep-sand. Heat from the hearth gave substance to the pale light of the April morning that now pierced through the dusty window above. Around him are the men of sorrow—Ruiz, Carlos, Mariano—but the scarlet shrouded sojourners were gone, if they were ever there, and this absence had a peculiar effect upon Pablo, who remembered poppies and wind but not their exit nor the passage of time. The mind-rending has come to its end. He is as lost as ever: when he had set out on the shepherd's path toward divination, it was with the vague but enduring desire to succor and explain his saintly agape. The memory of Eulogius—burned at the stake just days before—did to him what a mast does for a ship. But how the wind would blow was as unknowable as the galaxies above.

Al-Jabali, sacred seer, is dead. Pablo feels this, not by the sight of his stillness or the resignation on the followers' faces, but by the heretical haze that now smothers his mind: he cannot think. What could he do? Something has changed within him, as if a thread has been plucked from the tapestry of his persona, but this frivolity was nothing compared to the task at hand, the usurpation and disruption to come, the ablutionary outcry that would have to be redeemed or rekindled, if not by prayer then by pyre. The past, even just this morning, seemed to him like the frolicsome naivety of a remembered life built on broken stilts. "What did he say?" Mariano asks, knowing fully well that empty questions have only empty answers.

This experience must have been just a splinter in the eye, a lapse of time, wherein the monk dreams in another man's sleep. He pauses by at the library's threshold, "I'm going. Farewell Carlos, so long Ruiz," is the non-answer given to Mariano (a troubadour destined for recesses of history). And the monk is out the door, crunching step-by-step down the path girded by morning dew until, to his dreamlike dismay, he sees an ahistorical smattering of ice on the grass, a frost-crested memento for the impending flames of fanaticism.



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