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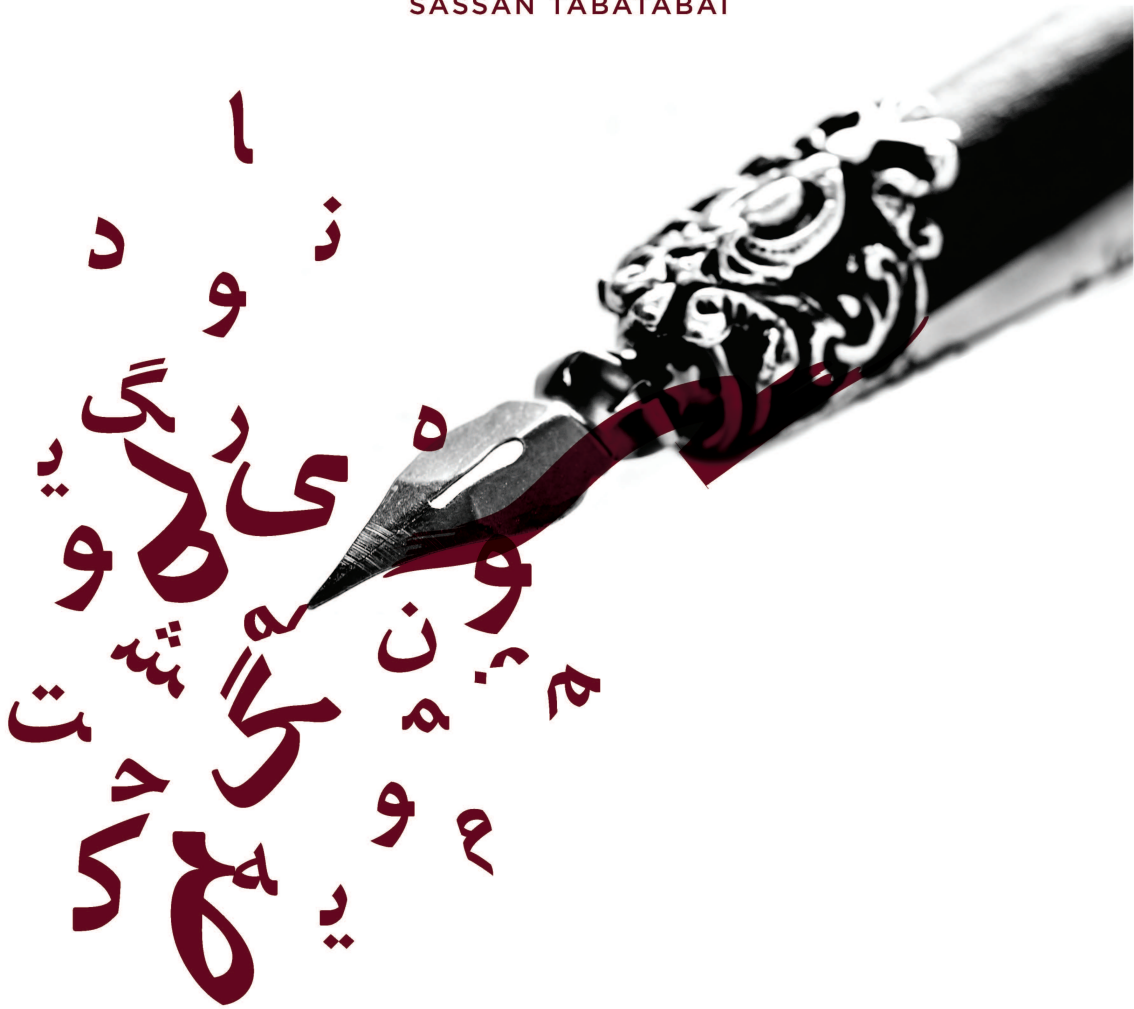
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IRANIAN
SERIES

FATHER OF PERSIAN VERSE

RUDAKI AND HIS POETRY

SASSAN TABATABAI



LEIDEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

Father of Persian Verse

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Father of Persian Verse

Rudaki and his Poetry

Sassan Tabatabai

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INTRODUCTION

I: RUDAKI'S LIFE AND POETRY

In the tenth century CE, Nasr ibn Ahmad II (r. 914-943), the Sāmānid Amir who ruled north-eastern Persia from his capital in Bukhārā, had a habit of spending the spring and summer in Herat (present-day Afghanistan) away from the heat and dust of his capital. One year, he was so charmed by the temperate climate and the beautiful maidens of Herat that he failed to return to Bukhārā as expected. Many months passed and the Amir showed no sign of leaving Herāt. Knowing that the poet Rudaki was one of the Amir's intimates, the courtiers and army captains approached him and offered him five thousand *dinārs* if he could persuade the Amir to return to Bukhārā. At their request, Rudaki, who was considered an excellent musician as well as a poet, traveled to Herat. There, in the Amir's presence, Rudaki plucked his harp and recited this poem:

Juye-Muliyān's scent drifts my way,
As do memories of a kind friend.
The Āmuy is hard to cross, but its stones
Feel silken soft beneath our feet.
Thrilled to see a friend, the Jayhun's waves
Leap halfway up our horses' flanks.
O Bukhārā, be happy, live long:
The cheerful Amir is returning to you.

The Amir is the moon, Bukhārā, the sky;
 The moon is returning to the sky.
 The Amir is a cypress, Bukhārā, the garden;
 The cypress is returning to the garden.

According to the story, upon hearing the last line of the poem, the Amir became so homesick for Bukhārā that he mounted his horse without putting on his riding boots and started galloping towards Bukhārā. Out of gratitude, Rudaki received twice the amount promised to him.¹

Abu ‘Abdollah Ja‘far ibn Mohammad Rudaki is believed to have been born around 880 CE and died around 941 CE. Unfortunately, very little has been recorded about his life; much that is known must be pieced together from his own poetry. For many years, Rudaki enjoyed the patronage of the Sāmānid Amir, Nasr ibn Ahmad II and any discussion of Rudaki’s poetry must be contextualized within the framework of the court. Rudaki prospered at the Amir’s court and at the height of his glory was said to have possessed two hundred slaves and needed one hundred camels just to carry his luggage.²

However came honor and riches for some,
 For him they came from the house of Sāmān:
 Forty thousand from the Amir of Khorāsān,
 Another five from the Amir of Mākān. (...)
 When my words fell on the Amir’s ears,
 He gave generously, as did the others’.

¹ This anecdote appears in most of the historical sources on Rudaki. See A. J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1958), pp. 32-33.

² Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 456.

Apparently, Rudaki had made his way into the Sāmānid court before the reign of Nasr II. Proof of this can be found in a poem written by Rudaki for Nasr II's predecessor, Amir Ahmad ibn Ismā'il (r. 907-914). In the poem, Rudaki is trying to console Ahmad after the death of his father, Amir Ismā'il-ibn Ahmad, who died in 907.

You who are sad, who suffer,
 Who hide your eyes that flow with tears
 For him, whose name I don't mention
 For fear of more sorrow and hardship:
 Went what went and came what came,
 Was what was, why grieve in vain?

Rudaki's position as the Sāmānid court poet can be considered the most significant aspect of his life. Traditionally, the court poet, whose function went far beyond that of a mere entertainer, was an integral part of the Persian court. Ardashir Bābakān, the founder of the Sāsānian dynasty in the third century, considered the poet a "part of government and the means of strengthening rulership."³

Other than praising the ruler and his realm, the poet was expected to be a source of counsel and moral guidance. As such, a poet like Rudaki would have to be well-versed in tradition. He would have to be familiar with the body of didactic literature of the past and draw upon it when necessary.

Take action. Don't sit idle for too long,
 Even though your sacks of gold reach the moon.

³ Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 6. Meisami provides a detailed account of the relationship between poet and court from its pre-Islamic origins.

The relationship between poet and patron was one of mutual benefit. The poet would glorify his patron, preserving his name and reputation. In return, the poet would gain wealth and influence, enjoying the luxuries of courtly life. Nizāmi Aruzi describes the poet-patron relationship in *Chahār Maqāleh* (1155-1157), a discussion in four discourses of the four influential professions of medieval Persia: the civil service, poetry, astrology and medicine. "A king cannot dispense with a good poet, who shall conduce to the immortality of his name, and shall record his fame in *diwāns* and books," writes Aruzi. "For when the king receives that command which none can escape (death), no trace will remain of his army, his treasure, and his store; but his name will endure forever by reason of the poet's verse."⁴

Praise the Amir. May the whole world praise him.
Beauty, virtue and order spring from him.

As the center of court life, the Amir enjoyed total devotion from the poet who would praise his strength and valor.

On the day of battle, of hate, of bravery,
If you see him clad in helmet and armor,
He will make an elephant seem small,
Even a drunk, roaring elephant.

We can see the influence of the court's culture and sensibilities even in Rudaki's love poems. The lover's unconditional devotion to his beloved parallels the loyal service expected of the poet or courtier.

If I'm not unlucky, how did I get involved

⁴ As quoted in Meisami, p. 10.

With this quick-to-anger woman of easy virtue?
She likes it if I'm thrown to the lions.
I can't stand it if a fly sits on her.
She tortures me. But my love for her
And loyalty to her never leave my heart.

In another poem he writes:

If only you'd place one foot upon this ground,
I'd make a thousand prostrations to its dust.

Many of the images in Rudaki's love poems have become staples of Persian poetry: the moon as the beautiful face of the beloved, the narcissi as eyes with which to see the beloved, the tulip as the cheeks of the beloved, and the agate as a tear of blood shed because of heartache.

You've stolen color and scent from the rose:
Color for your cheeks, scent for your hair.
The stream turns rose-colored when you wash your face.
The street smells of musk when you let down your hair.

The relationship between poet and patron, however, was a precarious one. When addressing the patron, whether praising or giving advice, the poet had to be careful not to offend. Offending the ruler could be costly to the poet who could easily lose his livelihood and quite possibly his life. The poet's position at court was also influenced by the internal politics and power struggles within the court. Rudaki's fortune was to a large extent dependent on the support of his main benefactor, Abolfazl Mohammad ibn Abdollāh Bal'ami, the vizier to Amir Nasr ibn Ahmad II. Bal'ami, who was one of the central figures in the Sāmānid court, has been credited, to a large extent, with the blossoming of Persian literature

in the tenth century. As the Amir's vizier from 922 to 938, he drew literary talent to the Sāmānid court by commissioning works of literature and offering lavish rewards to poets.

Bal'ami considered Rudaki to be unrivaled among both Persian and Arab poets. He commissioned Rudaki to translate the *Kalila va Dimna*, the collection of Indian "Bidpai" fables into Persian from an Arabic translation of the Pahlavi translation of the Sanskrit original. Unfortunately, no more than a few couplets have survived from Rudaki's translation.⁵

Rudaki's fortune took a turn for the worse with the death of Bal'ami in 937. Soon after, Rudaki fell out of favor with the Amir and was expelled from court. This traumatic event in Rudaki's life was followed by the death of the poet Shahid Balkhi, a close friend of Rudaki who had also enjoyed the patronage of the Sāmānid court. In a moving elegy on the death of Balkhi, one can sense Rudaki's anguish at his own situation:

Shahid's caravan has left before ours.
Believe me, ours will also leave.
Count the eyes, there is one pair less,
Measure the wisdom, thousands less.
Reap all that enriches your soul
Before death comes to bind your legs.

With his connection to the court severed, Rudaki spent the rest of his life in poverty and died a blind and desolate man in 941. In the poems written towards the end of his life, he complains about his miserable condition and his sad predicament.

My teeth are all worn down and falling out.

⁵ For a discussion of the role of Bal'ami as Rudaki's patron, see Zabihollāh Safā, *Tārikh-e Adabiyāt dar Iran* vol. 1 (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1977), pp. 376-381.

They weren't just teeth, they were as bright light.

He reminisces about his youth, health, strength and vitality, and mourns their loss:

My dark-haired beauty, you can't possibly know,
What shape I was in a long time ago!
You can caress your lover with your curls,
But never saw him with curls of his own.

Finally, he resigns himself to his pitiable state:

But times have changed, so have I. Bring me my staff.
It's time for the cane and the beggar's purse.

In one sad example, he seems to long for the days of comfort and luxury at court and helplessly asks for an explanation for his sudden change of fortune:

I was always intoxicated in this house.
Like the Amir and nobles, my place was secure.
Now, I am the same, the house and town are the same.
Then tell me, how has happiness turned to sorrow?

Rudaki was thought to have been blind from birth, but most scholars agree that he was not born blind but lost his sight later in life. The physical descriptions of shapes and colors in Rudaki's poetry make it highly unlikely that he was blind from birth. The imagery and the vivid depiction of nature in his poetry suggest that it is the work of someone who had a visual experience of the world. In one poem he compares a curl of his beloved's hair to a letter of the alphabet, and the mole on her cheek to the dot of that letter.

Who curled your hair into a “j”?
He who made your mole the dot of the “j”.
And your mouth is so small, as if someone
Has split a pomegranate seedlet in half.

In another poem, he not only describes a particular bird, he actually uses the verb “to see.”

I saw a hoopoe near Sarakhs
Whose little song reached the clouds.
She was wearing a little cloak
Of many different colors.

Rudaki borrows most of his imagery from the physical world. He treats nature as if it is a person and superimposes human characteristics on it, which often results in dynamic portraits:

The mighty heavens have fielded an army:
An army of dark clouds led by the zephyr,
Lightning its artillery, thunder its drummer.
I have seen a thousand armies, never so fierce.

A cloud that rains becomes a broken-hearted man, and the sun hidden behind clouds becomes a prisoner avoiding the guard:

Look at that cloud, how it cries like a grieving man,
Thunder moans like a lover with a broken heart.
Now and then the sun peeks from behind the clouds
Like a prisoner hiding from the guard.

Even wine is alive with human characteristics. Rudaki describes the “emotions” of the crushed grape inside a cask:

But when aware of what has happened,
 It will froth. It will moan from heartache,
 Sink to the bottom with sadness,
 Boil to the surface with sorrow.

Rudaki's poetry also resonates with references to a pre-Islamic orientation towards life. By the tenth century, although Islam had become deeply entrenched, the Persians still identified with a deep-rooted Zoroastrian past. One dominant theme in pre-Islamic Persian literature is *andarz*, moralizing and ethical teachings, admonitions and advice for proper behavior in both the private and public spheres of life. In *andarz* texts, a central concept is that of moderation, and man is urged to assume his proper place in cultured society by acquiring good manners and good speech.⁶

People aren't required to be generous and kind,
 But they are required to be thankful for grace.
 My lord bestows much that isn't required of him.
 How can I neglect what is required of me?

One must work hard and avoid laziness, falsehood and injustice; and must act virtuously by being honest, generous and kind. Rudaki invokes this pre-Islamic Zoroastrian ethos when describing the qualities of his patron.

With hand and tongue he spreads gold and pearls.
 Not in vain, has his name spread through the world.
 He planted the branch of kindness in our hearts.
 It's no joke that he has turned his back on wealth.

⁶ For a concise discussion of *andarz*, see Z. Safā, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under *Andarz*. ii. *Andarz* literature in new Persian.

Much of Rudaki's poetry is devoted to moral exhortation and is loaded with references to Zoroastrian culture and ancient Iranian themes, rather than Islamic and Semitic ones.

It's a puzzle, describing his grace and will:
 He is the *Avestā* in wisdom, the *Zand* in essence. (...)
 His essence is the *Vahi-nāmeḥ* to Kasrā.
 His ways have filled the *Pand-nāmeḥ* with guidance.
 The essence of this king is the real *Pand-nāmeḥ*,
 So that fortune itself can take counsel from him.⁷

The absence of Islamic references in Rudaki's work and his preoccupation with pre-Islamic Iranian themes provide an important clue regarding his orientation toward Persian culture. In fact, there are several instances in Rudaki's poetry where he all but dismisses the conventions of religious practices and Islamic life. Usually, such references are shrouded, as in a poem where he puts love before religion.

What use is facing the House of God, when the heart
 Faces Bukhārā and the beauties of Tarāz?
 God will accept your devotion to love,
 But he will not accept your prayers.

In other poems, he talks openly about drinking wine and getting drunk, disregarding Islam's insistence on abstention. It must be noted that unlike later Persian poetry where wine and drunkenness take on mystical connotations and can be interpreted as

⁷ Here, Rudaki is evoking Zoroastrian virtues as laid out in pre-Islamic sacred texts. The *Avestā* is the sacred writings of Zoroastrianism and the *Zand* is the interpretation of the *Avestā*. The *Vahi-nāmeḥ* (Letter of Revelation) and the *Pand-nāmeḥ* (Letter of Guidance) are pre-Islamic moral injunctions.

divine intoxication, for Rudaki, wine meant nothing more than wine, and drunkenness meant nothing more than being drunk.

Now we are drunk, so let's drink wine.
 Let's drink from the hands of beauties.
 They call us crazy and senseless.
 We are not crazy. We are drunk.

Perhaps one of the most telling examples of Rudaki's disregard for Islamic conventions is the poem in which he consoles the Amir for the death of his father. Interestingly, there is no mention of religion in this poem. Rudaki's remedy for the Amir's grief is to drink wine.

To break the siege of sorrow on your heart
 It is better to fetch the wine and drink.
 Out of great disasters, there will appear
 Virtue and grace and nobility.

Note that in the last couplet, Rudaki returns to some of the pre-Islamic *andarz* themes and emphasizes what he considers to be the hallmarks of Persian identity, namely virtue and honor.

Rudaki was also an innovator of poetic form. Aside from writing in forms inherited from Arabic poetry, namely the *qasida* and the *qit'a*, he is thought to be the first poet to have written in the *rubā'i* (pl. *rubā'iyāt*) form. The *rubā'i* is a quatrain (two couplets), which usually contains a succinct meditation on love. There is a historical anecdote associated with Rudaki's "discovery" of the *rubā'i*. As the story goes, while Rudaki was taking a stroll through the streets of Bukhārā, he came across a group of children at play. They were rolling walnuts on the ground and singing a childhood

jingle. The jingle caught Rudaki's ear who later wrote a poem in the same meter. The rest, as they say, is history.⁸

When you find me dead, my lips apart,
A shell empty of life, worn out by want,
Sit by my bedside and say, with charm:
"It is I who killed you, I regret it now."

By most accounts, Rudaki was a prolific poet. He has been said to have composed 1,300,000 couplets.⁹ Even if we take this number to be a gross exaggeration, his poetic output was undoubtedly much more than has survived to this day. The loss of much of Rudaki's poetry, who holds such a prominent position in the history of Persian literature, is puzzling. Jan Rypka attributes the loss of Rudaki's work to the nature of the poetry itself. "His verse is adorned by a simplicity which the completely antithetical taste of the periods of mannerism that followed were incapable of comprehending," proposes Rypka. "Since Rudaki had nothing to offer to satisfy the increasing demands of a literary taste intent on artificiality, the *divān* [collected poems] was lost."¹⁰

The poems that have survived have been preserved in the works of others, like Mohammad 'Afi's thirteenth century anthology of poetry, *Lobāb al-Albāb* (Quintessence of Hearts), which is one of the earliest sources in which we find Rudaki's poetry; Nizāmi Aruzi's twelfth century *Chahār Maqāla* (Four

⁸ Ja'far Sho'ār and Hasan Anvari, *Gozideh-ye ash'ar-e Rudaki* (Tehran: Nashr-e 'Elm, 1994), p. 171. For a discussion on the origins of the ruba'i see Shafi'i-Kadkani, *Musiqi-e she'r* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Āgāh, 1989), pp. 467-478. Also see Elwell-Sutton, "The 'rubā'i' in early Persian literature," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4, ed. R. N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 633-658.

⁹ Arberry, pp. 33-34.

¹⁰ Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1968), pp. 144-145.

Discourses); and Asadi's eleventh century Persian dictionary *Loghāt-e Fors* (Persian Words).¹¹

II. ON TRANSLATING THE POETRY OF RUDAKI

I faced several obstacles while translating Rudaki's poetry into English. My first priority in translating Rudaki has been to convey the meaning of his poems. Even when certain liberties had to be taken in order to bring my English lines to life, they have never been at the expense of the overall meaning of the poem. A translation that in any way alters the sense of the original poem ceases to be a translation altogether and becomes nothing more than an imitation.

Regarding its form, the most important outward features of Persian poetry are its quantitative prosody (measurement of syllables according to length) and its rhyme. The translator who tries to carry the forms of the Persian poem over into English is faced with monumental difficulties. The basic structure of English poetry is accentual, relying on stress rather than the length of syllables. When translating a classical Persian poem into English, if the translator insists on presenting the Persian poem to the English reader within the framework of Persian metrics, the result can be a clumsy poem sounding forced and unnatural.

Trying to bring the rhyme scheme from Persian over into English presents a similar problem. Persian poetry allows a liberal manipulation of language in order to satisfy its poetical forms. It is not unusual to find lengthy poems that use the same rhyme throughout. For example, we find in Rudaki's work a poem like "The mother of wine," in which each of the poem's 94 couplets end

¹¹ Arberry, p. 101.

in the same rhyme. In the poem "What my soul was like," 34 couplets not only end in the same rhyme but in the same word.

My decision to translate Rudaki's poems into couplets stems from the outward form of classical Persian poetry. The unit of the Persian poem is a *bayt* or distich, which is divided into two *misrā'* or semi-distichs. The two semi-distichs are of equal weight (they have the same number of feet). They are mirror images of each other and the same thought usually runs through both. I find this balance and symmetry to be an important aspect of Persian poetry, which I have tried to reflect in my translations. I have presented each distich as a couplet in which I have tried to maintain symmetry in both lines.

You can caress your lover with your curls,
 But never saw him with curls of his own.
 The days are past when his skin was silken-soft.
 The days are past when his hair was raven-dark.
 Beauty and charm were once his darling guests,
 Guests who will not come back, nonetheless.

Another consideration of form can be seen in the language I have used for my translations. The language in Rudaki's poems is relatively simple, free of the ornamentation we find in later Persian poetry. To a large extent, the beauty of Rudaki's poetry lies in its simplicity. I have, therefore, tried to avoid using inflated English, which would alter the stylistic substance of the original.

Day raises its banner in your name.
 The crescent moon is like your cup.
 Destiny imitates your strong will.
 Your charity is daily bread for all.

The translator of Persian poetry is faced with a variety of choices he will inevitably have to make in the English renderings. In particular, the nuances of a language such as punctuation, pronouns, articles, prepositions and gender, that are often absent from the Persian, must be inserted into the English translation if it is to make any sense.

The problem of punctuation can be relatively straightforward. In the original Persian, punctuation is inferred by the context, making a close and accurate reading essential. Translating pronouns, however, can be a delicate business, which often requires an active choice on the part of the translator. Persian pronouns lack gender, something that often needs to be added to the English translation. Once again, the translator must make a decision based on the context in order to attribute gender to the English pronouns. Granted, in many cases, the gender is quite evident; “Turks with pomegranate breasts,” are undoubtedly female.

But designating gender to pronouns is not always as obvious. In classical Persian poetry, it is not uncommon for young boys to be the objects of amorous discourse. Furthermore, at times it is unclear whether the poet is talking about himself or his beloved. In the following couplet by Rudaki, the pronoun in the first line is pivotal to the meaning:

Beauty and charm were once his darling guests,
Guests who will not come back, nevertheless.

The problem is exacerbated when Rudaki refers to himself in the first person in one couplet and in the third person in the next couplet:

My dark-haired beauty, you can't possibly know,
What shape I was in a long time ago!
You can caress your lover with your curls,

But never saw him with curls of his own.

Articles and prepositions present a different kind of difficulty for the translator of Persian poetry. Here, the problem isn't the translatability of [missing] articles and prepositions but their effect on the English line. Inserting articles and prepositions into the English translation inflates the line, destroying the distilled character and conciseness of the original. I have made a consistent effort to avoid, as much as possible, inflating my lines with articles and prepositions. Rolfe Humphries faced a similar problem when translating from the Latin. "Latin does not have to use all those miserable little space-taking pronouns, articles, prepositions — he, she, it, the, an, a, of, to," complains Humphries, "words that, before you know it, creep in, like the termites they are, to eat away the whole fabric of the line."¹²

One dilemma facing the translator is whether or not to clarify something in the translation that is vague in the original. Should you impose clarity on the translation for the sake of the reader or should you leave it vague, the way you found it? I have tried to present Rudaki's poems with as little embellishment, explanation or elaboration as possible. For the most part, wherever there has been imagery that would make sense to the Persian reader but perhaps not to an English reader, I have allowed the poem to stand on its own without artificial support. The imagery usually becomes apparent through the context of the poem.

How can I sew my gaze shut? To see my love
Only narcissi grow on my grave, not weeds.

¹² Rolfe Humphries, "Latin and English verse — some practical considerations," in *On Translation*, ed. R. A. Brower (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 61.

In Persian poetry, narcissi represent eyes with which to see the beloved. I think the imagery comes across without the need for any elaboration on my part. Wherever the need has arisen for some kind of elaboration for the imagery to make sense, I have tried to keep my additions to a minimum.

I want to stroke your amber-scented hair,
Paint with kisses the jasmine petals of your face.

The “face” at the end of the couplet is my addition. The Persian reader has no problem identifying “jasmine petals” as the soft, pale cheeks of the beloved, but the English reader, faced with the line: “Paint with kisses your jasmine petals,” might have difficulty deciphering the imagery from the context of the poem.

In other cases, the original is vague in the sense that it lends itself to different interpretations. In such poems, I have tried to stick to the original as much as possible, maintaining the ambiguity of the original to allow for the possibility of different readings. Consider the following couplet:

Stop, like a period. Because the lord
Has struck your name from the book of speech.

This couplet is open to two interpretations centered around “the lord” and “the book of speech.” The word “Lord,” (capitalized) would imply God. The “lord” (not capitalized) can be understood as “god” or as “ruler.” Hence, if “lord” is read as “god,” the line is understood as: “god has removed you from the world.” If, on the other hand, “lord” is read as “ruler,” the line is understood as: “the Amir has erased your name from the court *divān* (thrown you out of court).”

In another poem, Rudaki writes:

My eyes are a sea. The fire in my heart roars.
How can the pupil survive between sea and fire?

Here, once again, I have tried to maintain the ambiguity of the original, which makes the couplet open to different interpretations. The second line should be vague enough so that "the pupil" can be interpreted as a person (the poet himself), or the pupil of the eye.

When translating a work that is culturally and chronologically removed from our own, every twist and turn in the translator's road reveals new and unexpected obstacles. Should we attempt to translate every feature peculiar to the space and time of the work that is being translated? In tenth-century Bukhārā, the prevalent monetary unit was the *dirham*. Should *dirhams* be translated as dollars or cents (or pounds or shillings) for the English reader? William Arrowsmith faced a similar conundrum while translating from the ancient Greek. "How do we translate a currency made of talents, minas, drachmas and obols?" he wondered.¹³

In order to maintain the exotic feel of a poem written over a thousand years ago in a foreign land with a different culture, some aspects of the original poem need to be transferred into the English, not translated. To translate *dirhems* into dollars, for example, would take away from the alien and alluring qualities of the poem. The key is to transfer the poem, along with its social, cultural and historical context, into English. Tenth-century Bukhārā, must never become twentieth-century New York, just to make things more familiar for the reader. To translate such cultural and historical nuances as the currency, is to translate too much. This would only hinder the translation by distancing the original poem from its context. Hence, *dirhams* are left as *dirhams*.

¹³ Arrowsmith, "The lively conventions," in *Craft and Context of Translation*, ed. W. Arrowsmith and R. Shattuck (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 122-123.

When he found Turks with pomegranate breasts,
He appraised and counted out the dirhams.

The exotic nature of this poem stems from the fact that it is set in medieval Bukhārā, a place where slaves and concubines are part of the social tapestry. Rudaki is choosing a slave girl for his evening pleasure in tenth century Bukhārā. He is not soliciting a prostitute in Times Square in 2008. Arrowsmith also tries to avoid such over-translating. “[Italian] *Lire* may be more familiar to modern ears,” he writes, “but a little shaping and emphasis by the translator, even an intruded gloss where required, will make of drachmas and obols a perfectly acceptable convention.”¹⁴

A similar problem is posed by proper names, which Humphries considers to be stumbling blocks for the translator. “Should we bring over the name of every single ... river and mountain?” he asks. The question is a valid one, especially when many geographical names have an equivalent modern name which the reader can immediately identify. “Some names, whether of place or person,” contends Humphries, “mean nothing to us in illusion or connotation, and one of our obligations to the original author is not to bore his audience.”¹⁵

The poem “Juye-Muliyān,” offers an interesting case. In consecutive couplets, Rudaki mentions the Āmuy and the Jayhun, rivers that the Amir must cross on his way to Bukhārā. In fact, the Āmuy (or Āmu Daryā) and the Jayhun are the Persian and Arabic names, respectively, of the same river in Central Asia: the Oxus. My initial impulse was to substitute the Oxus for the other names. After all, the Oxus is more readily identifiable by the western reader, whereas the mention of the Āmuy or the Jayhun would send one scrambling for an atlas of Central Asia.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

¹⁵ Humphries, “Latin and English verse,” in *On Translation*, p. 63.

The dilemma arises, not in the actual choice of the river's name, but the fact that Rudaki uses two different names for the same river. Since this is one of Rudaki's best known and most often-translated poems, we have several examples to consider. Arberry chooses to use Oxus in both couplets:

The sands of Oxus, toilsome though they be,
 Beneath my feet were soft as silk to me.
 Glad at the friend's return, the Oxus deep
 Up to our girths in laughing waves shall leap.¹⁶

Jackson opts for a different method. He changes Āmuy to Oxus but leaves the Jayhun as is:

The sandy road by Oxus' banks, that rugged way,
 Silk-soft beneath my feet to me appears to-day:
 And Jihun's waves, for very joy at their friend's face,
 Rise to our waists in blithesome mood with fond embrace.¹⁷

Rudaki himself decided to use two different names, Arabic and Persian, for the same river. Since the two words, "Āmuy" and "Jayhun," are metrically identical, we know Rudaki did not use different names in different lines merely to satisfy the meter. Some thousand odd years later, we can only speculate as to why he chose two different names for the same river. Hence, in my translation, I have decided to maintain the two different names as they appear in the original.

The Āmuy is hard to cross, but its stones
 Feel silken soft beneath our feet.

¹⁶ Arberry, p. 33.

¹⁷ A. V. Williams Jackson, *Early Persian Poetry: From the Beginnings Down to the Times of Firdausi* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920) p. 36.

Thrilled to see a friend, the Jayhun's waves
Leap halfway up our horses' flanks.

I feel that a quick reference to the notes by the reader is not too much trouble for the worth of maintaining the names chosen by Rudaki himself.

Translating Persian months into English is yet another troublesome feature. The Persian calendar is seasonal, based on the natural cycles of nature. The Persian New Year takes place on the first of *Farvardin*, the first day of the first month of the Persian calendar. The first of *Farvardin* falls on the first day of spring, the vernal equinox, which roughly corresponds to the 20th or 21st of March. The first of *Tir* is the first day of summer; the first of *Mehr* is the first day of autumn; and the first day of *Day* is the first day of winter. To look at it another way, each month of the Persian calendar corresponds exactly to a sign of the zodiac.

The Persian months and their approximate equivalent dates in English are as follows:

Farvardin:	March 21 — April 20
Ordibehesht:	April 21 — May 21
Khordād:	May 22 — June 21
Tir:	June 22 — July 23
Mordād:	July 24 — August 23
Shahrivar:	August 24 — September 23
Mehr:	September 24 — October 23
Ābān:	October 24 — November 22
Āzar:	November 23 — December 22
Day:	December 23 — January 20
Bahman:	January 21 — February 19
Esfand:	February 20 — March 20

Each Persian month can be presented to the English reader in three different ways. One option is simply to approximate the English equivalent of its Persian month. For example, *Farvardin*, the first month of spring, can be approximated as April since almost two-thirds of *Farvardin* falls in April. *Āzar*, the last month of autumn, can be translated as November since most of the last month of autumn falls in November.

This option poses several problems. Rudaki, as a poet of nature, was fond of using the imagery of the natural world. Much of his poetry resonates with his concern for the natural cycle of things: life, death, aging, the seasons. Very often, he uses months in order to place his poems within the proper cyclical framework of nature. When he mentions *Āzar*, the last month of autumn, not only is he mentioning the end of autumn, but he is hinting at the start of winter. The problem with translating a month like *Āzar*, which runs approximately from November 23rd to December 22nd, is that neither November nor December can adequately convey *Āzar*. November is at least twenty days away from the end of autumn and December, already loaded with winter's baggage, conjures a completely different feeling.

A second option is to translate the Persian months according to their corresponding seasons. The obvious problem here is that three months correspond to each season; for example, *Mehr*, *Ābān* and *Āzar*, can all be translated as "autumn." When a specific month is translated as an entire season, the translation is diluted, presenting something as general where the original is specific. The seasonal approach to translating the names of months would need an additional qualifier (a part of the season: beginning, middle or end) if it is to represent a specific month. *Āzar*, for example, represents "late autumn."

A third option is simply to use the Persian names of the months in the English translation. For the reader who does not know what the Persian name of each month signifies, each time the name

of a Persian month is used it must be accompanied by a note of explanation.

As with all other self-imposed guidelines in translating, it quickly becomes evident that it is impossible to stick to one particular method, because much of translation is dictated by the context of the original. In translating Persian months into English, I have used all three options outlined above, depending on the context in which the Persian months were used.

In “The mother of wine,” referring to grapes ripening on the vine, Rudaki writes that a baby (grape) must drink the mother’s milk (ripen on the vine) for seven months, from the beginning of *Ordibehesht* until the end of *Ābān*. *Ordibehesht* and *Ābān* are the second and eighth months, respectively, of the Persian calendar. His use of *Ordibehesht* and *Ābān* are primarily to indicate a span of time, the seven non-winter months it takes for the grapes to ripen. Therefore, I didn’t find it necessary to make direct references to the specific months.

But it isn’t fair to separate
A baby from its mother’s breast,
Before it has suckled for seven months,
From early spring until late fall.

Similarly, in “Winter’s breath,” I have translated “*Day*” as “winter” because the main function of “*Day*” in the poem is to conjure a cold winter wind that is blowing on the field:

This grass field, tinged by winter’s breath
Like the tails of tigers and wolves,

However, in “*Mehregān*,” a poem about the Persian celebration of autumn, I have kept “*Āzar*,” the last month of autumn, as it appears in the Persian original. In this poem, *Āzar* is

used for a more specific purpose than the examples noted above. It conveys the end of autumn and the beginning of winter. In a poem about Mehregān, which was originally a Zoroastrian celebration, specific months and their places within the seasons assume a more distinguishing role. Replacing *Āzar* with autumn would, in my opinion, dilute the line.



The Poetry of Rudaki

برگزیده دیوان رودکی



Elegies

On the death of the Amir's father

You who are sad, who suffer,
 Who hide your eyes that flow with tears
 For him, whose name I don't mention
 For fear of more sorrow and hardship:
 Went what went and came what came,
 Was what was, why grieve in vain?
 You want to give harmony to the world?
 The world will not accept harmony from you.
 Don't complain, it doesn't heed complaints.
 Stop wailing, it doesn't hear you wail.
 Even if you wail until the day of reckoning,
 How can wailing bring back the one who is gone?
 You will see more torment from this wheel
 If you are tormented at every turn.
 It's as if disasters have been assigned
 To whomever you give your heart.
 There are no clouds, there's no eclipse,
 But the moon is covered, the earth is dark.
 Accept it or not, I am sorry to say
 You will not be able to conquer yourself.
 To break the siege of sorrow on your heart
 It is better to fetch the wine, and drink.
 Out of great disasters, there will appear
 Virtue and grace and nobility.¹

¹ This poem was written for the Sāmānīd Amir Ahmad ibn Ismā'il (r. 907-914) on the death of his father, Amir Ismā'il-ibn Ahmad (d. 907).

ای آن که غمگنی و سزاواری
 وندر نهان سرشك همی باری
 از بهر آن کجا ببرم نامش
 ترسم ز سخت انده و دشواری
 رفت آن که رفت و آمد آنک آمد
 بود آن که بود، خیره چه غم داری
 هموار کرد خواهی گیتی را
 گیتی است، کی پذیرد همواری
 مستی مکن، که نشنود او مستی
 زاری مکن، که نشنود او زاری
 شو، تا قیامت آید زاری کن
 کی رفته را به زاری بازاری؟
 آزار بیش زین گردون بینی
 گر تو بهر بهانه بیازاری
 گویی: گماشتست بلایی او
 بر هر که تو دل برو بگماری
 ابری پدید نی و کسوفی نی
 بگرفت ماه و گشت جهان تاری
 فرمان کنی و یا نکنی ترسم
 بر خویشتن ظفر ندهی باری
 تا بشکنی سپاه غمان بر دل
 آن به که می بیاری و بگساری
 اندر بلای سخت پدید آرند
 فضل و بزرگ مردی و سالاری

The death of Morādi

Morādi has died, but is not really dead.
 Such a great man's death is not trivial.²
 His precious life he returned to his father,
 His dark body entrusted to his mother.
 What belonged to the angels has gone with them.
 The man you say has died has just begun to live.
 He was no hay to blow away in the wind.
 He was no water to freeze in the cold.
 He was no comb to be broken by hair.
 He was no seed to be crushed by the earth.
 He was a golden treasure in this world,
 Both worlds were worth a grain of barley, to him.
 His earthen shell was cast back into the earth.
 His soul and wisdom rose to the heavens.
 The second life, of which people don't know,
 He polished and entrusted to God.
 He was clear wine mixed with sediment,
 Which settled while he rose to the top.
 They all take the trip together, my dear,
 The Marvazi, Rāzi, Rumi and Kurd.³
 In the end, each returns to his own home.
 How could satin be equal to rough cloth?
 Stop, like a period. Because the lord
 Has struck your name from the book of speech.

² Abol Hasan Mohammad ibn Mohammad Morādi was a poet who lived during the same time as Rudaki. Very little remains of his works.

³ Marvazi, Rāzi, Rumi and Kurd are the inhabitants of Marv, Ray, Rum (in Turkey) and Kurdistan, respectively.

مرد مرادی، نه همانا که مرد
 مرگ چنان خواهی نه کاریست خرد
 جان گرامی به پدر باز داد
 کالبد تیره به مادر سپرد
 آن ملک با ملکی رفت باز
 زنده کنون شد که تو گویی: بمرد
 کاه نبد او که به بادی پرید
 آب نبد او که به سرما فسرد
 شانه نبود او که به مویی شکست
 دانه نبود او که زمینش فشرد
 گنج زری بود درین خاکدان
 کو دو جهان را به جوی می‌شمرد
 قالب خاکی سوی خاکی فگند
 جان و خرد سوی سماوات برد
 جان دوم را که ندانند خلق
 مصقله‌ای کرد و به جانان سپرد
 صاف بد آمیخته با درد می
 بر سر خم رفت و جدا شد ز درد
 در سفر افتند به هم، ای عزیز
 مروزی و رازی و رومی و کرد
 خانه‌ء خود باز رود هر یکی
 اطلس کی باشد همتای برد
 خامش کن چون نقطه، ایرا ملک
 نام تو از دفتر گفتن سترد

Shahid's Caravan

Shahid's caravan left before ours.⁴
 Believe me, ours will also leave.
 Count the eyes, there is one pair less,
 Measure the wisdom, thousands less.
 Reap all that enriches your soul
 Before death comes to bind your legs.

.....⁵

All you have struggled to find,
 You must not lose easily.
 Profit turns friend into stranger.
 Pay him less to ward off that day.

.....

No wolf is as fierce as a lion.
 The sparrow's cry does not reach the hawk.

⁴ This poem is an elegy for the poet Shahid Balkhi (d. 940), a friend and contemporary of Rudaki who also enjoyed the patronage of the Sāmānīd Amir, Nasr ibn Ahmad.

⁵ The breaks indicate fragments missing from the poem.

کاروان شهید رفت از پیش
و آن ما رفته گیر و می‌اندیش
از شمار دو چشم يك تن کم
وز شمار خرد هزاران بیش
توشهء جان خویش ازو بربای
پیش کایدت مرگ پای آگیش

.....
آن چه با رنج یافتیش و به ذل
تو به آسانی از گزافه مدیش
خویش بیگانه گردد از پی سود
خواهی آن روز مزد کمتر دیش

.....
گرگ را کی رسد صلابت شیر
باز را کی رسد نهیب شخیش

Panegyric poems

The mother of wine

You must sacrifice the mother of wine,
Take away and imprison her child.
But you cannot take away her child
Before crushing her and taking her life.
It is not just to separate
A baby from its mother's breast,
Before it has suckled for seven months,
From early spring until late fall.⁶
Then, in all fairness, it is just
To imprison the child, kill the mother.
Once securely locked away, the child
Roams, confused for seven days and nights.
When it realizes what has happened,
It will froth. It will moan from heartache,
Sink to the bottom with sadness,
Boil to the surface in sorrow.
To purify gold you must boil it
In fire, but it will not boil from sorrow.
A camel drunk with rage
Foams at the mouth, throws its rider.
The guard will wipe away the froth,
Remove the darkness, reveal its brilliance.
Finally, when it has stopped struggling,
The guard will secure the lid.

⁶ Ordibehesht and Ābān are the second and eighth months, respectively, of the Persian calendar.

مادر می را بکرد باید قربان
 بچه او را گرفت و کرد به زندان
 بچه او را ازو گرفت ندانی
 تاش نکوبی نخست و زو نکشی جان
 جز که نباشد حلال دور بکردن
 بچه کوچك ز شیر مادر و پستان
 تا نخورد شیر هفت مه به تمامی
 از سر اردیبهشت تا بن آبان
 آنگه شاید ز روی دین و ره داد
 بچه به زندان تنگ و مادر قربان
 چون بسپاری به حبس بچه او را
 هفت شباروز خیره ماند و حیران
 باز چو آید به هوش و حال ببیند
 جوش بر آرد، بنالد از دل سوزان
 گاه زیر زیر گردد از غم و گه باز
 زیر زیر، هم چنان زانده جوشان
 زر بر آتش کجا بخواهی پالود
 جوشد، لیکن ز غم نجوشد چندان
 باز به کردار اشتیری که بود مست
 كفك بر آرد ز خشم و راند سلطان
 مرد حرس كفك هاش پاك بگیرد
 تا بشود تیر گیش و گردد رخشان
 آخر کارام گیرد و نچند تیز
 درش کند استوار مرد نگهبان

When completely calmed and clear,
 It becomes red like a ruby, like coral,
 Red like a carnelian from Yemen,
 Or a precious ring from Badakhshān.⁷
 If you smell it you would say it is a rose
 Scented with ambergris, myrobalan and musk.
 Inside the jar it will ferment
 Until mid-April, early spring.⁸
 Remove the lid at midnight,
 You will see a burning sun.
 And when you see it in a glass, you will say
 Moses, son of Amram, holds a gem in hand.
 The miser becomes generous, the weak becomes brave.
 After one sip, a rose garden will bloom on pale cheeks.
 And he who drinks a cup with joy
 Will feel no pain or sorrow.
 Ten-year-old sorrow will be banished to Tanjeh.⁹
 New hope will arrive from Ommān and Ray.¹⁰
 With such wine, so well aged,
 Its shirt worn threadbare for fifty years,
 We will have a feast fit for kings,
 Adorned with mallow, jasmine and roses.
 Heaven spreads its grace in all directions,
 Builds something no one can copy:

⁷ Badakhshān, currently in Afghanistan, was known for its rubies.

⁸ Nisān is the first month of the Syrian calendar, corresponding roughly to April.

⁹ Tanjeh, a port in current Morocco was considered at the time to be one of the farthest western inhabited places in the world.

¹⁰ Ray is a city near current Tehran. Ommān is in the south-eastern Arabian Peninsula.

چون بنشیند تمام و صافی گردد
 گونهء یاقوت سرخ گیرد و مرجان
 چند ازو سرخ چون عقیق یمانی
 چند ازو لعل چون نگین بدخشان
 ورش ببویی، گمان بری که گل سرخ
 بوی بدو داد و مشک و عنبر با بان
 هم به خم اندر همی گدازد چونین
 تا به گه نوبهار و نیمهء نیسان
 آنگه اگر نیم شب درش بگشایی
 چشمهء خورشید را ببینی تابان
 ور به بلور اندرون ببینی گویی
 گوهر سرخست به کف موسی عمران
 زفت شود رادمرد و سست دلاور
 گر بچشد زوی و روی زرد گلستان
 و آن که به شادی یکی قدح بخورد زوی
 رنج نبیند ازان فراز و نه احزان
 انده ده ساله را به طنجه رماند
 شادی نو را زری بیارد و عمان
 بامی چونین که سالخورده بود چند
 جامه بکرده فراز پنجه خلکان
 مجلس باید بساخته، ملکانه
 از گل و از یاسمین و خیری الوان
 نعمت فردوس گستریده ز هر سو
 ساخته کاری که کس نسازد چونان

Clothes of golden threads, newly-woven rugs,
 Exotic flowers, and seats in plenty;
 'Isā's harp, which makes the heart blush,
 Madaknir's lute, Chābak-e Jānān's fife.¹¹
 Seated in rows are the Amirs, Bal'ami,
 The nobles, and respected elders.¹²
 Up front, on his throne sits the king,
 Lord of all kings, Amir of Khorāsān.
 A thousand Turks stand ready to serve,
 Each, a dazzling two-week moon.
 Each wears a scented wreath,
 Has cheeks of rosy wine, and hair in braids.
 The cup bearer is fairer than the fair,
 Child of a Turkish beauty and the Khāqān.¹³
 The wine is happily passed around,
 The king of the world is content, he laughs,
 Taking wine from a dark-haired, angel-faced Turk,
 With the body of a cypress, and hair in waves.
 He raises a glass of wine,
 Salutes the king of Sistān.
 He drinks and cheers, as do his friends.
 All are happy with wine in hand.
 They drink to the health of Ahmad ibn Mohammad,
 The greatest of free men, the pride of Iran,
 The lord of fairness, the sun of his times
 Through whom justice thrives and brightens the world.

¹¹ Apparently, 'Isā, Madaknir and Chābak-e Jānān were court musicians. There is no mention of their names in any of the histories.

¹² It is unclear whether "Sāleh" is a name or is used as "righteous" or "noble." Abolfazl Mohammed ibn Abdollāh Bal'ami (d. 937) was the vizier (minister) to the Sāmānid Amirs Ismail ibn Ahmad, Ahmad ibn Ismail and Nasr ibn Ahmad.

¹³ Khāqān is the Turkik title for "ruler" or "leader" (used by the Chinese and Mongols).

جامه زرین و فرش‌های نو آیین
 شهره ریاحین و تخت‌های فراوان
 بربط عیسی و فرش‌های فوادی
 چنگ مدك نیرو نای چابك جابان
 يك صف میران و بلعمی بنشسته
 يك صف حران و پیر صالح دهقان
 خسرو بر تخت پیشگاه نشسته
 شاه ملوك جهان، امیر خراسان
 ترك هزاران به پای پیش صف اندر
 هر يك چون ماه بر دو هفته درفشان
 هر يك بر سر بساك مورد نهاده
 رؤس می سرخ و زلف و جعدش ریحان
 باده دهنده بتی بدیع ز خوبان
 بچه خاتون ترك و بچه خاقان
 چو نش بگردد نبیذ چند به شادی
 شاه جهان شادمان و خرم و خندان
 از کف ترکی سیاه چشم پریروی
 قامت چون سرو و زلفکانش چوگان
 زان می خوشبوی ساغری بستاند
 یاد کند روی شهریار سجستان
 خود بخورد نوش و اولیاش همیدون
 گوید هر يك چو می بگیرد شادان
 شادی بو جعفر احمد بن محمد
 آن مه آزادگان و مفخر ایران
 آن ملك عدل و آفتاب زمانه
 زنده بدو داد و روشنایی گیهان

There has been no man like him, and will never be
 (If you don't accuse me of boasting).
 He is proof of God. He is God's shadow.
 "Submit to him," says the Koran.
 Man is made of earth, water, fire and wind.
 This king is from the sun of the line of Sāsān.¹⁴
 This dark land has found glory through him.
 This wrecked world has become Eden through him.
 If you have a way with words, speak of his grace.
 If you write well, write only his praise.
 If you are a philosopher and seek his path,
 Then know his nature, learn his creed.
 When it comes to wisdom, you will say
 Before you stand the Greeks: Plato and Socrates.
 If you profess to be a man of God,
 Before you stand Shāf'i, Abu Hanifeh and Sofyān.¹⁵
 If he talks of science or philosophy,
 Listen to the wisdom of Loqmān.¹⁶
 A literate man gains knowledge and wisdom.
 A wise man will gain manners and faith.
 If you are looking for an angel,
 Before you stands Rezvān, that is clear.¹⁷
 Look closely at his soft, beautiful face,
 You will see the proof of what I say.

¹⁴ Sāsān is the grandfather of Ardeshir Bābakān, founder of the Sāsānian dynasty in the third century.

¹⁵ Faqih is a religious authority who is versed in Islamic jurisprudence. Sharia is Islamic law. Mohammed ibn Idris, known as Imām Shāf'i (767-820) was a theologian and a founder of the Shāf'iyah sect. Abu Hanifeh No'mān ibn Sābet (696-767) was the founder of the Hanafi school of Islam. Sofyān ibn Sa'id Suri (713-778) was a theologian.

¹⁶ Loqmān is a man known for his wisdom and piety. His name appears several times in the Koran.

¹⁷ Rezvān is heaven's door keeper.

آنکه نبود از نژاد آدم چون او
 نیز نباشد، اگر نگویی بهتان
 حجت یکتا خدای و سایه‌ء او ی بست
 طاعت او کرده واجب آیت فرقان
 خلق ز خاك و ز آب و آتش و بادند
 وین ملك از آفتاب گوهر ساسان
 فربد و یافت ملك تیره و تاری
 عدن بدو گشت تیر گیتی ویران
 گر تو فصیحی همه مناقب او گوی
 ورتو دبیری همه مدایح او خوان
 ورتو حکیمی و راه حکمت جویی
 سیرت او گیر و خوب مذهب او دان
 آن که بدو بنگری به حکمت گویی
 اینك سقراط و هم فلاطن یونان
 ورتو فقیهی و سوی شرع گرای
 شافعی اینك و بو حنیفه و سفیان
 گر بگشاید زفان به علم و به حکمت
 گوش کن اینك به علم و حکمت لقمان
 مرد ادب را خرد فزاید و حکمت
 مرد خرد را ادب فزاید و ایمان
 ورتو بخواهی فرشته ای که ببینی
 اینك او ی است آشکارا، رضوان
 خوب نگه کن بدان لطافت و آنروی
 تا تو ببینی برین که گفتم برهان

He is kind-hearted. He is real.
 He is noble and forgiving.
 If his words fall upon your ears,
 It will reverse the bad luck of Saturn.
 If you see him sitting on his throne,
 You will say Solomon has come to life.
 He rides like Sām, and while stars still shine,
 No horse shall see a rider like him.¹⁸
 On the day of battle, of hate, of bravery,
 When you see him clad in helmet and armor,
 He will make an elephant seem small,
 Even one that is roaring and drunk.
 During battle, even Esfandiyār
 trembles and runs from his spear.¹⁹
 At times of peace, his mountain of a body
 Is Mount Siyām; nobody sees him move.²⁰
 Facing his spear, even a dragon
 Melts like wax, as if facing fire.
 Even Mars if he comes to his battle,
 Will become a meal for his sword.
 Then again, when he takes the wine in hand,
 No spring cloud could rain like him.
 Spring clouds only shower dark rain,
 He rains parcels of silk and sacks of gold.
 He gives and gives, with both hands,
 Making the storm seem mundane.
 It is surely his grace
 That gives value to praise.

¹⁸ Sām was the father of Zāl and the ancestor of Rostam, the mythical Persian hero. Sām is known for being an expert rider.

¹⁹ Esfandiyār is a mythical Persian hero.

²⁰ Mount Siyām is in Transoxiana.

پاکی اخلاق او و پاک نژادی
 با نیت نیک و با مکارم احسان
 ور سخن او رسد به گوش تو یک راه
 سعد شود مر ترا نحوست کیوان
 ورش به صدر اندرون نشسته ببینی
 جزم بگویی که زنده گشت سلیمان
 سام سواری که تا ستاره بتابد
 اسب نبیند چنو سوار به میدان
 باز به روز نبرد و کین و حمیت
 گرش ببینی میان مغفر و خفتان
 خوار نمایند ژنده پیل بدانگاه
 ورچه بود مست و تیز گشته و غران
 ورش بدیدی سفندیار گه رزم
 پیش سنانش جهان دویدی و لرزان
 گرچه به هنگام حلم کوه تن اوی
 کوه سیام است که کس نبیند جنبان
 دشمن ار از دهاست، پیش سنانش
 گردد چو موم پیش آتش سوزان
 ور به نبرد آیدش ستاره بهرام
 توشهء شمشیر او شود به گروگان
 باز بدان گه که می به دست بگیرد
 ابر بهاری چنو نبارد باران
 ابر بهاری جز آب تیره نبارد
 او همه دیبا به تخت و زرّ به انبان
 با دو کف او، ز بس عطا که ببخشد
 خوار نماید حدیث و قصهء توفان
 لاجرم از جود و از سخاوت اوی است
 نرخ گرفته مدیح و صامتی ارزان
 شاعر زی او رود فقیر و تهیدست
 با زر بسیار بازگردد و حملان

The poet, poor and empty-handed,
 Goes to him and returns with much gold.
 He caresses the poet with praise.
 A learned man gets hired at court.
 As for fairness and justice,
 There is no one like him, so honest and fair.
 Both weak and strong get justice from him.
 He displays no tyranny or hatred.
 His grace is spread all over the world,
 From which no one is deprived.
 Those troubled by the world find comfort in him.
 The heart-broken find a remedy in him.
 The mercy of this glorious king,
 Like a rope, binds all deserts and fields.
 He accepts remorse, pardons sin,
 Will not anger, and strives to forgive.
 He is lord of Sistān, a victorious king.
 His is the tiger's luck, his foe, a moaning deer.
 Amr Lays is reborn in him,
 With his entourage and times.²¹
 The name of Rostam is grand, but
 Rostam, son of Dastān lives because of him.²²
 O Rudaki, put aside praise of all others.
 Praise him and receive prosperity's seal.
 No matter how hard you try
 Or sharpen your wit on a file,
 You cannot write poems worthy of him. Go, bring
 What you have, however inadequate.

²¹ Amr Lays is the second Saffārid king (887-900).

²² Rostam is perhaps the most famous mythical Persian hero.

مرد سخن را ازو نواختن و بر
 مرد ادب را ازو وظیفه دیوان
 باز به هنگام داد و عدل بر خلق
 نیست به گیتی چنو نبیل و مسلمان
 داد ببايد ضعيف همچو قوی زوی
 جور نبینی به نزد او و نه عدوان
 نعمت او گستریده بر همه گیتی
 آنچه کس از نعمتش نبینی عریان
 بسته گیتی ازو بیابد راحت
 خسته گیتی ازو بیابد درمان
 با رسن عفو آن مبارك خسرو
 حلقه تنگست هر چه دشت و بیابان
 پوزش بپذیرد و گناه ببخشد
 خشم نراند، به عفو کوشد و غفران
 آن ملك نیمروز و خسرو پیروز
 دولت او یوز و دشمن آهوی نالان
 عمروین اللیث زنده گشت بدو باز
 با حشم خویش و آن زمانهء ایشان
 رستم را نام اگر چه سخت بزرگ است
 زنده بدوی است نام رستم دستان
 رود کیا برنورد مدح همه خلق
 مدحت او گوی و مهر دولت بستان
 ورچه بکوشی به جهد خویش بگویی
 ورچه کنی تیزفهم خویش به سوهان
 گفت ندانی سزاش و خیز و فراز آر
 آنک بگفتی چنان که گفتن نتوان

Here is a eulogy, it's the best I could do.
 It has good words and is easily understood.
 But I don't know words that befit the Amir,
 Although my poems rival Jarir's, Tā'i's and Hassān's.²³
 Praise the Amir. May the whole world praise him.
 Beauty, virtue and order spring from him.
 I complain because my poems reveal my weakness
 Although I have the gift like Sari and Sahbān.²⁴
 At this time, I present his eulogy,
 I, who am expert at praising kings.
 There is a limit to praising all men
 But praising him has no limit, no end.
 It is no surprise that at a time like this,
 Rudaki becomes lifeless and confused.
 Had Bu 'Omar not given me the courage,
 Had Minister Adnān not allowed me,²⁵
 How could I find the nerve to praise the Amir,
 For whose sake God has created the world?
 If I were not weak and helpless. If I
 Didn't have orders from the Amir of the East,
 I myself would run like a page
 To his presence, with the poem in my teeth.
 This poem will apologize for me.
 The word-wise Amir will realize:
 Your servant's excuse is frailty and old age.
 That's why yours truly has not come as your guest.

²³ Jarir ibn 'Attieh (d. 727), Abu Tammām Tā'i (d. 727), and Hassān ibn Sābet Ansāri (d. 670) were famous Arab poets.

²⁴ Sari Alghavāni (d. 814) was an Arab poet. Sahbān Vā'el (d. 670) was an Arab orator.

²⁵ Bu 'Omar and Adnān were among the notables in the Sāmānid court, possibly nobles or ministers.

اینك مدحی چنانكه طاقت من بود
 لفظ همه خوب و هم به معنی آسان
 جز به سزاوار میر گفت ندانم
 ورچه جریرم به شعر و طایی و حسان
 مدح امیری که مدح زوست جهان را
 زینت هم زوی و فر و نزهت و سامان
 سخت شکوهم که عجز من بنماید
 ورچه صریع ابا فصاحت سبحان
 برد چنین مدح و عرضه کرد زمانی
 ورچه بود چیره بر مدایح شاهان
 مدح همه خلق را کرانه پدیدست
 مدحت او را کرانه نی و نه پایان
 نیست شگفتی که رودکی به چنین جای
 خیره شود بیروان و ماند حیران
 ورنه مرا بو عمر دلاور کردی
 وانك دستوری گزیده عدنان
 زهره کجا بودمی به مدح امیری
 کز پی او آفرید گیتی یزدان
 ورم ضعیفی و بی بدیم نبودی
 وان گه نبود از امیر مشرق فرمان
 خود بدویدی بسان پیک مرتب
 خدمت او را گرفته چامه به دندان
 مدح رسولست، عذر من برساند
 تا بشناسد درست میر سخندان
 عذر رهی خویش و ناتوانی و پیری
 کو به تن خویش ازین نیامد مهمان

May the glory of my Amir always soar,
That of his enemies always fall.
May his head reach as high as the moon,
His enemies, buried under the fish.
May his face be more brilliant than the sun,
His grace more lasting than Mount Judy and Sahlān.²⁶

²⁶ Judy is Mount Ararat in Turkey, where Noah's Arc is supposed to have landed. Sahlān is a mountain in Arabia.

دولت میرم همیشه باد برافزون
دولت اعدای او همیشه به نقصان
سرش رسیده به ماه بر به بلندی
و آن معادی بزیر ماهی پنهان
طلعت تابنده‌تر ز طلعت خورشید
نعمت پاینده‌تر ز جودی و ثهلان

May the Amir live long

May he live long, our glorious lord.
 May my precious life be added to his.
 I always worry about his life, since
 The mother of the free bears few like him.
 Of all kings there has never been a youth like him,
 Forgiving, literate, brave and wise.
 Can anyone know how much he tries?
 Can anyone know how generous he is?
 With hand and tongue he spreads gold and pearls.
 Not in vain, has his name spread through the world.
 He planted the branch of kindness in our hearts.
 It's no joke that he has turned his back on wealth.
 It's a puzzle, describing his grace and will:
 He is the *Avestā* in wisdom, the *Zand* in essence.²⁷
 No matter how much the poets try,
 They cannot praise him the way they should.
 His essence is the seed, his grace is water.
 The poet's talent is his fertile ground.
 His essence is the *Vahi-nāmeḥ* to Kasrā.²⁸
 His ways have filled the *Pand-nāmeḥ* with guidance.²⁹
 The essence of this king is the real *Pand-nāmeḥ*,
 So that fortune itself can take counsel from him.
 Whoever turns his back on the king's advice
 Sets the foot of happiness into sorrow's trap.

²⁷ The *Avestā*, written in Avestan (an ancient Eastern Iranian language) is the sacred writings of Zoroastrianism and the chief source for the teachings of Zoroaster. The *Zand* is the interpretation of the *Avestā*.

²⁸ *Vahi-nāmeḥ* is a "Letter (book/document) of Revelation." Kasrā is the title of Khosrow Anushirvān (531-579), the twenty-first Sāsānian king. The prophet Mohammad was born during his reign.

²⁹ *Pand-nāmeḥ* is the "Letter of Guidance." There is a *Pand-nāmeḥ* attributed to Anushirvān, a copy of which is in the British Museum.

دیر زیاد آن بزرگوار خداوند
 جان گرامی به جانش اندر پیوند
 دایم بر جان او بلرزم، زیراك
 مادر آزادگان كم آرد فرزند
 از ملكان كس چنو نبود جوانی
 راد و سخندان و شیرمرد و خردمند
 كس نشناسد همی كه كوشش او چون
 خلق نداند همی كه بخشش او چند
 دست و زبان زر و در پراگند او را
 نام به گیتی نه از گزاف پراگند
 در دل ما شاخ مهربانی بنشاست
 دل نه به بازی ز مهر خواسته برکند
 همچو معماست فخر و همت او شرح
 همچو ابستاست فضل و سیرت اوزند
 گر چه بكوشند شاعران زمانه
 مدح كسی را كسی نگوید مانند
 سیرت او تخم كشت و نعمت او آب
 خاطر مداح او زمین برومند
 سیرت او بود وحی نامه به كسری
 چون كه به آیینش پندنامه بیاگند
 سیرت آن شاه پندنامه اصلی است
 ز آنكه همی روزگار گیرد ازو پند
 هر كه سر از پند شهریار بیچید
 پای طرب را به دام كرم درافگند

Who in this world is the raw dough of defeat?
Anyone who is not pleased at his prosperity.
To anyone who does not wish splendor for him,
Say: You just try to tie fortune's hands.
Dear angels, be proud of the glory of his friends.
Dear heavens, laugh at the misery of his foes.
At the poem's end, back to what I said at first:
May he live long, our glorious lord.

کیست به گیتی خمیر مایهٔ ادبار
 آن که به اقبال او نباشد خرسند
 هر که نخواهد همی گشایش کارش
 گو بشو و دست روزگار فروبند
 ای ملک، از حال دوستانش همی ناز
 ای فلک، از حال دشمنانش همی خند
 آخر شعر آن کنم که اول گفتم
 دیر زیاد آن بزرگوار خداوند

Generosity

You killed many, broke the enemy's courage.
You gave so much, there isn't one beggar left.
Many have lamb and sweets on their table,
Others, not enough bread to ease their hunger.
Take action. Don't sit idle for too long,
Even though your sacks of gold reach the moon.

همی بکشتی تا در عدو نماند شجاع
همی بدادی تا در ولی نماند فقیر
بسا کسا که بره است و فرخشه بر خوانش
بسا کسا که جوین نان همی نیابد سیر
مبادرت کن و خامش مباش چندینا
اگرت بدره رساند همی به بدر منیر

Juye-Muliyān

Juye-Muliyān scent drifts my way,
 As do memories of a kind friend.³⁰
 The Āmuy is hard to cross, but its stones
 Feel silken soft beneath our feet.³¹
 Thrilled to see a friend, the Jayhun's waves
 Leap halfway up our horses' flanks.
 O Bukhārā, be happy, live long:
 The cheerful Amir is returning to you.
 The Amir is the moon, Bukhārā, the sky.
 The moon is returning to the sky.
 The Amir is a cypress, Bukhārā, the garden.
 The cypress is returning to the garden.

³⁰ Juye-Muliyān was a very lovely estate on the outskirts of Bukhārā.

³¹ Āmuy (Āmu Daryā) and Jayhun are the Persian and Arabic names, respectively, of the river Oxus in Central Asia. Traveling from Herāt to Bukhārā, one would have to cross the Oxus.

بوی جوی مولیان آید همی
یاد یار مهربان آید همی
ریگ آمو و درشتی راه او
زیر پایم پرریان آید همی
آب جیحون از نشاط روی دوست
خنک ما را تا میان آید همی
ای بخارا شاد باش و دیر زی
میر زی تو شادمان آید همی
میر ما هست و بخارا آسمان
ماه سوی آسمان آید همی
میر سروس و بخارا بوستان
سرو سوی بوستان آید همی

The pen and the harp

Life is a horse, you are the trainer, your choice to gallop.

Life is a ball, you are the mallet, your choice to play.

Although the harp player has delicate hands,

May they be sacrificed to the hand that holds the pen.

There is less oppression, less jealousy because of you.

There is more justice, more generosity because of you.

زمانه اسب و تو رایض به رأی خویش تاز
زمانه گوی و تو چوگان برای خویش باز
اگر چه چنگ نوازان لطیف دست بوند
فدای دست قلم باد دست چنگ نواز
تویی که جور و بخیلی به تو گرفت نشیب
چنانکه داد و سخاوت به تو گرفت فراز

Your justice

There is no drunkenness but that of love.
Love is enough misery, even for you.
If thoughts of war run through your enemy's heart,
Fear of your blade will cut him, limb from limb.
Your justice lets hawk and finch share the sky.
By your will night and day embrace.
From now on be happy, the winds of death
Will uproot the trees of malicious lives.
While a trace of this world still remains,
While the wheels of this grand universe turn,
Joy to your well-wishers, may they feast in bliss.
May those jealous of your glory moan from grief.

جز آن که مستی عشقست هیچ مستی نیست
همین بلات بس است، ای به هر بلا خرسند
خیال رزم تو گر در دل عدو گذرد
ز بیم تیغ تو بندش جدا شود از بند
ز عدل تست به هم باز و صعوه را پرواز
ز حکم تست شب و روز را به هم پیوند
به خوشدلی گذران بعد ازین، که باد اجل
درخت عمر بداندیش را ز پا افکند
همیشه تا که بود از زمانه نام و نشان
مدام تا که بود گردش سپهر بلند
به بزم عیش و طرب باد نیک خواه تو شاد
حسود جاه تو بادا ز غصه زار و نژند

The essence of this world

May the world please our lord. May he live long.

May no accidents befall him.

May God make this proverb come true for him:

If one door is closed, a thousand will open.

The lord of the heavens has built the world like this;

Joyous one moment, grieving the next.

.....

May God turn the evil eye away from your realm.³²

³² The first half of the final couplet is missing.

جهان به کام خداوند باد و دیر زیاد
برو به هیچ حوادث زمانه دست مداد
درست و راست کناد این مثل خدای و را
اگر ببست یکی در هزار در بگشاد
خدای عرش جهان را چنین نهاد نهاد
که گاه مردم شادان و گاه بود ناشاد

.....
خدای چشم بد از ملك تو بگرداناد

Your friendship

If I take your friendship with me to the grave,
Screaming your praise, I will still find virtues in you.
I don't want the Amir's legacy to remain.
I want the Amir himself to remain, as legacy.
He who has gone, you must consider him gone.
He who has died, you must consider him dead.

گر من این دوستی تو ببرم تا لب گور
بزنم نعره ولیکن ز تو بینم هنرا
اثر میر نخواهم که بماند به جهان
میر خواهم که بماند به جهان در اثرا
هر کرا رفت همی باید رفته شمری
هر کرا مرد همی باید مرده شمرا

Poems of complaint

What my soul was like

My teeth are all worn down and falling out.
They weren't just teeth, they were as bright light,
Rows of white silver, coral and pearl,
Bright as raindrops or morning star against night.
They have all worn down, each in its turn.
Such bad luck! The bad luck known as Saturn's.
Was it Saturn or the long years? I will
Tell you what: It was surely divine will.
The world's like an eye, round and rolling,
Ruled by an axiom, the cycles revolving.
It's the cure that alleviates our pain, or
The pain yet again supplanting the cure.
It makes old what was new, rejuvenates
What's been worn down with the years and with age.
Many lush gardens are dry deserts now,
And lush gardens grow where desert once sprawled.
My dark-haired beauty, you can't possibly know,
What shape I was in a long time ago!
You can stroke your lover with your curls,
But never saw him with curls of his own.
The days are past when his skin was silken-soft.
The days are past when his hair was raven-dark.
Beauty and charm were once his darling guests,
Guests who will not come back, nonetheless.
There were many beauties who bewildered all,
And their beauty always bewildered my eyes.

مرابسود و فرو ریخت هرچه دندان بود
 نبود دندان لابل چراغ تابان بود
 سپید سیم رده بود در و مرجان بود
 ستاره سحری بود و قطره باران بود
 یکی نماند کنون زان همه، بسود و بریخت
 چه نحس بود همانا که نحس کیوان بود
 نه نحس کیوان بود و نه روزگار دراز
 چو بود منت بگویم قضای یزدان بود
 جهان همیشه چو چنین گرد گردان است
 همیشه تا بود آیین گرد، گردان بود
 همان که درمان باشد، به جای درد شود
 و باز درد، همان کز نخست درمان بود
 کهن کند به زمانی همان کجا نو بود
 و نو کند به زمانی همان که خلقان بود
 بسا شکسته بیابان که باغ خرم بود
 و باغ خرم گشت آن کجا بیابان بود
 همی چه دانی ای ماهروی مشکین موی
 که حال بنده ازین پیش برچه سامان بود
 به زلف چوگان نازش همی کنی تو بدو
 ندیدی آنگه او را که زلف چوگان بود
 شد آن زمانه که رویش بسان دیبا بود
 شد آن زمانه که مویش بسان قطران بود
 چنان که خوبی، مهمان و دوست بود عزیز
 بشد که باز نیامد، عزیز مهمان بود
 بسا نگار که حیران بدی بدو در چشم
 به روی او در چشمم همیشه حیران بود

Gone are the days when he was happy,
When joy was plentiful and sorrow was slight.
When he found Turks with pomegranate breasts,
He appraised and counted out the dirhems.
Many a lovely slave girl sought him out
And came to him by night, hidden from all,
Who dared not come to him by light of day,
For fear of their masters and fear of jail.
Costly was the wine and each lovely face,
But they were always inexpensive for me,
For my heart was a treasury of riches,
Of words we call Love and Poetry.
I was happy, my soul was a meadow
Filled with joy, never having known sorrow.
My songs served to soften many a soul
That before was hard and heavy as stone.
My eyes watched for sweet, delicate curls,
My ears listened to the words of the wise.
No wife, no child, and no expenses,
I was weighed down by none of these burdens.
My sweet, you've seen only Rudaki of late,
You never saw him in his greater state,
Never saw him when he used to tell tales
And sang songs that rivaled the nightingales'.
He's no longer the friend of nobles. The days
Are past when he was favored by princes.
At the king's court, his volumes of verse
Were held in high esteem, when he held sway.
Gone are the days when everyone knew his lines
And he was the poet of Khorāsān.

شد آن زمانه که او شاد بود و خرم بود
 نشاط او به فزون بود و بیم نقصان بود
 همی خرید و همی سخت بی شمار درم
 به شهر هر که یکی ترک نار پستان بود
 بسا کنیزك نیکو که میل داشت بدو
 به شب ز یاری او نزد جمله پنهان بود
 به روز چون که نیارست شد به دیدن او
 نهیب خواجه او بود و بیم زندان بود
 نبیذ روشن و دیدار خوب و روی لطیف
 اگر گران بد، زی من همیشه ارزان بود
 دلم خزانهء پرگنج بود و گنج سخن
 نشان نامهء ما مهر و شعر عنوان بود
 همیشه شاد و ندانستمی که غم چه بود
 دلم نشاط و طرب را فراخ میدان بود
 بسا دلا، که بسان حریر کرده به شعر
 از آن پس که به کردار سنگو سندان بود
 همیشه چشمم زی زلفکان چابک بود
 همیشه گوشم زی مردم سخندان بود
 عیال نه، زن و فرزند نه، معونت نه
 ازین همه تنم آسوده بود و آسان بود
 تو رودکی را، ای ماهرو، کنون بینی
 بدان زمانه ندیدی که این چنینان بود
 بدان زمانه ندیدی که در جهان رفتی
 سرود گویان، گویی هزارستان بود
 شد آن زمان که به او انس رادمردان بود
 شد آن زمانه که او پیشکار میران بود
 همیشه شعر و را زی ملوک دیوان است
 همیشه شعر و را زی ملوک دیوان بود
 شد آن زمانه که شعرش همه جهان بنوشت
 شد آن زمانه که او شاعر خراسان بود

When the noble dehqan³³ was still of this world,
 I received much gifts and silver at his house.
 However came honor and riches for some,
 For him they came from the house of Sāmān:³⁴
 Forty thousand from the Amir of Khorāsān,
 Another five from the Amir of Mākān.³⁵
 And from his retinue eight thousand for me.
 Life was good then. Those were the days.
 When my words fell on the Amir's ears,
 He gave generously, as did the others.
 But times have changed, so have I. Bring me my staff.
 It's time for the cane and the beggar's purse.

³³ A prominent landowner.

³⁴ The house of Sāmān refers to the Sāmānids who ruled Khorāsān in the 10th century.

³⁵ Amir of Mākān refers to Mākān-e Kāki (d. 945) who ruled part of Tabarestān.

کجا به گیتی بودست نامور دهقان
 مرا به خانه او سیم بود و حملان بود
 کرا بزرگی و نعمت زاین و آن بودی
 ورا بزرگی و نعمت ز آل سامان بود
 بداد میر خراسانش چل هزار درم
 درو فزونی، يك پنج میر ماکان بود
 ز اولیاش پراگنده نیز هشت هزار
 به من رسید، بدان وقت، حال خوب آن بود
 چو میر دید سخن، داد داد مردی خویش
 ز اولیاش چنان کز امیر فرمان بود
 کنون زمانه دگر گشت و من دگر گشتم
 عصا بیار، که وقت عصا و انبان بود

The poet's change of fortune

I was always intoxicated in this house.
Like the Amir and nobles, my place was secure.
Now, I am the same, the house and town are the same.
Then tell me, how has happiness turned to sorrow?

The poet in old age

The black mountain is now covered with snow.
The cypress in the garden is bent like a bow.
What used to taste good no longer does.
What used to be harmless now quickly harms.

بسا که مست درین خانه بودم و شادان
 چنانک جاه من افزون بد از امیر و ملوک
 کنون همانم و خانه همان و شهر همان
 مرا نگویی کز چه شده است شادی سوک

سپید برف برآمد به کوهسار سیاه
 و چون درون شد آن سرو بوستان آرای
 و آن کجا بگوارید ناگوار شد دست
 وان کجا نگزایست گشت زود گزای

Meditations on life, death and destiny

Destiny's door

All is as it is supposed to be:
There is happiness now, be happy.
Why are you sad? Why do you worry?
Destiny does what it must for you.
The viziers' ways won't work for you,
Fate will decide what is best for you.
Life's wheel won't create another like you.
Your mother won't bear another like you.
God will never close a door on you,
Before opening a hundred better doors.

کار همه راست، آن چنان که ببايد
حال شادی است، شاد باشی، شاید
انده و اندیشه را دراز چه داری
دولت خود همان کند که ببايد
رای وزیران ترا به کار نیابد
هر چه صواب است بخت خود فرماید
چرخ نیارد بدیل تو ز خلاق
و آنکه ترا زاد نیز چون تو نزاید
ایزد هرگز دری نبندد بر تو
تا صد دیگر به بهتری نگشاید

It is useful to repent

Dear friend, when will you stop saying “where is happiness?”
No one will deprive himself of warm halva.³⁶
Today, it is useful for me to repent,
Just as it is useful for a sick man to sneeze.³⁷

The way of the world

O world, this is how you treat your children:
At times like a mother, at times a stepmother.
You don’t need wall braces or columns.
You don’t need brick walls or iron doors.

This world is like a dream

This world acts completely like a dream,
He whose heart is open will realize it.
Its kindness replaces cruelty.
Its happiness replaces sorrow.
Why are you so content with this world,
When everything is not in order?
It has a nice face but has bad habits.
It has charm but has bad manners.

³⁶ Halva is a traditional Middle Eastern dessert.

³⁷ It was believed that sneezing helped in the recovery of a sick person.

رفیقا، چند گویی کو نشاطت
 بنگریزد کس از گرم آفروشه
 مرا امروز توبه سود دارد
 چنان چون دردمندان را شنوشه

جهانا، چنینی تو با بچگان
 که گه مادری و گاه مادندرا
 نه پاذیر باید ترا نه ستون
 نه دیوار خشت و نه ز آهن درا

این جهان پاک خواب کردار است
 آن شناسد که دلش بیدار است
 نیکی او به جایگاه بداست
 شادی او به جای تیمار است
 چه نشینی بدین جهان هموار
 که همه کار او نه هموار است
 کنش او نه خوب و چهرش خوب
 زشت کردار و خوب دیدار است

Prey for this world

Dear boy, we are nothing but prey for this world.
We are mere finches; death is a hunting bird.
Sooner or later, every rose will die.
Death will crush us under a grinding stone.

Life, short or long

Life, be it short or long,
Does is not end in death?
This cord must pass through
The ring despite its length.
You can choose labor and hardship.
You can choose comfort and safety.
You can take little from this world
Or take all from Tarāz to Ray.
Your whole being is a dream,
But dreams are not real.
When death comes, everyone's the same,
You can't tell one from the other.
If only beauties can be coquettish,
Then no one can be coquettish but you.

جمله صید این جهانیم، ای پسر
 ما چو صعوه، مرگ برسان ز غن
 هر گلی پژمرده گردد زونه دیر
 مرگ بفشارد همه در زیر غن

زندگانی چه کوتاه و چه دراز
 نه به آخر بمرد باید باز
 هم به چنبر گذار خواهد بود
 این رسن را، اگر چه هست دراز
 خواهی اندر عنا و شدت زی
 خواهی اندر امان به نعمت و ناز
 خواهی اندکتر از جهان بپذیر
 خواهی از ری بگیر تا به طراز
 این همه باد و بود تو خواب است
 خواب را حکم نی، مگر به مجاز
 این همه روز مرگ یکسانند
 شناسی ز یکدگرشان باز
 ناز، اگر خوب راسزاست به شرط
 نسزد جز ترا کرشمه و ناز

This transient life

The great men of this world have all died.
They have all bowed their heads to death.
Even those who built palaces
Now lie covered with earth.
From the thousands and thousands of comforts
Were they left with anything but a shroud?
From their blessings they enjoyed what they wore,
What they ate and what they gave away.

The world is a deceiving game

Don't be fond of this transient life,
This world is a deceiving game.
Think of its kindness as fiction.
Tighten your belt at its hardships.

مهتران جهان همه مردند
 مگر را سر همه فرو کردند
 زیر خاك اندرون شدند آنان
 كه همه كوشك‌ها برآوردند
 از هزاران هزار نعمت و ناز
 نه به آخر به جز كفن بردند
 بود از نعمت آنچه پوشیدند
 و آنچه دادند و آنچه را خوردند

مهر مفعن برین سرای سپنج
 کین جهان پاك بازیی نیرنج
 نیک او را فسانه واری شو
 بد او را کمرت سخت بتنج

There was much to be sorry for

I didn't have the chance to apologize
For it all, but he pardoned me anyway.
I worship God. He is my creator.
My tongue did not rest from praising his servants.
Life's wheel is all trickery and bondage:
Poison mixed with nectar, gold-plated zinc.
Many, many new violets have blossomed,
Like a flame, bruised, when it touches sulfur.
Bring out the sun, pour it, drink from it.
It passes the lips and shines through the cheeks.

Thirteen-year-old bride

At times lightning laughs, at times thunder moans
Like a mother who mourns a thirteen-year-old bride.
Leaves on the old willow have turned to green silk.
Dew sits on the tulip, like tears shed by parted lovers.

اگر چه عذر بسی بود روزگار نبود
 چنان که بود به ناچار خویشتن بخشود
 خدای را بستودم، که کردگار من است
 زبانم از غزل و مدح بندگانم نسود
 همه به تنبل و بند است بازگشتن او
 شرنگ نوش آمیغ است و روی زرانود
 بنفش‌های طری خیل خیل بر سرکرد
 چو آتشی که به گوگرد بردوید کیود
 بیاروهان بده آن آفتاب کش بخوری
 ز لب فروشود و از رخان برآید زود

زمانی برق پر خنده، زمانی رعد پرناله
 چنان چون مادر از سوک عروس سیزده ساله
 و گشته زین پرند سبز شاخ بید بنساله
 چنان چون اشک مهجوران نشسته ژاله برلاله

The song of the zir

At dawn, the song of a moaning *zir*
 Soothes my ears more than prayer.³⁸
 No wonder, the wail of the *zir*
 Lures the prey out of the field.
 It always pierces the heart
 Although it has no arrows.
 At times it weeps, at times it wails,
 From morning till night, and again till dawn.
 It speaks but it has no tongue.
 It recites the story of lovers.
 At times, it can sober up a mad man.
 At times, it can put a sober man in chains.

The pen

It's a cripple who walks, has no ears but talks.
 It's an eloquent mute, sees the world without eyes.
 It is sharp as a sword. It moves like a snake.
 It has a lover's body and a darkened face.

³⁸ *Zir* is a high-pitched note. It is also the name of an ancient musical instrument. *Takbir*, part of the Muslim "call to prayer," is the proclamation of faith: *Allah-o-Akbar* ("God is great").

وقت شبگیر بانگ ناله زیر
 خوشتر آید به گوشم از تکبیر
 زاری زیر و این مدار شگفت
 گر ز دشت اندر آورد نخجیر
 تن او تیر نه، زمان به زمان
 به دل اندر همی گزارد تیر
 گاه گریان و گاه بنالد زار
 بامدادان و روز تا شبگیر
 آن زبان آور و زبانش نه
 خیر عاشقان کند تفسیر
 گاه دیوانه را کند هشیار
 گاه به هشیار برنهد زنجیر

لنگ رونده است، گوش نی و سخن یاب
 گنگ فصیحست، چشم نی و جهان بین
 تیزی شمشیر دارد و روش مار
 کالبد عاشقان و گونه غمگین

Love and its afflictions

This breeze from Bukhārā

This wind that blows my way from Bukhārā
 Smells of roses and musk, a jasmine breeze.
 Any man or woman caressed by this wind
 Says: maybe this wind blows from Khotan.³⁹
 No, no. Such luscious wind could not blow from Khotan.
 This wind blows from the bosom of my love.
 Each night I look to Yemen until you appear
 Because you are Canopus rising from Yemen.⁴⁰
 My dear, I try to hide your name from people,
 Keep it from falling in the public mouth.
 Want to or not, with whomever I speak,
 When I speak, it's your name that comes to mouth.

³⁹ Khotan, a city in Central Asia (currently in Chinese Turkistan) was famous for its musk.

⁴⁰ Canopus, a star in the constellation Carina, is brightest when it appears from the direction of Yemen, which is south-west in the Bukhārān sky.

هر باد که از سوی بخارا به من آید
با بوی گل و مشک و نسیم سمن آید
بر هر زن و هر مرد، کجا بروزد آن باد
گویی مگر آن باد همی از ختن آید
نی، ز ختن باد چنو خوش نوزد هیچ
کان باد همی از بر معشوق من آید
هر شب نگرانم به یمن تا تو برایی
زیرا که سهیلی و سهیل از یمن آید
کوشم که بپوشم صنما نام تو از خلق
تا نام تو کم در دهن انجمن آید
با هر که سخن گویم، اگر خواهم و گر نی
اول سخنم نام تو اندر دهن آید

Devotion to love

What use is facing the house of God, when the heart
Faces Bukhārā and the beauties of Tarāz?
God will accept your devotion to love,
But he will not accept your prayers.

My heart is a grain

Dear heart, why are you so selfish?
Why do you love the enemy in vain?
Why do you seek faith from the unfaithful?
Why do you strike iron that is cold?
And you, whose cheeks are like the lily,
The lily is jealous of your beauty.
Go down this dead-end street just once,
You'll light a fire under its residents.
My heart is a grain, your love, a mountain.
Why crush the grain under the mountain?
Forgive me dear boy, forgive me.
Don't needlessly kill a lover like me.
Come now, take a look at Rudaki,
If you want to see a lifeless body walk.

روی به محراب نهادن چه سود
 دل به بخارا و بتان تراز
 ایزد ما وسوسه عاشقی
 از تو پذیرد، نپذیرد نماز

دلا تا کی همی جویی منی را
 چه داری دوست هرزه دشمنی را
 چرا جویی وفا از بی وفایی
 چه کوبی بیهده سرد آهنی را
 ایا سوسن بناگوشی که داری
 بر شك خویشتن هر سوسنی را
 یکی زین برزن نا راه برشو
 که بر آتش نشانی برزنی را
 دل من ارزنی، عشق تو کوهی
 چه سایی زیر کوهی ارزنی را
 ببخشا، ای پسر، بر من ببخشا
 مکش در عشق خیره چون منی را
 بیا اینک نگه کن رودکی را
 اگر بی جان روان خواهی تنی را

In praise of the beloved

A hundred-petaled rose, musk, ambergris,
Apples, white jasmine and fragrant leaves,
It contains all of these, your beauty,
O Beauty, who captivate kings.
Your lover's night is the *Divine Night*,⁴¹
When the veil is removed from your face.
The sun hides its face behind a veil
When the veil reveals your two tulips.
And your chin is just like an apple,
An apple with a mole made of musk.

⁴¹ *Lailat al-qadar*, which I have translated as “*The Divine Night*,” is the night when the prophet Mohammad received the first revelation of the Koran.

گل صدبرگ و مشک و عنبر و سیب
یاسمین سپید و مورد بزیب
این همه یکسره تمام شده است
نزد توای بت ملوک فریب
شب عاشقت لیلةالقدرست
چون تو بیرون کنی رخ از جلیب
به حجاب اندرون شود خورشید
گر تو برداری از دو لاله حجیب
وآن زنخدان بسیب مانند راست
اگر از مشک خال دارد سیب

Crying for the beloved

I have the right to moan for my love's absence,
As the nightingale moans for the red rose, at dawn.
If fate does not deliver you to me,
I will burn fate with the flames in my heart.
When you brighten your face, a thousand
Butterflies will burn around you, as I do.
I will not fit under the tombstone, if
For one moment you sit grieving by my grave.
The world is as it has always been,
And will be the same for ever, my dear.
With one turn it will make a king,
With a throne, a crown and earrings.
O world, you make them rot under ground,
And the ground piles more torment on them.
Now, bring some of that life-giving wine,
And crush the past under a grinding stone.

به حق نالم ز هجر دوست زارا
 سحر گاهان چو بر گلبن هزارا
 قضا، گر داد من نستاند از تو
 ز سوز دل بسوزانم قضا را
 چو عارض بر فروزی می بسوزد
 چو من پروانه بر گردت هزارا
 نگنجم در لحد، گر زانکه لختی
 نشینی بر مزارم سوکوارا
 جهان این است و چونین است تا بود
 و همچونین بود اینند، یارا
 به يك گردش به شاهنشاهی آرد
 دهد دیهیم و تاج و گوشوارا
 توشان زیر زمین فرسوده کردی
 زمین داده بریشان بر زغارا
 از آن جان تو لختی خون فسرده
 سپرده زیر پای اندر سپارا

Tortured by the beloved

If I'm not unlucky, how did I get involved
With this quick-to-anger woman of easy virtue?
She likes it if I'm thrown to the lions.
I can't stand it if a fly sits on her.
She tortures me. But my love for her
And loyalty to her never leave my heart.

The cruel beloved

My eyes are a sea. The fire in my heart roars.
How can the pupil survive between sea and fire?
She has a crocodile's bite. She tears at the heart.
She is cruel. I will suffer if I give my heart.

Ayyār's message

Ayyār sent a secret message to me:⁴²
"Don't mention me in your poems so much.
This old man abuses me because of you.
I wish God would save me from his tyranny."

⁴² Ayyār means shrewd or sneaky. Nafisi claims that Ayyār is the name of one of Rudaki's favorite concubines.

گر نه بدبختی، مرا که فگند
 به یکی جاف جاف زود غرس
 او مرا پیش شیر بیسندد
 من نتاوم برو نشسته مگس
 گرچه نامردم است، مهر و وفاش
 نشود هیچ ازین دلم پرگس

دریا دو چشم و آتش بر دل همی فزاید
 مردم میان دریا و آتش چگونه پاید
 نیش نهنگ دارد، دل را همی خساید
 ندهم، که ناگوارد، کایدون نه خردخاید

کس فرستاد به سر اندر عیار مرا
 که: مکن یاد به شعر اندر بسیار مرا
 وین فژه پیر ز بهر تو مرا خوار گرفت
 برهاناد ازو ایزد جبار مرا

When the beloved drinks wine

Flowers bloom on her cheeks, it's no wonder:
Flowers always bloom when she drinks wine.
Her hair falls in curls but she stands up straight.
She has a healthy body but feverish eyes.⁴³

Submission to the beloved

I want to stroke your amber-scented hair,
Paint with kisses the jasmine petals of your face.
If only you'd place one foot upon this ground,
I'd make a thousand prostrations to its dust.
I'll kiss the seal on your letter a thousand times
If I see the mark of your signet ring upon it.
Tell them to cut off my hand with an Indian blade,
If one day I try to raise a hand to you.
I was silent when I should have recited poems.
But my tongue now turns with compliments for you.

⁴³ "Feverish eyes" imply sleepy, half-closed eyes, which are a sign of the beloved's beauty.

اگر گل آرد بار آن رخان او، نه شگفت
هر آینه چو همه می خورد گل آرد بار
به زلف کژ ولیکن به قد و قامت راست
به تن درست ولیکن به چشمکان بیمار

گرفت خواهم زلفین عنبرین تورا
به بوسه نقش کنم برگ یاسمین تورا
هر آن زمین که تو یک ره برو قدم بنهی
هزار سجده برم خاک آن زمین تورا
هزار بوسه دهم بر سخای نامه تو
اگر ببینم بر مهر او نگین تورا
به تیغ هندی گودست من جدا بکنند
اگر بگیرم روزی من آستین تورا
اگر چه خامش مردم که شعر باید گفت
زبان من به روی گردد آفرین تورا

The beloved's beauty

Song, rose-colored wine, and beauties like the moon,
 Would make an angel fall in the well.⁴⁴

How can I sew my gaze shut? To see my love
 Only narcissi grow on my grave, not weeds.⁴⁵

For the man who knows love's drunkenness,
 It's a shame to be sober for a moment.

Your eyes can't make out the ceiling beams by day.
 But you spot a straw in someone else's eye at night.⁴⁶

The beloved's curls

Who curled your hair into a "j"?⁴⁷

He who made your mole the dot of that "j".

And your mouth is so small, as if someone

Has split a pomegranate seedlet in half.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ In this line, Rudaki is making reference to the story of Hārūt and Mārūt, which has pre-Islamic roots ("Ho'avrutāt" and "Amrotāt" in Avestan literature) and is retold in the Koran. As the story goes, the angels Hārūt and Mārūt were sent to earth to guide mankind. They were seduced by the beautiful Nāhid ("Zohreh" in Arabic) and engaged in singing, drinking wine and merry-making. As punishment, God threw them into the well of Babylon.

⁴⁵ Narcissi represent eyes. Narcissi growing on the grave implies that the poet will see his beloved even after his death.

⁴⁶ The last couplet seems disjointed from the rest of the poem.

⁴⁷ I have translated the Persian letter [ج] "jim" as a "j". [ج], similar to a "j" in English has a dot. The dot in the [ج], however, is on the inside of the body of the letter, unlike the dot on top of the "j". The physical description of the dot being the mole surrounded by a curl of the beloved's hair makes more sense in Persian since the dot is surrounded by the body of the letter. The dot on the "j" as the mole, and the body of the letter as a curl of hair, demands a bit of a stretch in the imagination of the English reader. Nevertheless, it's an interesting coincidence that the [ج] and the "j" are similar sounding letters with similar physical shapes. Both are dotted letters with a curved body.

⁴⁸ A small mouth is a sign of feminine beauty.

سماع و بادۀ گلگون و لعبتان چوماه
 اگر فرشته ببیند در اوفتد در چاه
 نظر چگونه بدوزم که بهر دیدن دوست
 ز خاک من همه نرگس دمد به جای گیاه
 کسی که آگهی از ذوق عشق جانان یافت
 ز خویش حیف بود، گر دمی بود آگاه
 به چشمت اندر بالار ننگری تو به روز
 به شب به چشم کسان اندرون ببینی کاه

زلف ترا جیم که کرد آن که او
 خال ترا نقطه آن جیم کرد
 و آن دهن تنگ تو گویی کسی
 دانگکی نار به دو نیم کرد

Nature poems

Spring

A lush spring has arrived, colorful and effervescent,
With thousands of delights and decorations.
It is fair that the old man becomes young,
In a world that supplants old age with youth.
The mighty heavens have fielded an army:
An army of dark clouds led by the zephyr,
Lightning its artillery, thunder its drummer.
I have seen a thousand armies, never so fierce.
Look at that cloud, how it cries like a grieving man,
Thunder moans like a lover with a broken heart.
Now and then the sun peeks from behind the clouds
Like a prisoner hiding from the guard.
The world, which had been in pain for some time,
Has found a cure in this jasmine-scented wind.
A shower of musk streams down in waves,
On leaves, a cover of shiny new silk.
Snow covered crevices now bear roses.
Streams that had been dry now swell with water.
Upon the field, thunder howls like the wind.
Lightning cracks its whip from among the clouds.
On the meadow, a distant tulip smiles
Like the henna-painted nails of a bride.
The nightingale sings from the willow;
The starling answers from the cypress tree;
The ringdove's old song echoes from the cypress;
The nightingale serenades the red rose.
Now, drink wine. Now, be happy.
Now is the time for lovers.

آمد بهار خرم با رنگ و بوی طیب
 با صد هزار نزهت و آرایش عجیب
 شاید که مرد پیر بدین گه شود جوان
 گیتی بدیل یافت شباب از پس مشیب
 چرخ بزرگوار یکی لشکری بکرد
 لشکرش ابر تیره و باد صبا نقیب
 نفاط برق روشن و تندرش طبل زن
 دیدم هزار خیل و ندیدم چنین مهیب
 آن ابر بین که گرید چون مرد سوکوار
 و آن رعد بین که نالد چون عاشق کئیب
 خورشید را ز ابر دمد روی گاهگاه
 چو نان حصاری که گذر دارد از رقیب
 يك چند روزگار، جهان دردمند بود
 به شد که یافت بوی سمن باد را طیب
 باران مشکبوی بیارید نو به نو
 وز برگ بر کشید یکی حله قصیب
 کنجی که برف پیش همی داشت گل گرفت
 هر جو یکی که خشك همی بود شد رطیب
 تندر میان دشت همی باد بردمد
 برق از میان ابر همی برکشد قضیب
 لاله میان کشت بخندد همی ز دور
 چون پنجه عروس به حنا شده خضیب
 بلبل همی بخواند در شاخسار بید
 سار از درخت سرو مراو را شده مجیب
 صلصل به سرو بن بر، با نغمه کهن
 بلبل به شاخ گل بر، با لحنك غریب
 اکنون خورید باده و اکنون زبید شاد
 کاکنون برَد نصیب حبیب از بر حبیب

Choose the cup bearer and the wine. Drink. Sing
Like the starling or the nightingale.
Even though this young spring is a sight to see,
It pales before the pleasure of seeing my lord.
In your old age, as throughout your youth,
Everyone has always marveled at you.
You have had many dreams, and fulfilled them all.
You are the source of majesty, splendor and joy.

ساقی گزین و باده و می خور به بانگ زیر
 کز کشت، سار نالد و از باغ، عندلیب
 هر چند نوبهار جهان است به چشم خوب
 دیدار خواجه خوب تر، آن مهتر حسیب
 شیب تو با فراز و فراز تو با نشیب
 فرزند آدمی به تو اندر به شیب و تیب
 دیدی تو ریژ و کام بدو اندرون بسی
 بارید کان مطرب بودی به فرّ و زیب

Mehregān

Dear lord, the feast of Mehregān has come.⁴⁹
 The feast of kings and nobles has come.
 It's time for fur instead of silk, a tent
 Instead of the garden and the meadow.
 The myrtle has replaced the lily,
 Wine has replaced the Judas-tree.
 You are generous and your reign is young.
 Such luck: the wine has ripened in your youth.

.....

The flower has returned to the garden.
 It's time for the garden and the meadow.
 The flames of Āzar have died down.⁵⁰
 The flames rise up now in the tulip.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Mehregān* is a Zoroastrian celebration of autumn, in the month of *Mehr*, the first month of autumn according to the Persian calendar.

⁵⁰ *Āzar*, which means fire, is also the last month of autumn in the Persian calendar.

⁵¹ The last two couplets are not separated from the rest of the poem in the Nafisi manuscript. Here, I have chosen the Sho'ar and Anvary version, which has presented the second fragment separately. There is no thematic transition between the two fragments and the *radif* in the opening couplet of the second fragment indicates that it could be the opening couplet of a separate poem.

ملکا، جشن مهرگان آمد
 جشن شاهان و خسروان آمد
 خزیه جای ملحم و خرگاه
 بدل باغ و بوستان آمد
 مورد به جای سوسن آمد باز
 می به جای ارغوان آمد
 تو جوانمرد و دولت تو جوان
 می به بخت تو نوجوان آمد

.....

گل دگر ره به گلستان آمد
 واره باغ و بوستان آمد
 وار آذر گرشت و شعله او
 شعله لاله را زمان آمد

Hoopoe

I saw a hoopoe near Sarakhs
 Whose little song reached the clouds.
 She was wearing a little cloak
 Of many different colors.
 O ugly and inverted world,
 I stand before you in awe.

Winter's breath

This grass field, tinged by winter's breath⁵²
 Like the tails of tigers and wolves,
 Is now dyed and designed like the *Arzhang*,
 In a spring that bears Mani's mark.⁵³
 Don't feel too safe on the ship of life,
 The Nile is full of crocodiles.

⁵² According to the Persian calendar, *Day* is the first month of winter.

⁵³ Māni or Manes (c. 216-276) was the Persian founder of Manichaeism. Māni was also a painter and his scripture, the *Arzhang*, is illustrated with colorful paintings.

پوپك دیدم به حوالی سرخس
 بانگك بر برده به ا بر اندرا
 چادرکی دیدم رنگین برو
 رنگ بسی گونه بر آن چادر
 ای پر غونه و بازگونه جهان
 مانده من از تو به شگفت اندرا

آن صحن چمن که از دم دی
 گفתי دم گرگ یا پلنگ است
 اکنون ز بهار مانوی طبع
 پرنفش و نگار همچو ژنگ است
 بر کشتی عمر تکیه کم کن
 کین نیل نشیمن نهنگ است

Wine poems

On drunkenness

Now we are drunk, so let's drink wine.
Let's drink from the hands of beauties.
They call us crazy and senseless.
We are not crazy. We are drunk.

The virtues of wine

Wine brings out the dignity in man,
Separates the free from the man bought with coins.
Wine distinguishes the noble from the base:
Many talents are bottled in this wine.
It's joyous, when you are drinking wine,
Especially when the jasmine is in bloom.
Wine has scaled many fortress walls,
Broken many newly-saddled colts.
Many a mean miser, having drunk wine,
Has spread generosity throughout the world.

بد تاخوریم باده که مستانیم
 وز دست نیکوان می بستانیم
 دیوانگان بیهش مان خوانند
 دیوانگان نه‌ایم که مستانیم

می آرد شرف مردی پدید
 آزاده نژاد از درم خرید
 می آزاده پدید آرد از بداصل
 فراوان هنرست اندرین نبید
 هرآنکه که خوری می خوش آنکه است
 خاصه چو گل و یاسمن دمید
 بسا حصن بلند که می گشاد
 بسا کرّه نوزین که بشکنید
 بسا دون بخیلا که می بخورد
 کریمی به جهان در پراگنید

Rubā'iyāt

I

Her hair, down, is a long dark night;
Parted: a pair of open claws.
Disentangled braids, through each twist and turn
Cast wave upon wave of Tarāzian musk.

II

Day raises its banner in your name.
The crescent moon is like your cup.
Destiny imitates your strong will.
Your charity is daily bread for all.

III

No one seeks me out but misfortune.
Only my fever asks about my health.
If I'm on the brink of death, no one spares
A drop of water, except my eyes.

IV

She came to me. Who? The beloved. When? At dawn.
Afraid of whom? The guardian. Who is that? Her father.
I gave her two kisses. Where? On her moist lips.
Lips? No. What, then? Carnelian. How was it? Like sugar.

زلفش بکشی شب دراز اندازد
 ور بگشایی چنگل باز اندازد
 ور پیچ و خمش ز يك دگر بگشایند
 دامن دامن مشک طراز اندازد

چون روز علم زند به نامت ماند
 چون يك شبه شد ماه به جامت ماند
 تقدیر به عزم تیز گامت ماند
 روزی به عطا دادن عامت ماند

جز حادثه هرگز طلیم کس نکند
 يك پرسش گرم جز تبم کس نکند
 ورجان به لب آیدم، به جز مردم چشم
 يك قطره آب بر لبم کس نکند

آمد بر من، که؟ یار، کی؟ وقت سحر
 ترسنده ز که؟ ز خصم، خصمش که؟ پدر
 دادمش دو بوسه، بر کجا؟ بر لب تر
 لب بُد؟ نه، چه بُد؟ عقیق، چون بُد؟ چو شکر

V

Greedy one, don't seek fruit in this orchard,
This two-door garden is full of willows.⁵⁴
Don't rest idle, the Gardener is behind you.⁵⁵
Be still like the dirt, and pass like the wind.

VI

When you find me dead, my lips apart,
A shell empty of life, worn out by want,
Sit by my bedside and say, with charm:
"It is I who killed you, I regret it now."

VII

People aren't required to be generous and kind,
But they are required to be thankful for grace.
My lord bestows much that isn't required of him.
How can I neglect what is required of me?

VIII

I eagerly place your letter before me.
Teardrops pattern the Pleiades on my shirt.
Replying, when I take pen in hand,
I want to fold my heart in the letter.

⁵⁴ The two-door garden emphasizes the transience of life.

⁵⁵ The Gardener is the Angel of Death.

هان تشنه جگر، مجوی زین باغ ثمر
 بیدستانی است این ریاض بدو در
 بیهوده ممان، که باغبانت به قفاست
 چون خاک نشسته گیر و چون باد گذر

چون کشته ببینی ام دو لب گشته فراز
 از جان تهی این قالب فرسوده به آز
 بر بالینم نشین و می‌گوی بناز
 کای من تو بکشته و پشیمان شده باز

واجب نبود به کس برافضال و کرم
 واجب باشد هر آینه شکر نعم
 تقصیر نکرد خواجه در ناواجب
 من در واجب چگونه تقصیر کنم

در پیش خود آن نامه چو بلکامه نهم
 پروین ز سرشک دیده بر جامه نهم
 بر پاسخ تو چو دست بر خامه نهم
 خواهم که دل اندر شکن نامه نهم

IX

We've spread our rug in sorrow's house,
Shed tears. Ours is a heart on fire.
We've endured the world's tyrannies,
We, playthings of evil days.

X

As with Rudaki, love has made me tired of life.
Tears of blood have turned my lashes to coral.
I fear the pain of separation. I burn
With jealousy, like those who live in hell.

XI

She sold a tryst for a heart, a fair price.
She sells a kiss for a soul, and it's cheap.
It's true, when this beauty is the merchant,
She sells trysts for hearts, kisses for souls.

XII

You've stolen color and scent from the rose:
Color for your cheeks, scent for your hair.
The stream turns rose-colored when you wash your face.
The street smells of musk when you let down your hair.

در منزل غم فگنده مفرش ماییم
وز آب دو چشم دل پر آتش ماییم
عالم چو ستم کند ستمکش ماییم
دست خوش روزگار ناخوش ماییم

در عشق چو رودکی شدم سیر از جان
از گریهء خونین مزه‌ام شد مرجان
القصد که از بیم عراب هجران
در آتش رشکم دگر از دوزخیان

دیدار به دل فروخت، نفروخت گران
بوسه به روان فروشد و هست ارزان
آری، که چو آن ماه بود بازرگان
دیدار به دل فروشد و بوسه به جان

ای از گل سرخ رنگ بر بوده و بو
رنگ از پی رخ ربوده بو از پی مو
گل رنگ شود، چو روی شویی همه جو
مشکین گردد چو مو فشانی همه کو

XIII

Fate felt no remorse when killing you,
No soft heart for your elegance and youth.
I am amazed at the Taker, shameless
Before such beauty, stealing your life.

XIV

Each agate of sorrow you draw from my eyes, pierces
My cheek, opening a thousand roses of secrets.⁵⁶
Secrets my heart had kept hidden from my soul,
In rapture's language, are revealed by my tears.

⁵⁶ Agate, because of its dark red color symbolizes tears of blood, tears of sorrow.
Agate boring into the face can be read as tears rolling down the cheeks.

تقدیر که بر کشتنت آزر م نداشت
 بر حسن و جوانیت دل نرم نداشت
 اندر عجبم ز جان ستان کز چو تویی
 جان بستند و از جمال تو شرم نداشت

چشم ز غمت به هر عقیقی که بسفت
 بر چهره هزار گل ز رازم بشکفت
 رازی که دلم ز جان همی داشت نهفت
 اشکم به زبان حال با خلق بگفت

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