

## **James White: *Persian and Arabic Literary Communities in the Seventeenth Century: Migrant Poets between Arabia, Iran and India***

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James White's *Persian and Arabic Literary Communities in the Seventeenth Century: Migrant Poets between Arabia, Iran and India* is a substantial contribution to the literary history of Arabic and Persian as globalizing languages in the western Indian Ocean. It takes as its point of departure two biographical anthologies of poets, *Sulāfat al-ʿAṣr* (*The First Wine of the Press*) by ʿAlī Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Ḥusaynī al-Ḥasanī (d. before Ramadan 1119/November 1707) and the *Tadhkira* (*Biographical Anthology*) of Muḥammad Ṭāhir Naṣrābādī (d. after 1099/1687–8). In essence, the book develops from the question of what these voluminous works as a whole tell us about seventeenth-century poetry, its creators, and the world they lived in, instead of solely mining entries for historical data. To greatly simplify White's nuanced arguments: they reflected, projected, and immortalized literary communities. Six case studies further unwrap the migrations, networks, and exchanges that shaped these communities based on an intertextual reading of the works of poets included in the anthologies.

The background to this study is an early modern world that was highly mobile. There exists by now an impressive body of scholarly literature demonstrating that oars and sails connected the distant shores of the Arabian Sea and beyond for purposes such as trade, pilgrimage, diplomacy, and migration. White's book aids the further maturing of this transregional historiography by, among other things, appreciating how Persian and Arabic functioned as complementary languages for poetic expression in the Arabia–Iran–India zone of circulation. Indeed, Arabic and Persian cosmopolises often bled into one another, creating a spectrum of social and cultural hues which can hardly be contemplated in isolation. An equal number of chapters are consequently devoted to case studies of Arabic literary communities (chapters 2–4) and of Persian literary communities (chapters 5–7). In combination, the case studies invite reflection on how literature and socializing came together in similar ways across seventeenth-century polities.

Chapter 2, on an Arabic literary network in Hyderabad, will appeal to scholars interested in a recent but significant Arabic turn happening in South Asian history. Several interventions have started musing on the importance of studying Arabic sources produced in or in relation to South Asian contexts, such as the roundtable papers on “Arabic as a South Asian language” published in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (55/1, 2023). They make the case that the use of Arabic in South Asia has yet to receive the research that it deserves, eclipsed as the topic hitherto has been by a focus on Persian materials and by misconceptions about South Asian Muslims' (assumed lack of) contributions to Arabic literature. One way in which Arabic writings are crucially relevant to South Asian history, however, is that they allow us to unpack transregional influences on the political, intellectual and social life of Muslim authors in the subcontinent. In many



respects, this of course echoes discussions of Persian and Sanskrit as multibranching conduits of high culture and cosmopolitanism. Given how integral long-distance links were to these processes, we might soon see this growing interest in Arabic sources extend also to medieval and early modern Iran and Central Asia. Chapter 4 in White's book, on the composition of Arabic poetry in Mashhad, is already pioneeringly leading in that direction.

Another way in which this book refines our understanding of the effects of seventeenth-century mobility and migration is by paying attention to local levels of literary and social interaction, in addition to the transregional patterns. White shows that the migrant poets who are the subject of his study not only engaged with globalizing idioms, a corpus of classical texts, and overseas networks, but equally addressed local audiences and created literary communities that were specific to their time and place. Cosmopolitan literary production, in other words, also reflected localizing tendencies and multiplicity. More specifically, poets used "emulative intertextuality" in various forms to construct connections with the canon, with transregionally circulating pieces, and with artistic interlocutors in their immediate environs. This point is elaborately illustrated through a close reading of early modern poetry produced in Hyderabad, Sanaa, Mashhad, Kabul and Isfahan.

Further commendable features of this monograph are the many translated extracts of poetry that support its arguments, and its considerable attention to India's Deccan region (another trend that is gaining pace). But most admirable is its extensive bibliography of unpublished works that remain in manuscript, many written by unfamiliar names. As such, each chapter starts by tracing the biographies of its key figures, which makes the reader appreciate their backgrounds, migratory journeys, and social connections in relation to their literary production. It also brings out the relevance of poets who fell through the cracks of history for understanding the globalizing dynamics of early modern literature. White's methodology reminds us of the fact that the publication and celebration of an early modern work today does not necessarily reflect how it was valued by contemporaries. The conclusion further rightly points to the role that the colonial removal of manuscripts and modern nationalisms played in the neglect of some works and the foregrounding of others. Our own scholarly community will without doubt find this an inspiring study to emulate and build upon.

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## **Deniz Türker: *The Accidental Palace. The Making of Yıldız in Nineteenth-Century Istanbul***

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A visit to Yıldız Palace today is a somewhat dispiriting experience. The coherence of the whole has long been lost: some buildings serve as government offices, as they did in the