



When the First Brick is Crooked: The Philological Imperative in Historical Translation Studies

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Abstract

Historical Translation Studies (HTS) stands on unstable ground when it analyzes pre-modern translations without philological verification. This article examines a case from Persian Qur'ān translation. Since 1982, a rendering of Q. 15:22, *va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān firistādīm* ("And We sent the winds as bridegrooms to the flowers and trees"), has been debated in Persian translation theory as a model, or a breach, of fidelity. All participants assumed it came from a 5th/6th-century AH Persian translation of al-Ghazālī's *Ĵawāhir al-Qur'ān*, which the modern editor ascribed to Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar Nasafī. Comparing its verses with *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* and its prose with Nasafī's Persian passages in *al-Taysīr fī al-tafsīr* shows the ascription is unfounded and the text dates no earlier than the 7th/8th century AH. Second, the unique manuscript contains only al-Ghazālī's nineteen introductory chapters, not the verse anthology; the editor compiled the printed Q. 15:22 from *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*, a bracketed gloss of Sūrābādī's commentary, and his own words, and its celebrated wording first appeared on the back cover. None of the witnesses examined (the *Ĵawāhir* manuscript, the critical edition of the Sūrābādī tradition, and 142 manuscripts in *Farhangnāma-yi Qur'ānī*) contains it. A four-decade debate thus concerned a ghost translation. HTS should treat authorship, dating, and manuscript verification as preconditions of analysis.

Keywords: Historical translation studies, manuscript studies, philology, textual criticism, Qur'ānic translation

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1. Introduction

Historical Translation Studies (HTS) has spent three decades refining its questions. Pym (1998, pp. 5–6) distinguished translation archaeology, which establishes who translated what, when, where and for whom; historical criticism, which assesses translations and the values attached to them; and explanation, which asks why translations took the shape they did. D’hulst (2010) and the contributors to a 2014 special issue of *The Translator* (Munday, 2014; Rundle, 2014) moved the field toward archives, drafts, correspondence and other primary sources. Most of this methodological reflection presupposes that the translated text under discussion is itself secure. For pre-modern translations that presupposition is seldom safe. Texts survive in late copies, often in a single witness; attributions are inferred; and most readers, translation scholars included, meet them through printed editions whose decisions are not always visible on the page.

The Persian case examined here shows what happens when this is forgotten. In a lecture of 1982, published shortly afterwards in *Našr-i Dāniš*, Abolhassan Najafi opened his discussion of fidelity (*amānat*) in translation with a Qur’ānic phrase and its Persian rendering: Q. 15:22, *wa-arsalnā l-riyāḥa lawāqihā*, translated “in a text belonging to the fifth or sixth century AH” as *va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān firistādīm*, “And We sent the winds as bridegrooms to the flowers and trees” (Najafi, 1361 [1982], p. 5). For Najafi the rendering was faithful precisely because it left the letter of the verse to keep its poetic manner. The sentence became a touchstone. Lotfipour-Saedi (1372 [1993]) called it a betrayal; Hosseini (1387 [2009]) defended it, partly on the ground that a translator of the fifth or sixth century must have understood the language of revelation better than modern readers; Bi-Azar Shirazi (1377 [1998]) proposed to amend it; and Eyvazi (1403 [2024]) has recently reopened the question in his series “Broken Mirrors” (*Āyina-hā-yi šikasta*).

For four decades the participants argued about the sentence’s fidelity, its figurative status and its exegetical adequacy. None of them made its existence the object of inquiry: where it was written, by whom, and when. This article argues that the answers to these questions undo the debate. The rendering was ascribed to an anonymous Persian translation of al-Ghazālī’s *Ĵawāhir al-Qur’ān*, which its editor, Hossein Khadivjam, attributed to Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Nasafī (d. 537/1142). The study first tests that ascription by comparing the translation’s method and language with Nasafī’s known Persian writings. It then asks whether the rendering of Q. 15:22 occurs in the translation’s manuscript and in the sources from which it is said to derive.

The case is small, but its lesson is general: an editorial paratext became a quotation, a quotation a canonical example, and the example acquired a medieval author it never had.

2. Literature Review

Pym’s (1998) model is often summarized as a sequence, but its force lies in the dependency between its parts. Archaeology produces the data of translation history: catalogues, attributions, dates and places (pp. 5–6). If the archaeological layer is wrong, criticism evaluates a fiction and explanation accounts for it. D’hulst (2010) frames the historian’s task as a set of basic questions (who translated what, where, when, how, why and with what effect), all of which assume that the “what” is fixed before the “why” is asked.

Recent work has brought HTS closer to the archive, to translators’ papers, publishers’ records and the methods of historians (Munday, 2014; Paloposki, 2017; Rundle, 2014). These developments are calibrated to modern materials, where the existence and date of a translation are rarely in doubt. Pre-modern translation history faces a prior problem. Its primary sources are manuscripts, frequently late and sometimes unique, and its secondary sources are editions that have already made decisions about

them. The auxiliary discipline it needs first is therefore philology in the strict sense: textual criticism, codicology and historical linguistics.

Pollock (2009, p. 934) defines philology as “the discipline of making sense of texts” and argues that it belongs at the center of the humanities rather than at their antiquarian margins; Said (2004) made a related case for a “return to philology” as historically informed close reading. Three strands of that tradition matter most for translation historians. Textual criticism, from the stemmatic method codified by Maas (1958) to the social and material approaches of McGann (1983) and Greetham (1994), treats a printed text as an editor’s hypothesis about variant or lost originals. Material philology (Nichols, 1990; Cerquiglini, 1999) treats the manuscript as a historical object in its own right and variance as the normal condition of pre-modern textuality. Codicology (Gacek, 2009) supplies the means of dating and placing the physical witnesses. Persian editorial practice (*taṣḥīḥ*) has its own tradition and manuals (Mayel Heravi, 1369 [1990]), and many editions of the mid-twentieth century combine collation with silent normalization, supplementation from parallel sources and modern punctuation. Such an edition is a layered object. Some of its text comes from the manuscript, some is supplied by the editor, some is the editor’s commentary, and some, such as covers and mottoes, belongs to the book rather than to the work.

Two notions from Translation Studies help to describe what such layering can produce. Toury (2012) treats as “assumed translations” all texts that are presented or regarded as translations in the receiving culture, and he analyzes pseudotranslations, original texts presented as translations. The sentence studied here fits neither neatly, but resembles both: a modern text received and theorized as a medieval translation. Genette’s (1997) notion of the paratext is also needed, because the sentence first appeared in its celebrated form on the back cover of an edition, not in the edition’s text. HTS has begun to work with drafts and manuscripts of modern translators (Cordingley & Montini, 2015). It has worked far less with the editorial history of the pre-modern texts it analyzes.

3. The Text and the Debate

Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) wrote *Ĵawāhir al-Qur’ān* after the *lhyā’* and before the Persian *Kīmiyā-yi sa’ādat* (Eyvazi, 1403 [2024], p. 135). The work opens with nineteen chapters on the sciences of the Qur’ān and closes with two anthologies of verses, the “jewels” of knowledge and the “pearls” of action, which the Persian edition counts as 779 and 747 verses (Khadijām, 1360 [1982], p. 7).

A Persian translation of the nineteen chapters survives in a composite manuscript of the Majlis Library in Tehran, registered as no. 11345 (Khadijām, 1360 [1982], p. 15). It names no translator. Khadijām edited it, filled lacunae from the Arabic text (marking his insertions with asterisks), compared it with parts of *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*, and concluded that the translator was “in all probability” the Ḥanafī scholar Abū Ḥafṣ Najm al-Dīn ‘Umar Nasafī (d. 537/1142), adding the proviso “until the contrary is proven” (pp. 15–16). For the two anthologies, which the manuscript does not contain, he printed the Arabic verses and supplied Persian renderings of his own making, which he describes as follows:

Tarjuma-yi āyāt-i Qur’ān čunānki dar jā-yi xvadaš gufta-am, talfīqī ast az 12 tarjuma-yi Qur’ān-i karīm bā tikya-yi bīštar bar tafsīr-hā-yi Nasafī, Ṭabarī, Maybudī, Sūrābādī va Abū al-Futūḥ-i Rāzī.

“The translation of the Qur’ānic verses, as I have said in its place, is a compilation (*talfīq*) of twelve translations of the noble Qur’ān, relying mostly on the commentaries of Nasafī, Ṭabarī, Maybudī, Sūrābādī and Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī.” (Khadijām, 1360 [1982], p. 16, n. 1; cf. p. 81, n. 1)

Najafī (1361 [1982]) distinguished language “dependent on reality”, in which content can be separated from style, from language “dependent on itself”, in which it cannot, and argued that fidelity means preserving manner as well as matter, since “it is certainly not enough for the reader to know what the

author said; it is equally important to know how he said it" (p. 7). The Qur'ānic phrase served as his proof:

Īn-hā taqrīban tarjuma-yi lafz ba lafz-and va bā īn hama amīn nīstand, zīrā sabk rā fidā-yi muhtavā karda-and. Ammā tarjuma-yi hamīn 'ibārat dar yak matn-i muta'alliq ba qarn-i panjum-šišum-i hijrī az Imām Muḥammad Ḡazālī (yā ihtimālan az Abū Ḥafṣ Najm al-Dīn 'Umar Nasafī) čunīn ast: 'Va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān firistādīm.' Va īn tarjuma-ī amīn ast, harčand ki 'dāmādī' va 'gul-hā' va 'diraxtān' rā az xvad ba matn afzūda ast.

"These are more or less word-for-word translations, and yet they are not faithful, because they have sacrificed style to content. But the translation of the same phrase in a text of the fifth-sixth century AH by Imam Muḥammad Ḡazālī (or probably by Abū Ḥafṣ Najm al-Dīn 'Umar Nasafī) is as follows: 'And We sent the winds as bridegrooms to the flowers and trees.' And this is a faithful translation, although it has added 'bridegroomship', 'flowers' and 'trees' to the text of its own accord." (Najafi, 1361 [1982], p. 10)

Najafi's note cites Khadivjam's 1360 [1982] edition (p. 11, n. 7), and his wording of the attribution shows how the editor's hypothesis entered translation theory: al-Ḡazālī, the author of the Arabic source, appears as the translator, with Nasafī as the probable alternative. Lotfipour-Saedi (1372 [1993]) replied from an equivalence-based model. Since the Arabic verse uses no literary figure, he argued, the translator's metaphor interfered with the creativity of the source and had to be counted "betrayal in translation" (*xiyānat dar tarjuma*) rather than fidelity; he proposed *va mā bād-hā rā bārvar-kunān firistādīm* (pp. 76–77). Hosseini (1387 [2009], pp. 97–106) answered that *dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān* is personification, not metaphor, drawing on a mythological image of the wind as a male principle, and ended with an argument from the translator's date: *musallaman ū ki muta'alliq ba qarn-i panjum-šišum-i hijrī ast ba dark-i zabān-i vahy az mā tavānātar ast* ("surely he, who belongs to the fifth-sixth century AH, is more capable than we are of understanding the language of revelation", p. 106). Bi-Azar Shirazi (1377 [1998], pp. 248–249) set the sentence beside renderings by Ṭabarī, Nasafī, Maybudī and others, judged it incomplete because the winds also fertilize clouds, and offered *va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi [abr-hā va gul-hā va diraxtān] firistādīm*.

Eyvazi (1403 [2024]) reviews the whole exchange and concludes that the rendering is a free poetic paraphrase, not a faithful translation (pp. 144–145). His article comes closest to the problem. He notes that *tanhā nusxa-yi mavjūd az īn tarjuma fāqīd-i tarjuma-yi āyāt-i gulčīn-šuda dar baxš-hā-yi maḍkūr mī-bāšad* ("the only extant copy of this translation lacks the translation of the selected verses") and that the editor drew on Ṭabarī, Maybudī, Sūrābādī, Nasafī and Abū al-Futūḥ (p. 135). Yet he draws no consequence from the observation. His title still calls the sentence "an old translation", his abstract dates it to the fifth or sixth century (p. 131), and his analysis proceeds as if a medieval translator's choices were at issue. The present study starts where that observation was left.

4. Methodology

The study uses the second printing of Khadivjam's edition (1360 [1982]) and a digital copy of its manuscript, in which the translation occupies ff. 1–14. For Nasafī it uses Juvaynī's (1353 [1974]) edition of *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* (1353 [1974]) and the Persian passages of Nasafī's Arabic commentary *al-Taysīr fī al-tafsīr* collected by Navidi Malati (1394 [2015]), which preserve his Persian prose outside the format of a Qur'ān translation. For Sūrābādī (d. 494/1101) it uses the edition of the Turbat-i Šayx-i Ĵām abridgement by Mahdavi and Bayani (1338 [1959]), Mahdavi's (1344 [1966]) survey of the manuscripts, and Saidi Sirjani's (1380 [2001]) edition of the full commentary with its apparatus of variants. The *Farhangnāma-yi Qur'ānī* (Yahaqqi, 1372–1377 [1993–1998]), which records the Persian equivalents of Qur'ānic words in 142 early manuscripts of the Astan Quds Library in Mashhad, serves as a control corpus.

The analysis follows Pym's (1998) first two stages. Stage one tests the ascription and date of the translation. It compares a sample of verses rendered in the body of the *Ĵawāhir* translation with their renderings in *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*, attending to segmentation, word order, the treatment of Arabic participles, explication and lexical choice, and then compares the translation's prose with Nasafī's Persian in *al-Taysīr*. Stage two traces the rendering of Q. 15:22: it examines the manuscript, separates the layers of the printed text, identifies the source of each segment, and checks the Sūrābādī witnesses and the *Farhangnāma*. Quotations from the *Ĵawāhir* translation follow the printed text; where the edition's practice affects an argument, this is stated. All Persian passages are given in transcription, in a uniform system that follows the printed spelling and does not mark the *majhūl* vowels.

5. Results

5.1. Stage One: Who Translated the *Ĵawāhir*, and When?

Khadivjam's argument (1360 [1982], pp. 15–16) has four parts. The translation omits al-Ghazālī's admission that he had wasted half of his life writing on legal disputation (*xilāfiyyāt*), which the editor reads as the reaction of a translator who had himself written on the subject, as Nasafī had. The translation shares with *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* words such as *andaxsīdan* ("to seek refuge"), *farāz kardan* and *sikī* ("one third"). The two texts write second-person plural verbs alike, as in *bixandīt* and *bidānīt*. And both are written in a "mature, fluent and beautiful" prose.

None of these arguments identifies a translator. The omission may be a translator's choice or a lacuna, and in either case it says nothing about who the translator was; the editor restored the sentence from the Arabic (p. 34). The shared words are regional, not personal. The *Farhangnāma* records *andaxsīdan* in another early translation, where it renders *liwāḍan* (Q. 24:63), and its editors note that *andaxzīdan* is still in use in the dialect of Bīrjand (Yahaqqi, 1372–1377 [1993–1998], p. 1272). The second-person plural in *-īt* is a known feature of early eastern Persian prose (cf. Lazard, 1963). Such features can locate a text in Khorasan or Transoxiana; they cannot single out its author. Stylistic impression is not evidence.

5.1.1. Two Ways of Rendering a Verse

Table 1 sets the renderings of eight verses quoted in the body of the *Ĵawāhir* translation beside those of *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*.

Table 1. Verses Rendered in the *Ĵawāhir* Translation and in *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*

Verse	Ĵawāhir translation (ed. Khadivjam, 1360 [1982])	Tafsīr-i Nasafī (ed. Juvayni, 1353 [1974])
Q. 50:16	mā ba vay az rag-i ĵān-i vay nazdīktarīm p. 24	va mā ba vay nazdīktarīm az rag-i ĵān-i vay vol. 2, p. 749
Q. 87:14–15	harāyina rastagārī yāft kasī ki xvad rā pāk kard, va nām-i xudāvand yād kard va namāz kard p. 23	rast ānk islām āvard va āšnā šud ... [va nām-i xudāy-i xvīš yād kard, va namāz āvard] vol. 2, p. 896
Q. 73:8	ya'nī ba vay munqaṭi' šu az hama, ya'nī rūy az hama bigardān va ba sū-yi vay ār p. 23	va yād kun nām-i parvardigār-i xvīš, va az hama bubur va ba vay payvand dar har kār-i xvīš vol. 2, p. 852
Q. 21:20	tasbīḥ-i ḥaqq mī-gūyand šab va ruz, ki īšān rā hīč sustī va māndagī nīst p. 22	namāz ārand šab va ruz va sust na-and az mudāvamat-i vay vol. 1, p. 454

Verse	Ĵawāhir translation (ed. Khadivjam, 1360 [1982])	Tafsīr-i Nasafī (ed. Juvayni, 1353 [1974])
Q. 35:2	čūn xudāvand raḥmat bar kasī bigušāyad kas natavānad bast, va čūn bar bandad kas natavānad gušād p. 58	ānči gušāda kard xudāy ta'ālā bar mardumān az ni'mat ān rā bāzdāranda-ī nīst, va ānči bāz dāšt mar ān rā rasānanda-ī nīst vol. 2, p. 622
Q. 11:34	čūn xudāy xvāsta buvad ki kasī rā gumrāh kunad, naṣiḥat-i naṣiḥat-kunanda kuḡā sūd dārad? pp. 57–58	va sūd nadārad šumā rā naṣiḥat-i man agar xvāham tā naṣiḥat kunamatān, agar xudāy ta'ālā xvāsta bāšad gumrāh kardan-i šumā az īmān vol. 1, p. 310
Q. 32:12	ay parvardigār-i mā, dīdīm va šunīdīm, bāzgardān mā rā ba dunyā tā kār-i nikū kunīm ḡāl ki mā bar yaqīnīm p. 46	ay parvardigār-i mā dīdīm va šunūdīm ba-'iyān, bāz barmān tā īmān ārīm, va ṭā'at kunīm, či mā bīgumān šudīm vol. 2, p. 595
Q. 7:53	āyā barā-yi mā šafā'at-kunandagānī hastand ki dar ḡaqq-i mā šafā'at kunand, yā ānki mumkin ast ki mā rā bāz ba dunyā barand pp. 45–46	āyā hīnd mā rā imrūz šafī'ān, tā mā rā šafā'at kunand īšān. yā bāz-burda šavīm bad-ān ḡahān vol. 1, p. 221

Note. Ellipses and brackets in the *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* column follow the edition; only the portions corresponding to the *Ĵawāhir* renderings are given.

The contrast is consistent. *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* follows the Arabic segment by segment and keeps its order even where Persian prefers another: *va mā ba vay nazdīktarīm az rag-i jān-i vay* reproduces *wa-naḥnu aqrabu ilayhi min ḡabli l-warīd* word for word, while the *Ĵawāhir* moves the comparative phrase before the predicate, as unmarked Persian does. *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* renders Arabic participles with Persian agent nouns (*bāzdāranda-ī nīst* for *fa-lā mumsika laḡā*, *rasānanda-ī nīst* for *fa-lā mursila lahu*); the *Ĵawāhir* turns the same verse into two conditional clauses with finite verbs (*kas natavānad bast ... kas natavānad gušād*). *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* prefers Persian verbs where they exist (*rast* for *aḡlaḡa*; *az hama bubur va ba vay payvand* for *tabattal ilayhi*); the *Ĵawāhir* reaches for Arabic loans and periphrases (*rastagārī yāft*, *munḡaṭi' šu*, *bar yaqīnīm*, and *taḡṣīr* in its rendering of Q. 39:56). The *Ĵawāhir* explicates with *ya'nī*, supplies referents (*ba dunyā*), and changes illocutionary force, turning the conditional statement of Q. 11:34 into a rhetorical question. Its renderings are shaped by the argument of the treatise into which the verses are woven. Nasafī's are shaped by the verse. The same holds for Q. 11:38, where Nasafī keeps the verb of mockery (*fusūs kardan*) and the *Ĵawāhir* substitutes laughter (*mī-bixandīt ... bixandīm*).

The points of contact are real but common property. Both texts render the optative of Q. 33:66 with *kāškī* and a past optative in *-ī* (Nasafī: *ṭā'at dāštīmī*; *Ĵawāhir*: *iṭā'at ... dāštīmī*), and both use *rag-i jān* for *ḡabl al-warīd*. These are standard equivalents in Persian Qur'ānic usage and do not distinguish one translator from another.

One objection has to be met. A single translator might render verses differently in a running Qur'ān translation and in a translated treatise, where the verses serve an argument. *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* is, moreover, not strictly literal: it expands the text with alternative glosses (*va ḡūyand*, *va qīla*) and rhymed additions, as when its rendering of Q. 35:2 continues *va vay ast 'azīz dar hama-yi mulk va ḡalāl-i xvīš*, *ḡakīm dar aḡ'āl va aḡvāl-i xvīš* (vol. 2, p. 622). The difference of genre weakens any argument from translation method alone. This is why the comparison must extend to Nasafī's Persian outside the interlinear frame.

5.1.2. Nasafī's Persian Outside the Qur'ān Translation

Nasafī's Arabic commentary *al-Taysīr fī al-tafsīr* contains Persian sentences, which Navidi Malati (1394 [2015]) has collected from two manuscripts. They show Nasafī writing Persian freely, in homiletic and exegetical prose, and they have a distinct profile. They are rhymed and built on parallel members: *ṭanā gūy tā ṭanā yābī; šukr gūy tā 'aṭā yābī; riṣā diḥ tā riṣā yābī; va rāst āy tā varā yābī* ("Praise, and you will find praise; give thanks, and you will find gifts; consent, and you will find consent; be upright, and you will find Him"). They preserve phonetic forms such as *kirdan* for *kardan*, *mun* for *man*, *varā* for *ū rā*, *xuvī* for *xvāhī* and *rustaxīz* for *rastaxīz*. And they share vocabulary with *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*, such as *andaxsīdan*, *nigāhdāšt* and *sipās-dāranda*, which Navidi Malati documents in his notes.

The *Ĵawāhir* translation is also expository prose about the Qur'ān, and the comparison is therefore closer in genre. In the passages examined, the translation shows none of this rhymed parallelism. Its prose is plain and argumentative, built of periodic sentences that follow al-Ghazālī's reasoning. Its archaisms (*sīkī*, *farāz giriftan*, the *-it* ending, the optative in *-ī*) are of the regional, shared kind discussed above. The phonetic spellings are less probative, since the editor may have normalized them; an absence of rhyme and parallelism, however, cannot be an effect of normalization.

5.1.3. Toward a Date

The positive evidence for a date is thinner than the negative evidence against Nasafī, and it should be stated as such. The translation survives in one manuscript, and that copy is late: the codex was copied in 1053/1643. Its language combines a small layer of eastern archaisms with constructions more at home in later Persian: impersonal *mumkin ast ki* ("it is possible that"), *dar ḥaqq-i mā* ("on our behalf"), conjunctive *ḥāl ki* ("now that"), and a dense Arabic abstract vocabulary. None of these is datable in isolation, and some may reflect the editor's hand. The method points the same way. Early Persian renderings of the Qur'ān were dominated by the interlinear, segment-by-segment practice that *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* exemplifies (Azarnooosh, 1375 [1996]; Zadeh, 2012), and a translator who naturalizes word order and recasts clauses as freely as the *Ĵawāhir* translator does works against that grain. Taken together, these features point to a date considerably later than Nasafī's lifetime: on present evidence, the translation is unlikely to be earlier than the seventh or eighth century AH, and a closer date must await a full linguistic study of the manuscript. The more modest conclusion matters more for the debate: the ascription to Nasafī is unsupported, and with it the fifth- or sixth-century context in which the sentence has been read.

5.2. Stage Two: Where Does the Sentence Come From?

5.2.1. The Manuscript

The manuscript of the Persian *Ĵawāhir* contains the translation of the nineteen introductory chapters and nothing more. Its text ends with the short closing section in which al-Ghazālī announces that he will now string the jewels on one thread and the pearls on another (*aknūn mar ḥavāhir-i Qur'ān rā dar yak silk naẓm diham va durar rā dar silkī dīgar*), and closes with *va-llāhu a'lam*. Blank leaves follow, and the next item in the codex is a different work. Neither the Arabic anthologies nor any Persian rendering of them is present. The editor says as much when he describes the manuscript as a translation of al-Ghazālī's introduction, *ya'nī nūzdah faṣl-i āyāz-i kitāb* ("that is, the first nineteen chapters of the book", Khadivjam, 1360 [1982], p. 15). Every Persian verse in the second half of the edition (pp. 79–256) is therefore an editorial composition. Eyvazi (1403 [2024], p. 135) registered this

fact. What has not been shown is how the particular sentence was composed and how it acquired the form that was debated.

5.2.2. The Anatomy of the Printed Verse

In the 1360 [1982] printing, the rendering of Q. 15:22 reads:

Va mā firistādīm bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi diraxtān (=bārdār-kunandagān-i diraxtān) va furū-firistādīm az āsmān bārān, va nūšānīdīm šumā rā miqdārī az ān, va natavānīd šumā hama rā jumla kardan, va dar yak xizāna darāvardan.

“And We sent the winds to the bridegroomship of the trees (= the fertilizers of the trees), and sent down rain from the sky, and gave you some of it to drink, and you cannot gather it all and bring it into one storehouse” (Khadijām, 1360 [1982], p. 106).

Two things are evident at once. The sentence has no flowers, and it is composite. Its last clause is taken verbatim from *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*, which reads *va natavānīt šumā hama rā jumla kardan, va dar yak xizāna darāvardan* (Juvayni, 1353 [1974], vol. 1, p. 366); only the ending *-īt* has been modernized to *-īd*. Its opening clause has no counterpart in *Nasafī*, whose rendering of *lawāqih* is *bārdārandagān-i bārān, va gūyand gušn-afkandagān-i diraxtān* (“bearers of rain, and some say impregnators of trees”, vol. 1, p. 366). This last point bears on Najafī’s “or probably *Nasafī*”: the scholar to whom the editor ascribed the *Ĵawāhir* rendered this verse quite differently in his own Qur’ān translation. Nor does it occur in the Persian Ṭabarī, in Maybudī or in Abū al-Futūḥ, whose renderings Bi-Azar Shirazi tabulates (1377 [1998], p. 248). Among the sources the editor names, the image of the bridegroom has a single antecedent: the edition of the Turbat-i Ṣayx-i Ĵām abridgement of Sūrābādī by Mahdavi and Bayani (1338 [1959]), where the interlinear rendering is followed by a sentence in square brackets:

Va mā bifiristādīm bād-hā rā gušn-dihanda [mā bād rā ba dāmādī-yi diraxtān firistīm

“And We sent the winds as impregnators [We send the wind to the bridegroomship of the trees].” (Mahdavi & Bayani, 1338 [1959], p. 503)

The bracketed sentence has a singular “wind”, a present-tense verb and trees alone. Khadijām took the phrase *ba dāmādī-yi diraxtān*, set it into the syntax of his compilation, and added a parenthetical gloss of his own, (=bārdār-kunandagān-i diraxtān), in the modern Persian of the edition. The middle clause (*va nūšānīdīm šumā rā miqdārī az ān*) is not *Nasafī*’s, who has *va dādīmatān ba vay šurb va šarāb*, and must come from another of the twelve sources or from the editor himself.

The celebrated form appears elsewhere in the same book. The back cover of the 1360 [1982] printing carries, as a motto beneath the title, *va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān firistādīm. (Qur’ān)*. This is the version Najafī quoted, word for word, while citing the edition. Later printings brought the text into line with the cover: the third printing (Tehran: Ittīlā’āt, 1365 [1986]), as quoted by Eyvazi (1403 [2024], p. 135), reads *va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān firistādīm, va az āsmān barāyatān bārān furū-firistādīm, va nūšānīdīm šumā rā miqdārī az ān*. The flowers thus entered the tradition through a paratext, passed into scholarship through quotation, and returned to the edition’s text in a later printing. Table 2 sets out the sequence.

Table 2. The Wording of the First Clause of Q. 15:22 Across Witnesses and Printings

Witness	Wording	Reference
Turbat-i Ṣayx-i Ĵām abridgement of Sūrābādī (MS 584 AH), as edited in 1338 [1959]	<i>gušn-dihanda [mā bād rā ba dāmādī-yi diraxtān firistīm]</i>	Mahdavi and Bayani, p. 503
Sūrābādī, full commentary (critical edition)	<i>gušn-dihanda mīy rā ba bārān va diraxtān rā ba mīva</i>	Saidi Sirjani, vol. 2, p. 1255

Witness	Wording	Reference
Khadijjam's edition, text, 1360 [1982]	<i>ba dāmādī-yi diraxtān (=bārdār-kunandagān-i diraxtān)</i>	p. 106
Khadijjam's edition, back cover, 1360 [1982]	<i>va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān firistādīm</i>	back cover
Najafi, 1361 [1982]	<i>va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān firistādīm</i>	pp. 5, 10
Khadijjam's edition, 3rd printing, 1365 [1986]	<i>va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi gul-hā va diraxtān firistādīm</i>	Eyvazi, p. 135
Bi-Azar Shirazi, 1377 [1998]	<i>va mā bād-hā rā ba dāmādī-yi [abr-hā va gul-hā va diraxtān] firistādīm</i>	p. 249

5.2.3. The Sūrābādī Trail

Because the only antecedent of the image is a bracketed sentence in an edition of Sūrābādī, its status must be examined. Sūrābādī's commentary, which its author called *Tafsīr al-tafāsīr*, survives in many manuscripts, the oldest dated 523 and 535 AH (Mahdavi, 1344 [1966], pp. 6–9; Saidi Sirjani, 1380 [2001], vol. 1, preface). The Turbat-i Šayx-i Ĵām manuscript, completed in 584/1188 and endowed in 654/1256 to the shrine of Šayx Aḥmad-i Ĵām, is not a copy of that commentary. In Mahdavi's description it is *talxīs-i maxšūšī* ("a particular abridgement") of it: the abridger dropped the introduction, wrote each sura's verses continuously with an interlinear translation, and cut the questions, answers and exegetical notes, "except that he sometimes added a word or phrase to the word-for-word translation for further clarification" (Mahdavi, 1344 [1966], p. 22). The 1338 [1959] edition gives only the Persian parts of the manuscript, and it was printed without an account of its editorial conventions.

Two readings of the bracket are therefore possible. It may reproduce one of the abridger's explanatory additions, or it may be an editors' insertion. The edition records at least some supplements in footnotes, as on the same page, where the missing rendering of *fa-žallū fihi ya'rujūn* (Q. 15:14) is supplied "from the commentary of Abū al-Futūḥ" (Mahdavi & Bayani, 1338 [1959], p. 503, n. 1), which makes the first reading the more probable one; only an examination of the Turbat manuscript can settle the question. Even on that reading, the bracket is not a translation in the strict sense. By Mahdavi's own description it belongs to a class of explanatory additions, and such additions in early Persian Qur'ān translations can depart considerably from the words they accompany. In the Codex Hudā'ī Efendī (621/1224), for instance, the translator adds *dar in jahān* ("in this world") to Q. 7:143, in line with the Aš'arī doctrine of the vision of God, and *ba kitāb u sunnat* ("to the Book and the Sunna") to Q. 4:59, with no counterpart in the Arabic (Bigdeloo, 2025, pp. 96–97). Translation and interpretation are entangled even within the translation layer of such texts, a point that historians of translation have rarely registered. The bracket records an exegetical image, not a rendering of *lawāqih*, and on either reading it is a single gloss in one witness of an abridged version of another work. As this examination shows, the phrase is not a translation *stricto sensu*, and this affects every earlier discussion of the (in)fidelity of the rendering, all of which treated it as one. Beyond manuscript and textual examination, a close study of the nature of such passages, in this and other translations, is therefore a precondition for any later translational discussion. It is not a translation in the *Ĵawāhir*, it is not Sūrābādī's own text, and it is not the sentence that was debated, which has flowers.

Sūrābādī's own text says something else. In Saidi Sirjani's (1380 [2001]) edition of the full commentary, the verse is rendered *bifiristādīm bād-hā rā gušn-dihanda mīy rā ba bārān va diraxtān rā ba mīva; va gufta-and lawāqih ay: malāqih, bār-bar-gīranda ba mīy va bārān* ("We sent the winds, impregnating the clouds with rain and the trees with fruit; and it is said that *lawāqih* means *malāqih*, bearing a

burden of cloud and rain”, vol. 2, p. 1255). The apparatus for this passage records the readings of three further witnesses, none with *dāmādī* (vol. 5, p. 3562). That apparatus is incomplete overall, as the edition’s preface concedes (vol. 1, preface, p. 2), and the present study relies on the edition’s records rather than on a direct examination of the manuscripts, which remains desirable. As far as those records go, the *Sūrābādī* tradition does not have the phrase.

5.2.4. The Wider Manuscript Record

The *Farhangnāma-yi Qur’ānī* allows a broader check. Its entry for *lawāqih* lists twenty-eight Persian equivalents, each keyed to a manuscript of the corpus, among them *ābistan-kunanda-yi diraxtān* (“impregnator of trees”), *gušn-afkanda* and *gušn-dihandagān* (“fertilizers”), *bārī-dihanda-yi mīy* (“giver of burden to the cloud”) and *ābistan-kunanda-yi diraxtān va gird-kunanda-yi abr-hā* (“impregnator of trees and gatherer of clouds”) (Yahaqqi, 1372–1377 [1993–1998], p. 1272). Trees and clouds are common in these renderings. The bridegroom does not appear, and neither do flowers. The image of the wind as bridegroom was certainly available to Persian poets, as Hosseini’s (1387 [2009]) examples show. What the record shows is that no pre-modern rendering of this verse in the sources examined uses it, and that the sentence of the debate is a modern formulation.

6. Discussion

Every position in the debate rested on a historical premise that turns out to be false. Najafi (1361 [1982]) praised a medieval translator who knew how to preserve the manner of the Qur’ān; the sentence he quoted was an editor’s motto. Hosseini’s (1387 [2009]) argument from the translator’s proximity to revelation has no object. Lotfipour-Saedi (1372 [1993]) charged with betrayal a translator who never made the choice he condemned. Bi-Azar Shirazi’s (1377 [1998]) amended version added a further layer of composition to a sentence that was already a composite. Eyvazi (1403 [2024]) noticed the gap in the manuscript and still analyzed the sentence as an old translation. The theoretical questions raised along the way (the separability of style and content, the difference between metaphor and personification, the dimensions of equivalence) remain open, but they need a different example, or the same example correctly described: a Persian sentence of the 1980s, assembled by an editor from a medieval translation, a bracketed gloss and his own words, and completed on a book cover.

Toury’s (2012) notion of the assumed translation describes how the sentence functioned. It was presented and received as a medieval translation and was theorized as one. It differs from a pseudotranslation in that nobody intended to deceive. It was produced by ordinary editorial routines: a compilation from several sources without an indication of which segment came from where, a gloss promoted into the text, a motto printed on a cover, and an attribution hedged by the editor (“until the contrary is proven”) but quoted without the hedge. Genette’s (1997) paratext names the decisive step. The cover is not part of the work, yet it supplied the version that became canonical, and the canonical version then rewrote the text in later printings. Lexicographers call words that arise from misreadings and survive by being copied “ghost words”; translation history has ghost translations too, and no routine for detecting them.

In Pym’s (1998) terms, the debate moved from an archaeological claim (a fifth/sixth-century translation exists) directly to criticism of its values, and in Hosseini’s (1387 [2009]) case to a quasi-explanation (medieval translators understood revelation better). The critical work on the evidence, which philology supplies, was skipped. This is not a local failing: Persian HTS, like the history of translation in many manuscript cultures, depends on mid-twentieth-century editions, and editors of Persian Qur’ān translations routinely supplemented, normalized and compiled, as Khadivjam’s (1360

[1982]) twelve-source compilation and his asterisked insertions show. A scholar who quotes from such an edition has to know which layer of it the quotation comes from.

The case suggests a minimal protocol for HTS research on pre-modern translations. First, identify the witnesses of the text and their dates. Second, read the edition's introduction, notes and apparatus to separate the manuscript text from editorial supplements, compositions, glosses and paratexts, and, within the manuscript text, translation proper from explanatory additions. Third, test attributions on linguistic and codicological grounds, distinguishing regional features from idiolectal ones. Fourth, check the particular passage in the manuscripts or reliable reproductions, and against reference corpora such as the *Farhangnāma*. Only then evaluate. None of these steps is new to philologists, but they must become part of the training and routine of translation historians: literary criticism, historical linguistics and manuscript studies belong in the toolkit of translation studies, not only in neighboring departments.

7. Conclusion

The rendering of Q. 15:22 that Persian translation theory has debated since 1982 is not a medieval translation. The Persian *Ĵawāhir al-Qur'ān* is not demonstrably Nasafi's work, and its method and language point to a later translator. Its unique manuscript contains no translation of the verse anthology. The printed rendering of the verse was compiled by the editor from *Tafsīr-i Nasafi*, a bracketed sentence in an edition of a Sūrābādī abridgement, and his own words. The flowers came from the back cover. Two questions remain for further work: a full linguistic study of the manuscript, which would allow the translation to be dated with more precision, and an examination of the Turbat-i Šayx-i Ĵām manuscript and the Sūrābādī manuscripts themselves, which would settle the status of the bracketed gloss. Neither affects the main finding. For forty years, a debate on fidelity concerned a sentence that no medieval translator wrote.

This finding makes three contributions to HTS. First, it demonstrates how an uncertain attribution, editorial compilation and paratextual wording can combine to produce a historical translation that exists in scholarly discourse but not in the surviving medieval witnesses. The concept of the assumed translation helps explain how this sentence acquired historical authority, while the case extends its relevance to the editorial transmission of pre-modern texts. Second, it shows that philological investigation can do more than correct dates or establish textual variants: it can change the object of translation-theoretical inquiry itself. The debate over fidelity, figurative language and equivalence was not simply based on an inaccurate historical detail; it attributed translational decisions to a medieval translator who cannot be shown to have made them. Third, the study proposes a practical methodological principle for HTS: textual verification, attribution and dating must precede the theoretical interpretation of pre-modern translations. Establishing the provenance of a passage is not ancillary to translation history but part of its evidential foundation.

Future research can address these limitations through a full linguistic study of the *Ĵawāhir* manuscript, a direct examination of the Turbat-i Šayx-i Ĵām manuscript, and a broader collation of the Sūrābādī manuscript tradition. Such work could refine the translation's dating, clarify the origin and status of the bracketed gloss, and establish more precisely how editorial decisions shaped the printed text. Beyond this particular case, comparative investigations of other pre-modern translations could examine how frequently editorial supplements, conflated readings and paratextual material enter the secondary literature as features of historical translations. Developing a systematic protocol for documenting these textual layers would help translation historians distinguish surviving translations from editorial reconstructions and prevent theoretical arguments from resting on unverified evidence.

A Persian proverb says *xišt-i avval čūn nahad mi'mār kaĵ / tā ʔurayyā mī-ravad dīvār kaĵ*: if the mason lays the first brick crooked, the wall rises crooked to the Pleiades. In the history of translation, the first brick is the text. Authorship, dating and manuscript verification are not preliminaries to be delegated to other disciplines; they are the conditions under which a theoretical claim about a historical translation can be made at all.

AI Declaration

The author used Claude (Anthropic) to polish the language of the article and to check the consistency of its reference formatting.

Manuscript

Tarĵuma-yi Ĵawāhir al-Qur'ān [Persian translation of al-Ghazālī's Ĵawāhir al-Qur'ān, chapters 1–19] (1643). [Manuscript, composite volume no. 11345, fols. 1–14]. Kitābxāna-yi Maĵlis-i Šūrā-yi Islāmī, Tehran, Iran.

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