

## ***Gulistan*: Sublimity and the Colonial Credo of Translatability**

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*Gulistan*  
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In the centuries following its completion in AD 1258, the *Gulistan*, a work of prose-poetic homilies and entertaining narratives authored by Shaykh Sa'di Shirazi (1210–91/2 CE), came to gain renown as what Franklin Lewis terms the 'single most influential work of prose in the Persian tradition'.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the Persian context, the *Gulistan* also quickly found audiences in non-Persian-speaking societies, especially in Arabic-speaking societies and elsewhere in the Islamic world. Across the Ottoman Empire, in the fifteenth century to the eighteenth, the *Gulistan* was widely circulated. It was commented upon not only as a work of ethics but also for its style and poetics. In the same period in Mughal India, the work was read perhaps for its literary value but also as an instructive text for the study of Persian, a court language. Thus, the *Gulistan* came to be one of a finite number of texts both in Persian and in Arabic (and perhaps some other regional languages) that over the course of those three centuries achieved a degree of common currency as a canonical presence in diverse social and linguistic settings, from Cairo to Calcutta to Istanbul and beyond.

Yet, in the five hundred years before the eighteenth century, the *Gulistan* was very rarely translated into any of the other languages of the Islamic world. The existence of an odd number of monolingual translations – for example, one fourteenth-century Mamluk edition in Kipchak Turkish dialect<sup>2</sup> – proves rather than disproves the rule that is at the centre of this study: before the colonial period, the *Gulistan* was a work set outside and perhaps beyond the sphere of translation in its Islamicate home. Colonialism brought with it a new ideology concerning translation – what I will shorthand here as the 'credo of translation', a belief that translation is a positive, apolitical and effective form of intercultural mediation and that faithfulness to the original text is the object of translation. The *Gulistan*'s translation is directly an outcome of the ascendancy

of new ideological formations, catalysed by colonial relations, pertaining to translation: the emergence of a new credo of translatability.

The spread of print technologies in Islamicate societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries affirms the centrality of the *Gulistan* to various literary cultures, from Egypt to Istanbul to India. While still subject to dispute, some scholars have argued that the *Gulistan* was the first book printed in Persian inside Iran, in an edition produced in Tabriz in 1822, edited by one Mirza Ja'far.<sup>3</sup> However, the earliest printed edition was not issued in Iran, but rather in Calcutta, in 1809<sup>4</sup> although this was preceded by an 1806 bilingual Persian-English edition translated and edited by Francis Gladwin. The appearance of the Iranian print edition coincides closely with the publication of editions in Cairo and Istanbul. The Cairo Bulaq press, in particular, produced several editions of the *Gulistan*, all entirely in Persian with very little contextual material, from the 1830s through to the 1870s.<sup>5</sup> A variety of presses in Istanbul also produced lithographic editions in the same mid-century period.<sup>6</sup> Dozens of editions were published in the subcontinent over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> These eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editions speak to Arab, Ottoman, Indian and other readerships that presumably were drawn to ownership of the text by virtue of their own multilingual training, given that Persian remained a widely acknowledged *lingua franca* of poesis (much as Arabic retained status as the idiom of theology and jurisprudence).

However, another new audience for the text was to be crafted roughly over this same period through its various translations into European languages – especially into English. The first published translation, however incomplete, was Stephen Sullivan's 1773 edition. The first complete translation of the work into English dates to 1806, the aforementioned work of Gladwin, shortly followed a year later by Dumoulin's Calcutta translation. The work was to be retranslated several more times over the course of the century, with multiple editions of some English translations produced over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Near the end of that century, in 1888, Richard Burton's Kama Shashtra Society printed a translation of the *Gulistan* by Edward Rehatsek which was advertised as unexpurgated, and this then formed the basis for many further commercial editions.

During this period of the late-eighteenth century through to the early-twentieth century, in which the *Gulistan* was translated and circulated in new European editions, in the Mughal, Arabic and Ottoman Turkish contexts, the text was, as far as I have been able to ascertain, very rarely translated into any of the indigenous languages of these regions. There was one translation each into Ottoman, Hindustani (Urdu) and Arabic in