The History Of Literature I

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The word “poet[ry]” is derived from the Greek “poieses”, which means the will to create / transform. When it comes to the Reactionary proprietors of institutionalized dogmatism, then, “poieses” is naturally seen as a dire threat.

“Wisdom Literature” goes back to the 3rd millennium B.C. with both the Sumerians and Egyptians (see Stuart Weeks’ work on the topic). The authors of the Hebrew Bible openly recognize this fact in First Kings 5:10. In the 20th century B.C., the “Admonition Of [The Murdered] Pharaoh Amenemhat To His Son, Senusret” was composed in Egypt.

When it comes to ancient epics, the record goes back to the Sumerian “Epic of Gilgamesh”, which dates back to the late 3rd millennium B.C. The Akkadian “Enuma Elish” dates back to the early 2nd millennium B.C. In the early **11th century B.C.**, the Egyptian “Story of Wenamun” (an epic composed in Hieratic) was composed.

Poetry dates to **c. 700 B.C.**, with the Greek epics of Homer and Hesiod. Homer’s “The Iliad” and “The Odyssey” are still considered classics to the present day. And the legacy of lyric poetry goes back to Alkman of Sparta in the **7th century B.C.**

The oldest anthology of poetry is the “Shi-jing” [Book of Songs; a.k.a. “Classic of Poetry”] from the Zhou period in China. It was an ongoing compilation of material that started in the **11th century B.C.** and continued on through the 7th century B.C.

Here, we will explore literature in all three of these forms: didactic, epic, and poetic. Let’s begin with the Axial Age.

In India, the stories that wound up in the classic Sanskrit anthologies “Maha-bharata”, “Pancha-tantra”, and “Puranas” were originally composed during the Vedic period. It was during Classical Antiquity that the the epic “Rama-yana” was developed. (For an enumeration of subsequent Hindu lore, see Appendix 3.)

The Dravidian (i.e. Tamil / Sangam) literary tradition began with the first parts of the “Patinen-mel-kanakku” anthology (most notably, the “Ettuthogai”). The earliest (the “Akananuru”) dates back to 600 B.C. These were continuously developed through the 2nd century A.D. Thereafter, the “Patinen-kil-kanakku” collection was composed, which continued to be developed through the Middle Ages.

The legacy of satire goes back to the Ionian satirist, Xenophanes of Colophon, who lived **in the 6th century B.C.** During the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., the most revered writers in the world were the Attic writers–most notably: Aeschylus (the Father of Tragedy), Euripides, and Sophocles. Also notable was Pindaros of Thebes (a.k.a. “Pindar”).

In the 5th century B.C., the Chinese classic, “Spring And Autumn Annals” was composed. Later, renown writer, Lie Yu-kou of Zheng / Henan (a.k.a. “Lie-zi”) promoted Taoist ideals in his groundbreaking essays.

In the 4th century B.C., the early Confucian tradition was pioneered by great poets like Qu-Yan and Song-

Yu of Chu (ref. the “Songs of Chu”). Ancient China’s “Hundred Schools of Thought” era was contemporaneous with the vibrant philosophical activity in ancient Greece. Such traditions–in both the East and West–generally allowed for independent voices–though persecution was not unheard of (as exemplified by the death-sentence of Socrates).

In India, the renown Mauryan writer, Chanakya (a.k.a. “Kautilya”; “Vishnugupta”) pioneered Sanskrit exposition with his landmark treatise, the Artha-shatra”. {1}

Meanwhile, in the Hellenic world, Menanros of Dionysia / Lenaia (a.k.a. “Menander”) broke new ground in comedy.

Literature **in the 3rd century B.C.** would prove to be propitious. In the Far East, Panini (Punjabi) and Tiruvalluvar (Tamil) were notable writers; as the Sangam literary tradition thrived. In Greece, Theocritus of Syracuse broke new ground in pastoral (bucolic) poetry, Posidippus of Pella and Asclepiades of Samos produced lyric poetry, and Apollonius of Rhodes composed the epic, “Argonautica”. Even scholarly activity flourished at this time. Eratosthenes of Cyrene was not just a poet, he was a music theorist, geographer, astronomer, and mathematician. {2}

Meanwhile, poetry emerged in the Roman Republic with the Oscan writer, Quintus Ennius of Calabria (known for his epic, the “Annales”). Others from the period included the Greco-Roman writer, Lucius Livius Andronicus of Calabria (who pioneered Old Latin), as well as Cnaeus Naevius (who pioneered comedy and national dramas [praetexta pabula]).

In the 2nd century B.C., the Roman (Berber) playwright, “Publius” Terentius “Afer” of Carthage (a.k.a. “Terence”) broke ground. There also arose what is now referred to as the “Circle of Scipio” (a group of intellectuals and writers named after the Roman statesman, “Publius” Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus). Ionian poet, Nikandros of Klaros (a.k.a. “Nicander of Colophon”) produced renown work. And Oscan writer, Marcus Pacuvius of Calabria pioneered tragedy.

In China, there emerged the eight great “immortals” of Huainan, who together (under the patronage of King Liu An of Huainan) composed the great anthology of essays, the “Huainanzi” in the 2nd century B.C. Meanwhile, one of the greatest writers of Classical Antiquity, Sima Qian, composed his magnum opus: “Records Of The Grand Historian”.

In India, Su[n]draka composed the classic “Mrcchakatika” [“Little Clay Cart]. Shortly thereafter, the great Tamil anthology, “Eighteen Greater Texts” was composed.

In the 1st century B.C., Han essayist, Jia Yi of Luoyang was a renown political commentator, best known for his open criticism of the Qin dynasty (“Guo Qin Lun”). Meanwhile, the Chinese “Classic Of Mountains And Seas” was composed.

By the time Marcus Tullius Cicero of Arpinum started breaking new ground **in the 1st century B.C.** (ref. his “De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum” [On the Ends of Good and Evil], wherein he discusses Platonism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism), the legacy of letters in the Occident had been firmly established. In the earliest days of the Roman Empire, writing continued to flourish. “Publius” Vergilius Maro (a.k.a. “Virgil”) composed the “Aeneid”. Gaius Valerius Catullus of Verona–followed by Propertius of Assisi–pioneered love poetry. Other figures are worth noting:

- “Publius” Ovidius Naso (a.k.a. “Ovid”) composed “Metamorphosis”.
- Marcus Terentius Varro composed his magisterial “Antiquitates Rerum Humanarum et Divinarum” [Human and Divine Affairs of Antiquity]; and also wrote extensive commentaries on agriculture and

linguistics.
- Quintus Horatius Flaccus (a.k.a. “Horace”) composed satires.
- Albius Tibullus pioneered the elegy.
- Athenaeus of Naucratis composed his “Deipno-sophistai”.
- Epicurean thinker, Philodemus of Gadara composed poetry.
- Meleager of Gadara, a Cynic, compiled an anthology entitled “The Garland”.

(Also worth noting are the works of Lucius Accius of Umbria and Titus Lucretius Carus of Mantua.)

Then came the great statesmen, Lucius Annaeus Seneca of Cordoba (a.k.a. “Seneca the Younger”) and Marcus Aurelius, who promoted Stoicism. **In the 1st century A.D.**, there was also:

- Iberian writer, Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (a.k.a. “Quintilian”)
- Iberian writer, Marcus Valerius Martialis of Augusta Bilbilis (a.k.a. “Martial”)
- Iberian writer, Marcus Annaeus Lucanus of Cordoba (a.k.a. “Lucan”)
- Italic writer, Decimus Junius Juvenalis of Aquinum (a.k.a. “Juvenal”)
- Boeotian writer, Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus of Chaeronea / Phocis (a.k.a. “Plutarch”)

It might be noted that Plutarch’s “Moralia” predates the Gospel of John–what would become the most embellished (and, not coincidentally, the most influential) of the Gospel accounts of the Palestinian preacher, Jesus of Nazareth.

This brings us to Late Antiquity. In the Buddhist tradition, the great Indian poet, Asvagho?a of Saketa broke new ground **in the late 1st century A.D.**

The 2nd century A.D. was a major time for didactic literature. The stoic philosopher (and Roman Emperor) Marcus Aurelius composed insightful tracts. The anthology of fables, “Physiologus” was composed in Alexandria. The Numidian (Berber) writer, Lucius Apuleius of Madaurus composed the satirical novel, “The Golden Ass”, which earned renown in Carthage. And Lucian of Samosata composed satires.

In the Far East, literary excellence continued to flower. The Chera prince, Ilango Adigal composed the great Tamil epic, “Silappadikaram”; and the Buddhist monk, Chithalai Sathanar composed its sequel, the “Manimekalai”. Ashva-ghosha of Saketa composed the classic poem, “Saundara-Nanda”; as well as the classic hagiography of Siddhartha Gautama of Lumpini: the “Buddha-charita”.

During the 3rd century A.D. in China, there emerged the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” in Cao Wei. These writers engaged in “quingtan” (rigorous philosophical debates). They even produced robust political criticisms of the (Confucian) Jin regime. Ji Kang wrote “Shisi Lun” [“Discourse on Individuality”]. Ruan Ji was the most renown of these free-thinking essayists. And by the end of the 3rd century, the renown Indian writer, Bhasa, had composed the “Svapna-Vasavadattam” [“Dream of Vasavadatta”] as well as the tale of “Charudatta In Poverty”.

Tao Yuanming (a.k.a. “Tao Qian”) thrived as a writer in China **c. 400 A.D**. In India, the Kashmiri poet, Kalidas[h]a was the most renown dramatist of the era (4th or 5th century A.D.) Also in India, Aryabhata of Kusumapura emerged as the first major mathematician and astronomer of the Dark Ages **c. 500 A.D.**

In the Greco-Roman world, myriad epic romances were composed during Late Antiquity. Some of the most notable:

- “The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon” by Achilles Tatius of Alexandria

- “Chaereas and Callirhoe” by Chariton of Aphrodisias
- “The Tale of Anthia and Habrocomes” by Xenophon of Ephesus
- The “Aethiopica” by Heliodorus of Emesa
- “Daphnis and Chloe” by an author from Lesbos.

Even during the Roman Empire’s decline, iconoclasts continued to write. **In the 4th century**, Palladas of Alexandria composed eloquent critiques of Christianity. **In the early 5th century**, Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius composed his masterful critique, “Saturnaliorum Libri Septem” [Seven Books of the Saturnalia]. And Nonnus of Panopolis composed his “Dionysiaca”.

Alas, by the time Roman Catholicism had overtaken Europe, writers of philosophy were being persecuted, imprisoned, and even executed–as shown by the treatment of heterodox thinkers like Boëthius **in the early 6th century**. {3}

Persia had a vibrant tradition of literary criticism in Late Antiquity (that is: prior to the Islamic take-over). This is attested by Pahlavi works like the “Ayin-e Nam-e Nebeshtan” [Principles of Writing Book]. Persian literature flourished as well. Most notable was the “Daedestan-i Menog-i Khrad” [“Judgement of the Spirit of Wisdom”; composed in the “Pazend” variation of Avestan script] and the “Drakht-i Asurig” [“Assyrian Tree”; composed in Pahlavi script]. Meanwhile, Persian versions of the Panchatantra proliferated–as with the “Bab-e Edteda’I-ye”. {4}

For didactic purposes, we will now juxtapose the development of literature in the Muslim world against the rest of the world. It is worth noting how such development was influenced by the advent of Islam.

A half-century before the birth of Mohamed of Mecca, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius of Anicia penned his landmark work, “The Consolation of Philosophy”–which contained far more profound insight than the entirety of all the Islamic scripture that would be composed for the next thousand years…and would far surpass the “Recitations” in eloquence.

Leading up to Mohammed’s own time, the great poets of the Middle East wrote in Syriac–as with Ephrem of Nisibis and–later–luminaries like Jacob of Sarug and Narsai of Nisibis. All hailed from al-Jazeera (northern Levant).

In India, the literary tradition continued. By the time Mohammed of Mecca was born, Nathakuthanaar had composed the great Tamil epic, “Kundala-kesi”; Bhartrhari had just composed his great work of Sanskrit poetry, the “Satakatraya”; Gunadhya had compiled the collection of tales, the “Brihat-Katha” [in the extinct Paishachi language]; and Varahamihira of Ujjain / Avanti had just finished composing the “Brihat-Samhita”…and was about to complete his magnum opus (a treatise on astronomy known as the “Pancha-Siddhantika”).

Meanwhile, the Aeolian (Greek) poet, Agathias of Myrina / Mysia was in his prime. As MoM came of age, the great Brittonic (Cumbric) poet, Aneirin of Gododdin, composed the epic, “Y Gododdin”; and the great Irish (Gaelic) poet, Eochaid mac Colla of Connacht (a.k.a. “Dallan Forgaill”) composed the “Amra Choluim Chille” [Elegy of Saint Columba].

To ascertain what the impact of Islam was on the region, it’s worth contrasting things as they were BEFORE and AFTER its existence. Prior to MoM’s lifetime, Arabia boasted a plethora of revered poets–including:

- As-Samaw’al ibn Adiya of the Banu Harith
- Ziyad ibn Muawiyah of the Banu Dhubyan [a.k.a. “Al-Nabigha”]

- Alqama ibn Ubada of the Banu Tamim [a.k.a. “Alqama al-Fahl”]
- Maymun ibn Qays al-Asha of the Banu Hanifa [at Hajr, in Yamamah, in the Najd]
- Tarafa ibn al-Abd of the Banu Bakr {11}
- Harith ibn Hilliza al-Yashkuri of the Banu Bakr
- Abu Aqil Labid ibn Rabiah of the Banu Amir / Hawazin
- Imr[u] al-Qays ibn Hujr of the Banu Kindah {5}
- Maymun ibn Qays “al-A’sha” of the Banu Hanifa [at Hajr, in Yamamah, in the Najd] {6}
- Umaiya [alt. Umayya] ibn Abi as-Salt of the Banu Khuza’a [hailing from Ta’if; ostensive progenitor of the Umayyads via Sufyan]

…to mention ten of the most prominent. In pre-Islamic Arabia, women were also accorded literary stature–as with the poetesses, Afira bint Abbad of Yamama (who earned renown in the 3rd century) and Layla bint Lukayz (who earned renown in the 5th century).

In pre-Islamic Hijaz, the lyrical poetry known as “nasheed” was popular as well, for which musical instruments were often used as accompaniment. (It may be for this reason that instruments were banned by early Mohammedans.)

Also notable was Antarah ibn Shaddad al-Absi of Najd (a.k.a. “Antar”), a storied Arabian warrior-poet of the Banu Abs (one of the tribes of the greater Banu Ghatafan, who allied themselves with the Quraysh after MoM took control over Yethrib). He died in 608, two years before MoM claimed to have received his first revelation. Antarah ibn Shaddad is often down-played by Islamic apologists–who want to believe that the Koran was the first great Arabian work, unmatched by antecedent writers. All evidence is to the contrary.

We should bear in mind that, as Classical Arabic had not yet fully developed, all these writers would have spoken the lingua franca of the region, SYRIAC. Indeed, Syriac is the language that Mohammed of Mecca would have spoken / understood, and the language in which Koranic ayat were originally recited. These writers would have used a script influenced by the Nabataean alphabet, or possibly a Semitic script like Safaitic, Dadanitic, or Hismaic. Only after Classical Arabic was developed in the 8th century did the (neo-Nabataean) Kufic script start being used…which eventually led to the Arabic script. {7}

If one were to take a time machine back and recite the Koran to anyone in the early 7th-century Hijaz, including MoM himself, they would likely not understand much of what you said. It would be like trying to speak to a citizen of the Roman Empire (who spoke Vulgar Latin) in one of the medieval Romance vernaculars; or to a Netherlandish peasant during the Dark Ages (who spoke Old Frisian) in modern Dutch.

The best reference for pre-Mohammedan Arabian poetry are the earliest anthologies. Here are the five most renown:

- The “Mufaddaliyyat” compiled by Al-Mufaddal al-Dabbi of Kufa (c. 700)
- The “Mu’allaqat” compiled by Hammad ar-Rawiya of Kufa (8th century)
- The “Asma’iyyat” compiled by Al-Asma’i of Basra (late 8th century)
- The “Jamharat Ash’ar al-Arab” compiled by Abu Zayd of the Quraysh (late 8th century)
- The “Kitab al-Hamasah” compiled by Habib ibn Aws of the Banu Tayy [a.k.a. “Abu Tammam”] (9th century)

In the 10th century, Abu al-Faraj of Isfahan (a.k.a. “Abulfaraj”) compiled the massive “Kitab al-Aghani” [Book of Songs], a compendium of material that had spanned from 6th-century Arabia all the way through 9th-century Syria…including material culled from Mesopotamia.

Note that the material in these anthologies was ORIGINALLY in Syriac; and was only later rendered in Classical Arabic. In each case, the compiler had to translate most of the source-material from the original Syriac verse (likely available only in Kufic script when written; complimented with contemporaneous orality) into the still-germinating Classical Arabic. By the time the Koran was finally compiled (it was rendered in its current form at some point in the 9th century, probably using Kufic script), Classical Arabic had been developed for exactly that purpose.

The Father of Arab poetry (sometimes misleading called the "Father of Arabic Poetry"), Imra al-Qays (listed above) would have died just a few years prior to MoM's birth. Once a beloved poet throughout Arabia, he would later be denigrated as a blasphemer by Mohammedans (that is, once MoM had set the new precedent).

The most prominent Arabian poet during Mohammed's early life would have been Ziyad ibn Muawiyyah of the Banu Dhubyan (a.k.a. "Al-Nabigha"). He was not alone. Five other Arabian poets during MoM's early life:

- Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma of the Banu Muzaina
- Hatim of the Banu Tayy
- Jabal ibn Jawwal of the (Jewish) Banu Taghlib
- Amr ibn Kulthum of the (Jewish) Banu Taghlib
- Uday [alt. "Adi"] ibn Zayd of the (Christian) Banu Lakhm, hailing from Al-Hirah

All of them would have written in Syriac. (Records are clear that the Christians of Al-Hirah read and recited their scriptures–and composed their liturgical material–in Syriac.) There were even renown female poets during MoM's lifetime. Here are seven of the most notable:

- Safiyah bint Thalabah al-Shaybaniyah of the Banu Shayban (a.k.a. "Al-Hujayjah")
- Qutayla ukht al-Nadr of the Banu Quraysh
- Hind bint al-Numan of the Banu Lakhm (a.k.a. "Al-Hurqah")
- Al-Khirniq bint Badr
- Asma bint Marwan
- Al-Khansa
- Jewish poetess, Sarah of Yemen (of the Banu Qurayza)

The notion that Arabia was bereft of a vibrant literary tradition prior to Islam is sheer nonsense. Indeed, around the time MoM was growing up, poetry competitions were regularly being held in the Hijazi town of Ukaz. In fact, as we'll see, the advent of Islam FETTERED the literary tradition; and rendered female writers all but obsolete (as I show in part II of my essay, "The History Of Female Empowerment").

It should be noted that SATIRE was the most common form of poetry in Arabia until Mohammedan prohibitions rendered it verboten. That is: UP UNTIL Islam overtook the region, satirical commentary was a major part of Arabian culture–as the great poets enumerated above attest. However, once sharia was put in place, satirical poetry vanished. Anything that was seen as subversive was forbidden. Where once critical discourse flourished in the region, it ceased to be tolerated.

An illustrative case is the Arabian poet, "Labid" of the Banu Amir tribe (listed above), who wrote pagan poetry UNTIL he became acquainted with Islam. In other words, the one "pre-Islamic" poet who ended up converting to the new "din" promptly stopped writing after his conversion.

There were actually a few Arabian poets, popular during Mohammed's lifetime, who were purported to

have (eventually) converted to Islam. Take, for instance, the female poet, Tumadir bint Amr of Najd (a.k.a. “al-Khansa”), who is now known only for her elegies. As the story goes, she opted to become Muslim (though there is no hard evidence for this). Other apocryphal tales of conversion include the poet, Hassan ibn Thabit of the Banu Khazraj–who is said to have lived for over 120 years. (Gadzooks!) His contributions were limited to encomia to MoM.

The way some Islamic apologists tell it, though, poetry was exuberantly celebrated in the Muslim world during its earliest days and throughout the Middle Ages. Outside of panegyrics to approved rulers and elegies for deceased brethren, this is nonsense. In other words: The only poetry permitted was poetry that served the interests of those in power (read: verse that was FOR powerful men; or at least verse that was APPROVED BY powerful men). {12} Note that even the Koran itself was addressed explicitly to MEN. Leaving aside the entire chapter of the Koran devoted to impugning poets, we might simply review what actually transpired.

Pursuant to Mohammed’s rise to power, poets who persisted to compose verse yet failed to toe the line were summarily executed (or assassinated). The Hadith, as well as the two earliest biographies of MoM (those of Ibn Ishaq and Al-Tabari) remind us that this is precisely what was done to myriad writers who strayed from their assigned path.

The aforementioned Asma bint Marwan was one of the first writers to be killed for her craft. Per Ibn Ishaq’s “sirat”, when MoM heard of Asma’s strident criticism of him, he responded: “Who will rid me of Marwan’s daughter?!” She was murdered in her bed, as she slept with her infant children.

But she was only the beginning. Take note of a dozen more writers who were persecuted / executed by the Sahabah–all of whom are attested in Islamic records:

- Persian poet, Nadr ibn al-Harith ibn Kalada of Ta’if (decapitated for reciting Persian folktales)
- Jewish poet, Abu Afak of Banu Ubayda (who’s poem about MoM we still have)
- Jewish brothers, Sallam and Al-Rabi ibn Abu al-Huqayq of Khaybar (renown poets from the Banu Nadir)
- Huwayrith ibn Nafidh [alt. Nuqaydh] Wahb Qusayy
- Jewish poet, Ka’b al-Ashraf of Yathrib (also of the Banu Nadir) {8}
- Ka’b ibn Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulama
- Al-Harith ibn al-Talatil
- Abdullah ibn Zib’ari (who was spared when he repented)
- Abdullah ibn Khatal (from the Banu Taym clan of the Quraysh)
- Fartana bint al-Zibr’a and Qurayba (slave girls of Abdullah ibn Khatal)

These were the most notable cases. There were surely many others who met the same fate–due to material that was deemed sacrilegious. MoM’s ministry was characterized by extreme brutality–a record filled with executions (mostly beheadings) and torture. {9}

The above figures can be enumerated not because of cherry-picking by mendacious anti-Islamic muckrakers; they are from the EARLIEST Islamic sources (such as Al-Tabari and Ibn Ishaq) who were BOASTING about such occurrences. So to reject these accounts would be to repudiate MUSLIM sources, not to defend them.

This point is worth reiterating: Accounts of the above persecutions are not the result of anyone trying to dig up dirt on Mohammed. Such ignominious incidents are proudly proclaimed by Muslim historiographers. Unsurprisingly, there are few incidents recorded in NON-Islamic sources (as non-Muslims were not

exactly encouraged to document such cases); and surely Islamic sources were not eager to–or even able to–tout every poet that was disappeared by the authorities. {10}

So it bears repeating: These examples are touted in ISLAMIC sources. Hence, for Muslim apologists to dispute this incriminating record, they must bring into question the credence of their own scriptures.

The aforementioned executed writers were not anomalies; they were indicative of a larger trend. Islamic sources highlighted them not because such occurrences were embarrassing, but because they were EMBLEMATIC. This precedent is even attested in Islam's holy book. In Surah 111 of the Koran, Mohammed denounces the wife of a man he despised (Abu Lahab), Umm Jamil bint Harb ibn Umayya–contemptuously referring to her as "the carrier of firewood". Mohammed wished both the husband and wife damnation. Umm Jamil's crime? Supporting her husband when he opposed MoM's proselytization in Mecca.

Ironically, one of the most renown examples of poetry during Mohammed's lifetime was from a woman named Qutayla bint al-Nadr. She was most famous for having written an elegy to her late brother, Nadr ibn al-Harith–a pagan who had spoken out against Mohammed, and had been executed on Mohammed's orders (ref. the records of Al-Jahiz of Basra). Her fate has been lost to history.

Perhaps one of the preeminent Arabian poets of the late 7th century was Hammam ibn Ghalib of the "Darim" clan of the Banu Tamim (famously known as "Al-Farazdaq"). He was reprimanded for impertinent verse on several occasions; and at one point was banished by caliph Marwan. He eventually agreed to be employed as a propagandist for the Umayyad caliph, Al-Walid–thus sparing his career, and possibly his life.

Al-Farazdaq's contemporary–and rival–poet, Jarir ibn Atiyah (also of the Bani Tamim) was initially not well-received by the Umayyad caliphs either (by Abd al-Malik or by Al-Walid). Later, he too decided to toe the line; and would consequently become THE ONLY poet known to have ever been received by caliph Umar II.

Meanwhile, Persian writer, Abdullah ibn al-Muqaffa was executed for heresy (in the 750's) by Abbasid caliph, Al-Mansur. Al-Muqaffa was a Muslim, yet some of the views expressed in his verse seemed to too closely resemble Manichaean thought. So he was killed.

And so it went: Pursuant to Mohammed's ministry, poetry was stringently regulated throughout Arabia–with dire consequences for those who produced un-approved material. For example, while the work of the popular poet Al-Alahijah was permitted because it was primarily limited to homilies and elegies, others were not so lucky. The great Yemeni poet, Waddah al-Yaman (late 7th / early 8th century) was executed for composing un-approved verse. The renown poet Salih ibn Abd al-Quddus was also killed for heretical statements (8th century). As we shall see forthwith, this trend continued through the Middle Ages.

In a nutshell, permissible material was limited to sanctioned elegiac and panegyric verse. Anything that did not fit the guidelines of piety (critiques, parodies, or encomia to the wrong kind of figures) was forbidden.

The well-known pagan poet K'ab ibn Malik is worth noting. He presumably knew he had a choice if he wanted to continue in his vocation: play along or die. Toeing the line was a more attractive career prospect than being executed; so he opted to comply with the new Mohammedan strictures. Thereafter, he devoted his prodigious skills exclusively to the composition of elegies (i.e. one of the only acceptable topics under

an Islamic theocracy). Surely, he was aware that he was in danger of meeting the same fate as the (non-compliant) writers listed above. Unsurprisingly, K'ab ibn Malik is retroactively deemed an exemplar of fealty to the Mohammedan movement in the Hadith. Such is the nature of revisionism: "See! Mohammedans ADORED poetry!"

Another well-known Arabian poet of the era was a Christian from the Mesopotamian "Taghlib" tribe: Ghiyath ibn Ghawth (a.k.a. "Al-Akhtal"). It is unknown how he died (c. 710, during the reign of Umayyad caliph, Al-Walid). Being non-Muslim, he was certainly not celebrated by the caliphate; yet it seems that he was permitted to recite so long as he limited himself to elegies (and the occasional panegyric to an approved figure). It is safe to assume Al-Akhtal was eventually disappeared. For also in the early 8th century, another renown Bedouin poet, al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi of Kufa, was assassinated for reciting un-sanctioned poetry.

With so much material suppressed, it is no wonder that Arabs were so easily impressed by the "Recitations" (i.e. the Koran). For–outside of officially sanctioned material–denizens of Dar al-Islam were allowed to be exposed to virtually nothing else.

To recapitulate: The only poetry permitted was that which did not in any way challenge the Mohammedan movement. Ergo material was restricted to encomia, eulogies, benedictions, and MAYBE allusion to some anodyne personal affairs…so long as it did not trespass on the Sunnah or impugn those in power (that is: so long as it did not cause "fitna"). Anything that treaded on theological / political ground had to be in line with Mohammedan diktats lest it be deemed heretical; with dire repercussions for the author.

But what was going on elsewhere in the world during MoM's lifetime? As it turns out, poetry was well-attested. For example, there were the great Tamil poets, Thirugyana Sambandar (alt. "C[h]ampantar") and Appar Tirunavukkarasar. And it was during MoM's ministry that the great Sanskrit epic, "Bhatti-kavya" was composed by the famed Gujarati poet, Bhatti of Vallabhi.

Meanwhile, the Irish epic "Tain Bo Cuailnge" and the earliest pieces of "Ulster Cycle" were composed. During Mohammed's lifetime, there also emerged such writers as:

- Anglo-Saxon (Christian) poet, Cædmon of Northumbria
- Gaelic poet, Senchan Torpeist of Connacht
- Welsh poet, Taliesin
- Andalusian writer, Isadore of Seville
- Byzantine poet, Georgios of Pisidia
- Palestinian Jewish poet, El'azer ben Kalir (and his mentor, Yannai)
- Indian author, Banabhatta, who composed one of the earliest novels (a romance known as the "Kadambari")
- Indian author, Subandhu, who composed the romantic fairy-tale, the "Vasa-vadatta"
- Tibetan writers, Prajna-Varman and Jina-mitra
- Chinese (Tang) poet, Luo Bin-wang of Wu-zhou [Zhe-jiang]

One wonders how such writers may have fared under sharia law. Would the Salaf have welcomed their non-Mohammedan material? (See part I of "The History Of Salafism".)

So what about the centuries following the inception of Islam? As I showed in part II of "The History Of Female Empowerment", poetry–EVEN JUST AMONG WOMEN–was thriving for millennia before AND for the millennium following MoM's ministry. There, I track the trend exclusively in terms of female writers / intellectuals–a rough barometer for how things were generally (in terms of scholastic activity and

free speech).

What else was going on elsewhere in the world during the century following Mohammed's ministry? We might note that the renown Indian poet Bhavabhuti of Vidarbha (Maharashtra) composed the "Mahavira-charita" and "Uttara-Rama-charita". In Nara-era Japan, Otomo no Yakamochi compiled an anthology of didactic poetry known as the "Man'yoshu" [Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves], which included material dating back to Mohammed's lifetime. (His poems incorporated Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and Shinto teachings.)

By then, free speech was virtually non-existent in the Muslim world. Indeed, it was systematically suppressed, per Mohammed's example. Take, for instance, one of the most renown writers of the era: Arab poet, Abdullah ibn al-Mu'tazz, who lived in the 9th-century. His grandfather was assassinated by the Abbasid caliph. Then his father was assassinated, also by the Abbasid caliph. Then–in one of the more bizarre and ironic twists of fate in palace history–he HIMSELF was designated caliph…but then only lasted a single day before he too was assassinated (to make way for the preferred caliph).

Just after Mohammed's death, one of the greatest poets of the Far East emerged: Pallava (Indian) writer, Dandin of Kanchi-puram. Meanwhile, the Cumbric / Brythonic poet, [a]Neirin broke new ground.

Starting in the **8th century**, the anthology of Vajrayana poetry, the "Charyapada", started to be compiled (using the Magadhi Prakrit).

Meanwhile, literature flourished in Japan. It was during the 7th and 8th centuries that the anthology of poetry known as the "Man-Yoshu" [Myrian Leaves] was compiled in the Chinese-based "man-yogana" script (ref. Otomo no Yakamochi). Soon thereafter were the "Rokkasen" (six poetry geniuses) of the early Heian period: Otomo Kuronushi, Ono no Komachi, Ariwara no Narihira, Kisen Hoshi, Sojo Henjo, and Funya no Yasuhide. "Waka" poetry thrived in the Nara and Heian periods–notably:

- The "Man'yo-shu" of the 8th century
- The "Kokin Waka-shu" in the 9th century
- The "Gosen Waka-shu" in the 10th century

It was also around this time that classics like the "Ko-jiki" and "Nihon Shoki" were composed. Kukai of Shikoku [a.k.a. "Kobo-Daishi"] wrote in the late 8th / early 9th century. The epic "Monogatari" literature flourished starting in the 9th century. The Tendai Buddhist writer, Gen-shin (a.k.a. "Eshin-Sozu") composed the epic "Ojo-yoshu" c. 985. And Murasaki Shikibu of Kyoto broke new ground as a female novelist when she composed the "Tale of Genji" c. 1000.

Tellingly, the great Persian (Barmakid) poet, Aban al-Lahiqi of Basra, who lived **in the late 8th / early 9th century**, was Manichaean. **In the early 9th century**, the great Persian-Arab poet, Abu Nuwas al-Hasan of the Banu Hakam began his career praising the famous (Buddhist) Bactrian dynasty: the Barmakids of Balkh. The caliph (Harun al-Rashid) exiled him for the gesture. Abu Nuwas al-Hasan was eventually imprisoned by the next caliph (Muhammad ibn Harun al-Amin) for writing sacrilegious material. Later, he would be imprisoned AGAIN…by the NEXT caliph (Abu Ja'far Abdullah al-Ma'mun). The famed poet died in prison.

Also from **the 9th century**, there was the Arabic book of songs, the "Kitab al-Aghani"–which included some material from the aforementioned court panegyrist, Al-Farazdaq. Much of this was mere propaganda–generally serving some sort of economic or political purpose (i.e. extolling the caliphate / sultanate)…which is simply to say: It was primarily comprised of material of which the powers-that-be

approved.

Meanwhile, the Irish (neo-Platonist) thinker, Johannes Scotus Eriugena composed his magnum opus, the "Periphyseon" (a.k.a. "On the Division of Nature"). In India, the Digambara (Jain) poet, Asaga wrote the "Vardhaman Charitra" [Life of Vardhamana] in both Sanskrit and Kannada. Soon thereafter, Raja-shekhara penned the "Kavya-mimamsa" and "Karpura-manjari".

In 10th-century, the greatest Persian poet (Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn Ahmad Daqiqi of Tus) was Zoroastrian. He was most renown for his composition of an epic history of Iran, which romanticized the Sassanian culture from the days of yore. Meanwhile, the Armenian author, Gregor of Narek composed the "Matean Voghbergut'yan".

Arguably the greatest Arab poet of the Middle Ages was Abu at-Tayyib Ahmad ibn al-Husayn al-Mutanabbi al-Kindi of Aleppo (b. Kufa) [a.k.a. "Al-Mutanabbi"], who wrote in the 10th century. What, pray tell, became of HIM? Lo and behold: He was assassinated. Why? His bold verses were deemed to be offensive to Mohammedan traditionalists.

In the Muslim world, such tragic episodes were not anomalies. There were numerous examples:

- Arab poet, Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi of Kufa was imprisoned–and eventually assassinated–for impertinent poetry (early 8th century)
- Persian writer, Bashar ibn Burd of Basra was executed for heresy (8th century)
- Arab writer, Abul Atahiyya of Kufa was imprisoned for offending the caliph (9th century)
- The most famous Persian (Sufi) poet of the era, Mansur al-Hallaj was executed for composing unapproved verse (late 9th / early 10th century)
- Famed Persian poet, Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn Ahmad Daqiqi of Tus, opted to remain Zoroastrian; and was eventually murdered for the decision (10th century)
- Arab writer, Abul Ala al-Ma'arri of Aleppo was killed for heretical material (11th century)

Such men were persecuted for exercising free speech–just as had been Abdallah ibn al-Mu'tazz, Salih ibn Abd al-Quddus, Waddah al-Yaman, et. al. Anyone today who is unaware of the assault on free speech during MoM's tenure–and the centuries thereafter–betrays a grave ignorance of the Islamic record. To suggest, as some do, that Abdallah ibn al-Mu'tazz is evidence that free speech was accepted–let alone celebrated–in the early Muslim world is a vulgar joke. Yet such declarations often circulate in some circles.

At the risk of flogging a steed that is already deceased: The only poets who were allowed in the Mohammedan domain were those who paid tribute in the approved manner. This could take the form of (A) those who composed eulogies for the departed and (B) those who paid tribute to the powers that be–specifically: to the presiding cynosure (caliph / sultan / mullah / emir). Examples of officially-approved panegyrists include the Arab poet, Al-Mutanabbi of Kufa (later executed for stepping out of line) and the Hamdanid poet Sayf al-Dawla of Aleppo–both of whom wrote in the 10th century under the Abbasid caliphate.

Other than (approved) elegies and panegyrics, some verse regarding the quotidian (the beauty of a sunset, an account of a permissible romance, the sweet aroma of a flower) were permitted…so long as it didn't ruffle any feathers (read: subvert the Sunnah). Anyone else was censured, persecuted, or killed.

The rare exceptions proved the rule. **In the 11th century**, Seljuk (Persian) Sultan, Malik Shah of Isfahan was a man of letters, and patron of the great poet, Omar Kayyam. Not coincidentally, he was renown for his policy of religious tolerance. Such deference was not attributable to more stringently hewing to the

Sunnah. He is notable for being so atypical. In other words: He was exceptional precisely because he was LITERALLY an exception. Also notable was the (Uyghur) Kara-khanid "Kutadgu Bilig", composed by Yusuf Khass Hajib of Balasagun…for the prince of Kashgar.

Certain works from Islam's so-called "Golden Age" stand out. Most notable was the great epic, the "Shahnameh" [Book of Shahs] by Persian poet, Abu al-Qasim Ferdowsi of Tus–composed c. 1000. The work gave an embellished historiography of Persian kings. It was Persian pride that allowed this lore to be disseminated, as it did not OVERTLY undermine sharia, nor did it trespass on the Sunnah. Ferdowsi was not at liberty to compose his epic however he saw fit, though. His material had to meet the approval of his employers: first the governor of Tus (on behalf of the Samanid ruler, Abu Mansur Mamari) and then the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud (who required him to alter the epic to suit Ghaznavid sensibilities). Accordingly, modifications were made to antecedent versions of the lore.

As it happened, Ferdowsi spent much of the end of his life in exile, having displeased the Islamic authorities. Local clerics did not allow him to be buried in an Islamic cemetery; which indicates that the grievance with his work was most likely religious. In openly harboring non-Islamic beliefs, he was eventually murdered under, one might say, vague circumstances. Much of his poetry was deemed too controversial, and so was eventually destroyed.

It is worth surveying the most notable Muslim writers of **Islam's "Golden Age"** and the centuries thereafter:

- Persian writer, Roozbeh Pur-i Dadoe of Shahr-i Gur [Arabized to "Abu-Muhammad Abd-ullah Ruzbeh ibn Daduya"; a.k.a. "Ibn al-Muqaffa"], who spent most of his life in Basra (8th century)
- Persian poets, Abu al-Abbas of Marv and Hanzala of Badghis (late 8th century)
- Persian poet, Abu Nuwas al-Hasan ibn Hani al-Hakami of Ahvaz (late 8th / early 9th century)
- Persian poets, Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur of Khorasan, Ibn Qutayba ad-Dinawari [al-Marwazi] of Kufa [a.k.a. "Ibn Qutaybah"], and Hanzala of Badghis (9th century)
- Persian poet, Abu Hafs of Sughd [Sogdia] (late 9th / early 10th century)
- Persian poet, Abu Abdullah Jafar ibn Mohammad of Rudak [a.k.a. "Rudaki"] (late 9th / early 10th century) {13}
- Persian (Sufi) poet, Abul Hasan Shahid ibn Hussain Jahudanaki of Balkh [a.k.a. "Shahid Balkhi"] (early 10th century)
- Tunisian (Fatimid) poet, Muhammad ibn Hani of Masila / Andalusia (10th century)
- Persian poets, Abul Qasim Hasan Unsuri of Balkh and Abu al-Qasim Firdawsi of Tus [a.k.a. "Ferdowsi"] (late 10th / early 11th century)
- Turkic poet, Yusuf Khass Hajib of Balasaghun; who wrote the (largely secular) "Kutadgu Bilig" (11th century)
- Andalusian (Almoravid) poet, Muhammad ibn Ammar of Algarve (11th century)
- Andalusian (Mu-wallad) poet, Abu Amir Ahmad ibn Gharsiya of Basque country [who penned Shu'ubiyya material] (11th century)
- Persian (Sufi) poet, Abu Ismail Abdullah al-Ansari of Herat (11th century)
- Persian writer, Abu Mansur Ali ibn Ahmad Asadi of Tus [Khorasan]; who wrote the epic "Garshasp-Nama" and composed philosophical dialogues called "Monazarat" (11th century)
- Persian polymath, Omar Khayyam of Nishapur / Khorasan; who studied in Samarkand; then pursued his vocation in Bukhara; and set the standard for "ruba'i poetry" with his magnum opus, the "Ruba'iyat" (late 11th / early 12th century)
- Persian (Sufi) poets, Hakim Abul-Majd Majdud ibn Adam Sana'i of Ghazna and Ahmad-e Jami of Torshiz / Khorasan (late 11th / early 12th century)
- Persian (Sufi) poet, Hakim Abul-Majd Majdud [ibn Adam Sanai] of Ghazna; who penned "al-

Hadiqat al-Haqiqa" ["The Walled Garden of Truth"] (early 12th century)
- Turkic (Sufi) poet, Khoja Akhmed Yassawi of Sayram (early 12th century)
- Persian writer, Nizami Aruzi of Samarkand [a.k.a. "Arudhi"]; known for his epic "Chahar Maqaleh" (12th century)
- Persian poet, Jamal al-Din Abu Muhammad Ilyas ibn Yusuf ibn Zakki of Ganja [a.k.a. "Nizami Ganjavi"]; who penned the "Panj Ganj" [rendered "Khamsa" in Arabic]; and was known for love-stories like those of Qais ibn Al-Mulawah (a.k.a. "Majnun") and Layla al-Aamiriya, as well as an account of the fabled romance between the shah Khosrow and the maiden Shirin (12th century)
- Persian (Sufi) poet, Abu Hamid ibn Abu Bakr Ibrahim of Nishapur [a.k.a. "Attar"; a.k.a. "Farid ud-Din"]; who wrote "ghazal" (lyrical poetry) and "Mantiq-ut-Tayr" ["The Conference of the Birds"] (late 12th / early 13th century) {14}
- Sindhi (Sufi) "qalandar", Syed Muhammad Usman of Marwand [a.k.a. "Lal Shabaz"] (late 12th / early 13th century)
- Persian poet, Abu-Muhammad Muslih al-Din ibn Abd-Allah of Shiraz [a.k.a. "Sa'di / Saadi Shirazi"]; who penned the "Bustan" and "Gulistan" (13th century)
- Persian writer, Sadid ud-Din Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Aufi of Bukhara; known for his "Jawami al-Hikayat wa Lawami al-Riwayat" [Collection of Stories and Illustrated Histories] (13th century)
- Persian (Sufi) "mevlana", Jalal al-Din Muhammad of Balkh [a.k.a. "Rumi"; primarily associated with Konya, in the Sultanate of Rum]; who composed the "Masnavi-i Ma'navi" (13th century) [Also of note was his son, Baha al-Din Muhammad-i Walad.]
- Turkic (Sufi) poet, Yunus Emre of Karaman, a major influence on Sufi literature (late 13th / early 14th century)
- Bengal poet, Shah Muhammad Sagir of Arakan; who composed an eloquent version of the ancient love story between Yusuf and Zulaikha (late 13th / early 14th century)
- Persian poet, Khwaja Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafez of Shiraz [a.k.a. "Hafez"]; who influenced romantic "ghazal" (lyric) poetry (a.k.a. "divan") in Persia for centuries (14th century) {15}
- Persian (Sufi) poet, Nur ad-Din Abd ar-Rahman of Jam / Khorasan [a.k.a. "Jami"]; author of the "Haft Awrang" [Seven Thrones] (15th century)

During this auspicious period, these were the most prominent writers in the Muslim world. (See Appendix 1 for other Muslim writers.) None of the figures listed here were permitted to compose subversive material. So far as Arabic went, the most notable work from the period was an Arab love story from the 13th-century: the "Hadith Bayad wa Riyad" [Story of Bayad and Riyad]…with unknown origins.

Of the 34 listed: 26 were Persian, 3 were Andalusian, 2 were Turkic, 2 were from the Far East, and 1 was Maghrebi. None were from the Levant, Mesopotamia, or Arabia. Funny how Classical Arabic–putatively god's native tongue–did not inspire an efflorescence of literature IN Classical Arabic. Even within Dar al-Islam, the vast majority of literature was composed in Pahlavi (Persian) during the "Golden Age", which explains why it became the literary language of the Ottoman Empire.

Let's turn, now to the Late Middle Ages.

During the Late Middle Ages, literature within the Muslim world was limited, but did exist. One of the most notable examples was the parable about "Hayy ibn Yaqdhan" [Alive, Son of Awake], written in **the 11th century** by the famed freethinker, Avicenna. That work would inspire Andalusian physician Ibn Tufayl to write a novel by the same name a century later. These works were decidedly SECULAR in nature, as they were celebrations of science over dogmatism. To make this explicit, the title of the latter work is sometimes translated in English as "The Improvement Of Human Reason As Exhibited By The Life Of Hayy ibn Yaqdhan". Needless to say, Avicenna (and his character, Hayy ibn Yaqdhan) as an ANOMALY. Such achievements had nothing whatsoever to do with religiosity.

As it turned out, the majority of the most valuable non-fiction material from the Orient was distinctly non-religious. For example, Bactrian writer, Nasir Khusraw of Khorasan penned the great (secular) travelogue, the "Safar-nama". The Turkic "Kutadgu Belig" [Book of Wisdom-leading-to-Fortune] was also composed in the 11th century.

By the 14th century, the Renaissance in Europe was in full swing, and the demise of intellectual activity in the Muslim world was impossible not to notice–a subject I explore in my essay: "Islam's Pyrite Age". In the 16th century, the Azeri / Oghuz poet, Muhammad ibn Suleyman of Karbala [a.k.a. "Fuzuli"]; the Bengal writer, Syed Shah Isra'il of Sylhet; and the Sumatran Sufi pantheist, Hamzah Fansuri produced some noteworthy material.

As far as poets in the Muslim world go, that just about covers it…until the 19th century (see the Appendix 2). As this survey shows, it was the (very notable) exceptions that proved the rule. Yet to hear Islamic apologists tell it, one would think there was an efflorescence of literary achievement in the medieval Ummah–achievements that surpassed what was going on in the rest of the world.

Quite the contrary: There was a noticeable STUNTING of literary achievement in Dar al-Islam. Unsurprisingly, the stifling of speech also occurred in the other theocratic region of the Middle Ages: (Roman Catholic) Europe. That the Roman Catholic Church was just as censorious as the rulers in Dar al-Islam does not detract from the present point. Indeed, in the annals of human history, the medieval Vatican likely gets the gold medal for most aggressive censorship. This was in spite of the construction of the Malatestiana Library (in Cesena), the Marciana Library (in Venice), and the Laurentian Library (in Florence) during the 15th century. {19}

That the Muslim world–in medieval times, and to the present day–gets the silver medal is nothing to celebrate. The bar here is abysmally low. So far as Dar al-Islam was concerned, fresh new ideas were not on the menu. Voicing them was a surefire way to get into hot water. That Islam's theocratic rulers were not quite as hostile to free speech as was the Vatican Curia is hardly something over which to gloat. The treatment of poetry within the Mohammedan dominion was excessive by ANY standard.

Let's review. When it came to the medieval Muslim world, the point can't be emphasized enough: So long as the material was not seen to subvert the Sunnah, it was permitted. The moment a writer stepped on the toes of Islam's standard-bearers, he was promptly eliminated. This draconian policy followed from the clear precedent set by MoM himself, and the Sahabah / Salaf.

We might contrast this to the handling of poetry in, say, the Judaic tradition. The Jewish Andalusian poet, Judah ha-Levi of Toledo / Grenada (late 11th / early 12th century) is a good example–as he composed secular and philosophical material. Rather than being persecuted for the gesture, he was revered for it. A dozen other examples of **Sephardic** (Jewish) writers from the era:

- Andalusian poet, Dunash ha-Levi ben Labrat of Fez (10th century)
- Andalusian writer, Judah ben David Hayyuj of Cordoba (10th century)
- Andalusian writer, Jonah "Ibn Janach" of Zaragoza (11th century)
- Andalusian writer, Shlomo ben Yehuda "Ibn Gabirol" of Malaga / Cordoba [Solomon ben Judah; a.k.a. "Avicebron"] (11th century), a Neo-Platonic moral philosopher.
- Andalusian writer, Shmuel "Ha-Nagid" of Cordoba [alt. Samuel ibn Naghrillah] (11th century) {20}
- Andalusian commentator, Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra of Tudela (early 12th century)
- Andalusian poet, Joseph ben Jacob ibn Tzaddik of Cordoba (12th century)
- Andalusian (secular) rationalist and satirist, Judah ben Solomon al-Harizi of Toledo (late 12th / early

13th century)
- Norman Storyteller, Berechiah ben Natronai Krespia ha-Nakdan composed a book of fables, “Mishle Shu’alim” c. 1200
- South European poet, David Ha-Kohen of Avignon (13th century)
- Italian poet, Immanuel ben Solomon ben Jekuthiel of Rome (late 13th / early 14th century)
- Andalusian writer, Joseph ben Shem-Tov of Castile (15th century)

We might also note the writings of the 12th-century (Sephardic) Andalusian thinker, Moses ben Maimon of Cordoba (a.k.a. “Maimonides), who was influenced by such luminaries as Mohammed al-Farabi of Khorasan, Ibn Sina of Bukhara (a.k.a. “Avicenna”), and his contemporary, Ibn Rushd of Cordoba (a.k.a. “Averroës”).

Judaism often–***though certainly not always***–welcomed literary activity outside of strictly religious material. In the early 16th century, Castilian writer, Isaac ben Judah Abrabanel of Lisbon was both a philosopher and physician. His magnum opus, “Dialoghi d’Amore” [its original Italian title] was a beautifully-written philosophical book on love–which, incidentally, promoted Renaissance ideals. Rather than being persecuted for sacrilege, he was celebrated for the brazen gesture.

There were, of course, limits to tolerance in Beth Israel, as attested by the excommunication of the great philosopher, Baruch-cum-Benedict Spinoza.

In the post-Mohammedan era, the juxtaposition between Dar al-Islam and the rest of the world is very revealing. Just as literary activity was being stifled in the Middle East, we find a different story in the Far East. The efflorescence of literature in Japan has already been mentioned. It should also be noted that the Tang period (618 to 907) turned out to be the Golden Age of Chinese literature. {18}

Presumably, the Abrahamic deity sat idly by as all this headway was made outside of Dar al-Islam. Such juxtaposition serves to further illustrate the LACK of liberal verse in the Muslim world.

During Islam’s “Golden Age”, other notable writers of the Far East included:

- Jain writers, Shiva-koti Acharya, Naga-varma, and Sri Ponna pioneered Kannada poetry (9th and 10th centuries)
- Tamil poet, Thirutakka-Thevar composed the “Civaka Cintama?i” (10th century)
- Chinese (Song) writers like Su Shi and Su Zhe of Sichuan [a.k.a. “Su Tung-po”], Sima of Guang [a.k.a. “Jun-sh”], Zeng Gong of Fu-zhou, Guan of Qin, Ou-yang Xiu of Sichuan, and Ting-jian of Huang broke new ground (11th century)
- Telugu writer, Nannaya Bhattaraka of Rajahmundry composed a new version of the Mahabharata (11th century)
- Tibetan writer, Mila Thopaga of Gungthang [a.k.a. “Jetsun Milarepa”] composed his famed poetry (late 11th / early 12th century)
- Chinese (Southern Song) writers, Lu You and Xin Qiji of Hang-zhou composed their famed poetry (early 12th century)
- Gujarati (Jain) scholar, Hema-chandra of Dhandhuka composed his famed poetry (early 12th century)
- Tamil writer, Kambar composed a new version of the Ramayana, the “Rama-vataram” (12th century)
- Kannada writer, Madhva Acharya of Karnataka ushered in the era of Hoysala literature (12 century)
- Hoysala writer, Raghavanka composed Kannada poetry. Andayya then composed his magnum opus: “Kabbigara Kava” [Defender of the Poets] (late 12th / early 13th century)

In Kashmir alone, there was an efflorescence of literary activity in the 11th century; even as Islam’s

"Golden Age" was on the wane:

- Abhinava-gupta composed the "Tantra-loka"
- Kshemendra composed the "Brihat-katha-manjari"
- Somadeva composed the "Katha-sarit-sagara"
- Bilhana composed the great epic, "Vikraman-kadeva-charita", as well as the classic love poem, the "Chaura-pancasika"
- Kshemendra produced an anthology of ethical poetry, the "Charu-charya"

These writers were all highly innovative in their philosophical disquisition; yet none were persecuted by their respective societies. Unlike the Muslim world, poets were not limited to elegies and panegyrics. Indeed, Eastern traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism usually allowed for dissident speech. {16}

It was in the 11th century that the "Van Mieu" [House of Literature] at Hanoi was established by the Ly Dynasty in Vietnam. And it was during the Middle Ages that the great Chinese works like "Hau Kiou Choaan" [The Fortunate Union] and "Chinese Courtship" were composed.

During the Dark Ages of Europe, it cannot be over-emphasized that the Roman Catholic Church was ALSO extremely oppressive. Medieval Christendom had an abysmal record when it came to the toleration of free-thought and free expression. The dearth of progress between the demise of (pre-Christianized) Rome and the Renaissance is glaring. This was primarily due to the dominion of the Vatican, which stifled intellectual activity in Europe for over a thousand years–from the execution of Hypatia of Alexandria in 415 to the persecution of Galileo in 1633. {17}

Nevertheless, during this period, there were a few writers who managed to produce estimable material. The great Skalds (Norse poets) of Scandinavia–beyond the reach of Roman Catholic dominion–composed their sagas beginning c. 800 (with Bragi Boddason's "Ragnarsdrapa"); culminating in the writings of Snorri Sturluson in the early 13th century. The Old English epic "Heliand" and the eloquent Frankish hagiography, "Vita Karoli Magni" [Life of Charles the Great] were both composed c. 830. The Germanic epic, "Hildebrandslied" [Lay of Hildebrand] was composed in the 830's. And the (Greek) epic poetry known as the "Acritic Songs" became popular in the Byzantine Empire beginning in the 9th century. Also of note:

- Ealhwine of Northumbria (a.k.a. "Alcuin of York") wrote **in the 8th century**.
- The great Frankish / Germanic scholar, [h]Rabanus Maurus Magnentius of Mainz wrote **in the late 8th / early 9th century**.
- Anglo-Saxon poet, Cynewulf of Mercia [alt. Northumbria] pioneered Anglian poetry **in the 9th century**.
- The (Old English) epic romance about Waldere and Hildegyth was composed **in the 9th century**.
- The skaldic (Norse) poet, Audunn "illskalda" composed material for the Yngling dynasty **in the 9th century**.
- The "Sequence of Saint Eulalia" was composed using Old French **in the 9th century**.
- The Anglo-Saxon anthology of (Old English) poetry, the "Exeter Book" was compiled **in the 10th century**.
- Skaldic (Norse) poetry was composed by Eyvindr Finnsson "skaldaspillir" and Einarr Helgason "skalaglamm" **in the 10th century**.
- The Anglo-Saxon epic, "Beowulf" was composed **c. 1000** (roughly around the same time as Ferdowsi's "Shahnameh", mentioned earlier).
- The skaldic (Norse) "Bandadrapa" was composed by Eyjolfr "dadaskald" **in the 11th century**.
- Byzantine (Christian devotional) writers, John Mauropous of Paphlagonia and Christopher of

Mytilene composed poetry using medieval Greek **in the 11th century**.

As Islam's "Golden Age" came to an end **during the 12th century**, the early Renaissance in Europe was underway. During this time:

- Georgian writer, Shota Rustaveli wrote his epic, "Vepkhi-Stqao-sani" [One With the Tiger's Skin].
- French writers like Peter Abelard, Benoit de Sainte-Maure, and Chrétien de Troyes started composing the epic poetry known as the "Chanson de Geste"–most notably: "La Chanson de Roland" and versions of the Arthurian legend.
- English writer, Geoffrey of Monmouth elaborated upon Arthurian legend.
- Celtic writers composed the "Mabinogion".
- Norman writer, Béroul composed his epic about the fabled Arthurian knight, Tristan.
- Byzantine writer, Constantine Manasses wrote a romance: "The Love of Aristander and Callithea".
- The Castilian epic, "El Cantar de mio Cid" was composed.
- Germanic writers, Hildegard of Bingen, Gottfried von Strassburg, and Wolfram von Eschenbach broke new ground in Saxony.
- Armenian writer, Nerses of Lambron / Cilicia earned renown.

In the 13th century, Jean Bodel did a new compilation of "Les Chansons de Geste" (French). Classics like the "Nibelungenlied" (German), the "Gesta Danorum" (Danish), and the "Life Of Alexander Nevsky" (Russian) were composed. Meanwhile, Austrian poet, Rudolf von Ems composed epics.

And farther to the east, the landmark work, "Amrut-anubhav" [Elixir of Experience] was composed by the famed Marathi poet, [d]Jnyaneshvar of Maharashtra.

In the 14th century, Geoffrey Chaucer composed his Canterbury Tales, Giovanni Boccaccio composed his "Decameron" [Book of Allegories], and Francesco Petrarch had composed his "Canzoniere" [Book of Songs]. This was the heyday of the Niram poets in southern India, who pioneered Malayalam literature.

In the 15th century, Bengal poet, Maladhar Basu composed his landmark "Sri Krishna Vijaya". Meanwhile, Cherusseri Namboothiri of Kunnar [Kerala] composed the greatest works of Malayalam literature. It was then that the great Armenian poet, Yovhannes T'lkuranc'i flourished. Around this time, the great (secular) Library of Corviniana was commissioned by the Hungarian King, Matthias Corvinus.

In the late 15th / early 16th century, Italian writers, Matteo Maria Boiardo ("Orlando Innamorato") and Ludovico Ariosto ("Orlando Rusioso") rendered their own version of the aforementioned (French) "Chansons de Roland"; thereby moving the literary tradition forward in Italy.

In the 16th century, Ming writer, Xu Zhong-lin of Nan-jing composed the classic Chinese epic, "Feng-shen Yan-yi" ["Investiture of the Gods"]. Meanwhile, the Italian writer, Ludovico Ariosto wrote the epic romance, "Orlando Furioso" c. 1516. The poem, a continuation of Matteo Maria Boiardo's Orlando Innamorato, describes the adventures of Charlemagne, Orlando, and the Franks as they battle against the Saracens

This brings us to the early Enlightenment. In part II of this essay, we will survey the modern era; and focus on the use of parable around the world.

Footnotes:

{1 Though its Vedic form predates Classical Antiquity, Sanskrit was eventually refined and formalized

during the 2nd century B.C. by such stalwarts as Patanjali, Pa?ini, and Katyayana. Its original script was Old Brahmi–itself a variation on the Phoenician alphabet (alt. Old Aramaic script). Vedic Sanskrit eventually yielded a panoply of Prakrits, which themselves ramified into an array of scripts.}

{2 Meanwhile, Pyrrho of Elis pioneered Skepticism in Ionia. And Euclid pioneering mathematics with is "Elements" in Egypt, while both Callimachus of Cyrene and Apollonius of Perga achieved renown as a great scholars at the Library of Alexandria. I explore the history of intellectual activity in my essay, "Islam's Pyrite Age".}

{3 Marcus Aurelius, the Emperor who embraced Stoicism, ruled two centuries prior to the Roman Catholic magisterium overtaking the Roman imperium. It is no coincidence that the Constantinian Emperor best known for his philosophical writings, Julian, was the one who dissented against Nicene Christianity.}

{4 Later, the Persian scholar, Rozbih pur-i Dadoe of Fars would adapt it as the "Kalileh o Demneh" ["Kalilag and Damnag"] c.750. That would be followed by Rudaki's version, "Anvar-i Suhayli" in the 12th century.}

{5 MoM is said to have disdainfully referred to this renown poet as "the leader of the poets into hellfire". What prompted this contempt could have been any of a number of things. Imru al-Qays was, of course, a pagan; his material tended to be bawdy; and he was very eloquent–all three are strikes against him. His name means "man of the deity, Qays".}

{6 Al-A'sha was likely a Christian.}

{7 Even further back, the region would have made use of scripts that combined Semitic and Greek influences–notably Dadanitic. The first major work of CA grammar was the "Kitab" by Abu Bishr Amr ibn Uthman ibn Qanbar of Basra (a.k.a. "Sibawayh") from the late 8th century. The first dictionary (laying out the newly-established CA lexicon) was the "Kitab al-Ayn" by Ibadi linguist, Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi of the Azd, who was also in Basra during the late 8th century. For more on this topic, see my essay on "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text".}

{8 Ka'b al-Ashraf was not killed just for subversive speechifying, but for alleged treason (aiding and abetting the Quraysh, so the story goes). Suffice to say: Persecution of poets–based on such allegations–was standard under the new Mohammedan regime.}

{9 Suffice to say, magnanimity was not MoM's strong suit. For the self-proclaimed "Seal of the Prophets", forbearance was anathema. Even the most celebrated example of MoM's alleged magnanimity, his seizure of Mecca, is based on farce–a matter I explore in "Mohammed's Seizure Of Mecca".}

{10 After all, history is written by the victors. Dissidents had few advocates to record their pariah status. Note that subversion came in forms other than just writing. ANY expression that was seen as subversive was dealt with harshly.}

{11 It is interesting to note that Tarafa's half-sister (Al-Khirniq bint Badr) was a well-known female poet–an occurrence that would become unheard of once Mohammedism overtook the Middle East. Predictably, ALL of these poets were declared "jahiliyyah" (blasphemous; literally translated as "ignorant") by Mohammedan impresarios; and thereafter summarily dismissed.}

{12 Today, there are many who are well aware of this ignominious record, yet choose not to acknowledge it. Ironically, pretending to not know about what is clearly documented in Muslims' own exalted accounts

is an affront to those who purport to hold those accounts in such high esteem. To pull this off, one is forced to exalt such material while simultaneously disregarding it.}

{13 Known as “Rudaki”, the great poet served as a court panegyrist for the Samanid ruler, Nasr II of Bukhara, but was banished when his writing fell out of favor, dying in poverty as an outcast for his insubordination. This was yet another example of how irreverence (read: free speech) was not tolerated.}

{14 His verse is characterized by mysticism and allegory; not by doctrinal obsession. He is also well-known for his “divan”, as well as the “Ilahi-Nama” and “Mukhtar-Nama”.}

{15 Islamic scholar, Shahab Ahmed, described Hafez’s “divan” as “the most widely-copied, widely-circulated, widely-read, widely-memorized, widely-recited, widely-invoked, and widely-proverbialized book of poetry in Islamic history.” It should be noted that Hafez was not halal. Indeed, he romanticized wine-drinking and had an overtly libertine attitude toward life. His verse was suffused with sensuality and conviviality rather than with piety. Tellingly, his patron was a physician (employed in the Muzaffarid court in Shiraz) rather than a cleric.}

{16 There were, of course, exceptions to the rule. For example, the work of conservative Song writer, Zhu Xi established orthodoxy in the 12th century. We can find episodes of censure ANYWHERE if we look for it. The tyrannical Chinese ruler, Shi Huang (a.k.a. King Zheng of Qin) persecuted dissidents in the 3rd century B.C. He even perpetrated the infamous “burning of the books”. The aforementioned Ji Kang was executed after continually rebuffing–and thus publicly embarrassing–military ruler, Sima Zhao. Such exceptions were notable precisely because they were so exceptional. For a list of great thinkers of the Far East during Islam’s “Golden Age”, see my essay: “Islam’s Pyrite Age”.}

{17 We could go on and on. The execution of Boëthius in 524 would set an odious precedent that would continue on through the persecution of Peter Abelard in 1140-42, the Condemnations of 1277, the excommunication of William of Ockham in 1328, the execution of Jan Hus in 1415, Tomas de Torquemada’s reign of terror in the 1480’s and 90’s, the exile of Tycho Brahe from Denmark in 1597, and the burning of Giordano Bruno in 1600.}

{18 In addition to Luo Bin-wang (the contemporary of MoM), here are fifteen of the most notable Tang writers:

- Lu Zhaolin of Fan-yang (7th century)
- Wang Bo of Jiang-xi (7th century)
- Yang Jiong of Shaan-xi (7th century)
- Xuan-zang of Luo-yang / Henan (7th century)
- Meng Haoran of Xiang-yang (late 7th / early 8th century)
- Xu Xuan-ping of Hui-zhou (late 7th / early 8th century)
- Du Fu of Henan (8th century)
- Li Bai of Sui-ye [a.k.a. “Li Po”] (8th century)
- Wang Wei of Chang’an (early 8th century)
- Han Yu of Henan (late 8th / early 9th century)
- Bai Juyi of Tai-yuan [a.k.a. “Po Chu-i”] (late 8th / early 9th century)
- Li Shang-yin of Henan (9th century)
- Du Mu of Henan (9th century)
- Courtesan, Yu Xuan-ji (9th century)
- Li He [Chang-ji] (9th century)

All these writers were producing material even as the “Recitations” was still be compiled–a topic discussed in my essay: “Genesis Of A Holy Book”.}

{19 The library was commissioned by the Medici family. Of course, that was only a generation after followers of Girolamo Savonarola burned thousands of heretical books at the infamous “Bonfire of the Vanities”.}

{20 He composed “Ben Tehillim” [Son of Psalms], “Ben Koheleth” [Son of Ecclesiastes], and “Ben Mishlei” [Son of Proverbs].}

*** * ***

APPENDIX 1: Other Medieval Writers In Dar al-Islam

There are a few middling Muslim writers worth noting during Islam’s “Golden Age”–most of whom were Persian. Here are sixteen who lived between 900 and 1500:

- Persian poet, Ayyuqi of Ghazna, who penned the love-story of Varqa and Golshah (10th century)
- Sufi mystic, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Jabbar ibn al-Hasan of Nippur [a.k.a. “Al-Niffari”], who composed an anthology of devotional verse, the “Kitab al-Mawaqif” [Book of Standings] (10th century) *
- Persian poet, Badi al-Zaman of Hamadan, who invented the form of lyrical folktales known as “Maqamat”. The form would later be developed by Al-Hariri of Basra in the following century (10th century)
- Ghaznavid poet, Abul Qasim Hasan Unsuri of Balkh (late 10th / early 11th century)
- Persian (Sufi) poet, Abu-Sa’id Abul-Khayr of Balkh / Khorasan (late 10th / early 11th century)
- Persian poet, Abu Najm Ahmad [ibn Ahmad ibn Qaus] Manuchehri of Damghan (11th century)
- Persian poets, Anvari of Khorasan and Khaqani of Shirvan; as well as the (Sufi mystic) Attar of Nishapur (12th century)
- Syrian writer, “Majd al-Din” Usama [ibn Murshid ibn Ali] ibn Munqidh [al-Kinani al-Kalbi] of Shaizar dedicated his memoir, the “Kitab al-Itibar” [Book of Learning By Example] to Saladin (12th century)
- Persian poet, Bahram-e Pazhdo [as well as his son, Zartosht] (13th century)
- Andalusian (Sufi) poet, Ibn Arabi of Murcia (13th century)
- Berber (Malzuza / Zenata) poet, Abu Faris Abdl-Aziz ibn Abd ar-Rahman al-Malzuzi of Meknes (13th century)
- Andalusian / Maghrebi poet, Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Musa ibn Said (13th century)
- Persian (Sufi) poet, Khwaja of Kerman [a.k.a. “Khwaju”] (14th-century) **
- Sumatran (Sufi) poet, Mahzah Fansuri of Aceh, who’s panentheistic / mystical poetry was banned by the Sultan (15th century)

Their oeuvre was primarily comprised of romances and mysticism. Such material was permitted by the authorities simply because it did not threaten to disrupt the established Islamic order. ***

It should be noted that censorship has not been unique to Islam. Indeed, the Roman Catholic Church has been the primary culprit for the last two millennia (ref. Catherine Nixey’s “The Darkening Age”). Until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960’s, the Church officially banned books by Descartes, Spinoza, Copernicus, Galileo, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Voltaire, Darwin, and Marx via the “Librorum

Prohibitorum". In other words: the Vatican forbade all the most important works of the Enlightenment. The Church even banned literature–such as Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, and Alexandre Dumas. Even when it finally rescinded the bans, the Vatican stated that the bans were still morally binding.

Modern Judaic theocracy is no better. The Judeo-fascist regime in the modern nation-State of Israel has draconian censorship laws–criminalizing such things as the (eminently democratic) Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, which is endorsed by anyone concerned with human rights. Section 173 of the government's legal code makes it a crime to publish anything "that is liable to crudely offend the religious faith or sentiment of others." (!) The term "Nakba" (for the ethnic cleansing that occurred pursuant to the nation-State's founding) has been banned in all textbooks. This odious modus operandi is not limited to Abrahamic theocracy, though; it is typical of ANY illiberal regime–as the stringent censorship in Soviet Russia attested; and as it continues to the present day in China and North Korea. It is no coincidence, then, that the most brainwashed polities in the world today can be found in Israel, China, and North Korea.

{* Al-Niffari was a Sufi mystic about whom almost nothing is known. Note that his "Kitab al-Mawaqif", a compilation of visions, should not be confused with the "Mawaqif fi Ilm al-Kalam" [Stances on the Knowledge of Theology] by Adud al-Din al-Iji of Shiraz–a book of Ash'ari commentary from the 14th century.}

{** He is perhaps most famous for his love story about Persian prince, Homay and Chinese princess, Homayun.}

{*** Note that these writers did not generally write in Islam's liturgical language, CA. Indeed, none were Arab[ian]. (!) More to the point, none had institutionalized dogmatism–of ANY kind–to thank for their literary achievements. The closest we might come to a writer steeped in dogmatism was the 10th-century Sufi writer, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Jabbar ibn al-Hasan of Niffar.}

APPENDIX 2: A Contrast With Modern Arabic Literature

There are two purposes here. First, to debunk the supposition that the Islamic world was a boon to literature. Second, to defuse the fetishization of Koranic verse (as an unsurpassed literary triumph).

The contempt for scholarship (free thought) and literature (free speech) dates back to the advent of Christianity–whereby anything deemed heretical was decried. And the disdain for "poets" dates all the way back to Plato's "Republic", in which the Athenian philosopher expressed concern about–and even contempt for–"poets" qua SOPHISTS (rather than with those who were simply excelling in the literary arts).

As we've seen, pursuant to the Islamic take-over of Arabia, poets–male or female–became a persecuted lot. This was a tragic development, as poetry was a significant part of Arabian / Bedouin culture up until the Mohammedan movement established dominion the region.

Within Dar al-Islam, writers whose work surpasses that of the Koran is nothing new. It has been occurring since the first appearances of the holy book:

- **In the 8th century**, it was the Persian writer, Bashar ibn Burd of Basra (executed for heresy, by the caliph).
- **In the 9th century**, it was Abul Atahiyya of Kufa (imprisoned for offending the caliph).
- **In the 10th century**, it was Al-Mutanabbi of Aleppo / Kufa (assassinated for offending the authorities).

- **In the 11th century**, it was Abul Ala al-Ma'arri of Aleppo.

And so on. They were all likely correct in their modest claim of besting the Koran's inimitability ["i'jaz'], as the bar they had to clear was quite low.

The zany trope that Koranic verse exhibits an unsurpassed–nay, unsurpassable–eloquence is immediately shown to be farcical upon simply reading / hearing a few lines of the "Recitations". We soon find that the only thing miraculous about the Koran is that anyone thinks that there is anything miraculous about it.

In the midst of their feverish apologetics, what many Koran fetishists do is construe grandiloquence as eloquence; audacious rhetorical flourishes as profundity; provocativeness as erudition; puissance as credence. If one is sufficiently infatuated with the IDEA that a text is miraculous, one will be apt to see even the crudest phraseology as exquisite. True Believers are routinely mesmerized by is mundane to the rest of us. Such is the nature of fetishization.

For such delusive thinking, consider the 8th-century Persian writer, Roozbeh Pur-i Dadoe, who translated Borzuya's Pahlavi version of the "Pancha-tantra" into Syriac…which was then translated into medieval Arabic. * This final rendition of the work (entitled "Kalila[h] and Dimna[h]") is considered by many to be the greatest prose in Arabic from the Middle Ages.

How are we to approach works that were originally composed in ARABIC when evaluating them IN ENGLISH? When it comes to exploring existential themes in a serious way, we might look at one of the greatest literary achievements of the modern era: Adonis' ***"Aghani Mihyar al-Damashqi"*** [Songs of Mihyar of Damascus]. Does the eloquence and profundity of this work–composed in MODERN Arabic–come through after it has been translated into English. Of course. Yet are we to suppose that a work composed in Classical Arabic is so deficient that it cannot be conveyed well in an alternate language?

We might also note the amazing works of literature enumerated in part II of this essay. Most have been translated into myriad other languages–with the virtue of the prose always shining through. Certainly, Classical Arabic is not exempt from this phenomenon.

During the 19th century, there arose such famed poets as the Mughal writer, Mirza Asad-ullah "Beg / Khan" (a.k.a. "Ghalib") and Kashmiri writer, Muhammad Iqbal of Punjab (considered the father of Pakistan). These men opted to primarily write in Farsi and the variant of Hindi now known as "Urdu" (respectively). This is telling.

In the modern day, there has been a plethora of great Arabic writers–all of whom have clearly bested the mediocre caliber of Koranic verse. Notable was the late Arabian writer, Abdul Rahman Munif (d. 2004), who's books were banned–and his Saudi citizenship revoked–by the House of Saud. **In Egypt alone** there have been many brilliant writers of Fus[h]a (formalized modern Arabic, a.k.a. "Fusha"). A dozen of the most notable:

- Taha Hussein (d. 1973)
- Tawfiq al-Hakim (d. 1987)
- Yusuf Idris (d. 1991)
- Yahya Haqqi (d. 1992)
- Zaki Naguib Mahmoud (d. 1993)
- Naguib Mahfouz (d. 2006)
- Khairy Shalaby (d. 2011)
- Mohamed El-Bisatie (d. 2012)

- Ibrahim Aslan (d. 2012)
- Bahaa Taher
- Son'allah Ibrahim
- Hamdi Abu Golayyel

Other examples of contemporary Arabic literati include:

- **Iraqi writers:** Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi (d. 1936), Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (d. 1964), Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati (d. 1999), and Nazik al-Mala'ika (d. 2007)
- **Lebanese writers:** Gibran Khalil Gibran (d. 1931), Hanan al-Shaykh, Elias Khoury, and Wadih Saadeh
- **Syrian writers:** Nizar Tawfiq Qabbani (d. 1998), Halim Barakat, Ali Ahmad Said Esber (the aforementioned "Adonis", who has lived in exile since 1956), and Haidar Haidar (who's novel "Walimah li A'ashab al-Bahr" was banned in most Arab countries)
- **Palestinian writers:** Ghassan Kanafani (d. 1972) and Mahmoud Darwish (d. 2008)
- **Moroccan writers:** Mohamed Choukri (d. 2003), Bensalem Himmich, and Muhammad Baradah
- **Tunisian writers:** Ali al-Du'aji (d. 1949), Habib Selmi, and Mustapha Tlili (d. 2017)

The list goes on and on. There's the **Jordanian** poet, Mustafa Wahbi al-Tall (d. 1949). There's the **Omani** writer, Jokha al-Harthi. ** There's the **Turkish** writer, Orhan Pamuk. There's the **Kurdish** writer, Yasar Kemal (d. 2015). There's the **Sudanese** writer, Tayeb Salih (d. 2009). Such men are exceptional; and the exceptions have proven the rule. That these literary talents have excelled in Arabic exposition belies the ineluctability of Koranic verse.

Note that most Algerian writers composed their works in French–as with, say, Kateb Yacine, Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Feraoun, Malek Haddad, Mouloud Mammeri, Malek Bennabi, and (non-Muslim) Albert Camus. *** Why? French offered far more opportunity for eloquence than did Arabic; and their target-audience (those who were interested in modern literature) was–not coincidentally–primarily French-speaking.

Translating the Koran AND the compositions of such authors into English imposes the same alleged handicap–a parity that enables us to make a fair comparison. Invariably, whether in Arabic or English, one will find that Koranic verse doesn't even come close to measuring up to the best the Arab world has to offer.

The point here is simple: Anyone who insists that good writing in Classical Arabic cannot be translated into English is on the losing side of the argument. The mere suggestion of the Koran's inimitability is not a defense of the Koran; rather, it is an insult to all great Arabic writers; as well as a sign of one's own literary deficiencies. To those who indiscriminately play the "Lost In Translation" card, the most prudent reply is simply: "Don't blame the translation. Blame the source material. Translation works perfectly fine, thank you very much."

The juxtaposition between the great modern writers of Fus[h]a and Koranic verse (which was originally composed in Syriac, then rendered in CA) is stark; and we do the former a grave disservice by insisting their work can't hold a candle to Islam's holy book…in a misguided attempt to maintain the illusion of the Koran's unsurpassed eloquence.

Those well-versed in Arabic–Classical or modern–might even go the other way, taking the verse of, say, Keats or Emerson and translating it from English into CA…then making the comparison. Result: The puerility–and often, inanity–of Koranic verse becomes all-the-more evident.

We can survey the extensive offering of Arabic literature today, and see whether or not THOSE works translate well into English. As it turns out, they do. As the above list of modern writers using the Arabic language attests, we find that good writing in Fus[h]a shines through when read in English.

How about "One Thousand And One Nights" (a.k.a. "Arabian Nights")…an anthology that includes well-known tales like "Ali Baba And The Forty Thieves", "Aladdin's Magical Lamp", and "The Seven Voyages Of Sinbad The Sailor"? Though some of these tales derived from other sources, all were eventually composed in Arabic. Comparing the Koran to THESE classic works–in Arabic–yields a verdict that is almost certainly embarrassing to the former. What of the material found in the so-called "Maqamat" (anthology of medieval Arabic poetry)? It is clearly superior to Koranic verse; yet their compilers did not claim to be the mouthpiece for the Creator of the Universe. So what gives?

We can even go a step further, and contend that it is an insult to ALL great authors with literary works in Arabic to suggest that the contents of the Koran bests than their writing. For the fact of the matter is that the Koran is very shoddy writing.

So what was the impact Islam had on the literary scene? As we've seen, by the the time the Enlightenment was gathering steam, Occidental literature was flourishing. Meanwhile, in the Muslim world, the literary scene was languishing. Indeed, by then, Dar al-Islam had been intellectually sclerotic for many centuries. (For more on this, see part I of my essay on "The History Of Salafism".)

As I hope to have shown, free speech was not something that flourished within the Ummah. That liberal voices were also stifled in most of Christendom under the draconian laws of the (intellectually bankrupt) Roman Catholic Church does not exonerate Dar al-Islam from this dismal record. We are left, then, with a stifling precedent that sadly persists to the present day in many precincts of the Muslim world–just as MoM would have wanted it.

{* Persian author, Roozbeh Pur-i Dadoe hailed from Shahr-i Gor in Fars, though he spent most of his career in Basra. His name was retroactively Arabized to "Abu-Muhammad Abd-ullah Ruzbeh ibn Daduya" (a.k.a. "Ibn al-Muqaffa") in an effort to make it seem as though his rendition of the tale was the first major work in Classical Arabic. He died shortly before c. 760, long before Arabic had become a literary language.}

{** Ref. "Ladies Of The Moon" [alt. "Celestial Bodies"]. Other contemporary Muslimah writers are enumerated in part II of my essay, "The History Of Female Empowerment".}

{*** I base my assessment here on the widespread esteem that the works of these men have received (from literati who are fluent in both Arabic and English). I have never actually read Shakespeare's King Lear either, but I know that the play is widely recognized to be a masterpiece (even after being translated into other languages); and so would not hesitate to reference it in order to make a similar point.}

APPENDIX 3: Hindu / Jain Lore

Folklore, by its very nature, undergoes metamorphoses over time, as circumstances–and sensibilities–change. An illustration of this is the Persian "Arda Wiraz Namag" [Book of Arda Viraf], tale of the dream-journey of a devout Zoroastrian–probably the legendary "Wishtasp" [alt. "Vishtaspa"]–to the next world. The work was first composed during the Sassanian era, but did not assume its final form until the 9th, 10th, or even 11th century–after a long series of recensions and emendations.

Here's the twist: In the original (Zoroastrian) literature, "Vishtaspa" is the quintessence of righteousness. Yet after Persia became Islamic, his portrayal was given drastic a make-over. In the so-called "Sistan" heroic cycle of the Middle Ages, he was rendered "Goshtasp", the villain of the fabled Kayanian Dynasty–an execrable character who betrayed his native Iran by allying himself with the dreaded Romans, and even imprisoning his own son: the Iranian hero "Esfandiar".

Hindu lore gets the gold medal for continuous production of new material over the course of millennia–starting with the earliest Vedic literature. The material of Vyas[a]'s "Mahabharata" (4th century B.C.) dates back to the period of the quasi-mythical Kuruk-shetra War: 12th thru 8th century B.C. The collection of fables in Vishnu-sharma's "Pancha-tantra" (3rd century B.C.) underwent a long metamorphosis in the ensuing centuries. And Valmiki's "Rama-yan[a]" (5th century B.C.) was made into a plethora of versions throughout the Far East–as I enumerate in my essay on "Mythemes".

Indian legends stem from a myriad of landmark works, beginning with the "Vetala Pancha-vimshati" collection of tales (i.e. the "Vetala tales"; a.k.a. the "Baital Pachisi") from Late Antiquity. The most notable include:

- The "Manav[a] Dharma-shastra" [a.k.a. the "Manu-Smriti"; the story of Manu delivering the laws] (2nd century)
- Vimalasuri's "Pauma-charya" (2nd century)
- The "Divya-vadan[a]" (2nd century)
- Ilango Adigal's "Cilappati-karam" [Tale Of An Anklet] (2nd century)
- Sithalai Sathanar's "Mani-mekalai" (2nd century)
- The "Markan-deya" Purana (3rd century) *
- The "Matsya" Purana (3rd century)
- The "Vayu" Purana (4th century)
- The "Kuntalakesi" (4th century)
- Kalidasa's "Raghu-vamsha" (5th century)
- The "Vishnu" Puranas (5th century) *
- Subandhu's "Vasa-vadatta" (5th century)
- Vyasa's "Skanda" Purana (6th century) *
- Gunadhya's [now lost] "Brihat-katha" (6th century) **
- Bharavi's "Kirata-Arjuna" ["Of Arjuna and Kirata"] (6th century) ***

That was all before the fabled ministry of Mohammed of Mecca. There were several major works written around Mohammed's lifetime:

- Banabhata's "Kadambari"
- Yativrsabha's "Tilo[k]ya Panatti"
- Dandin's "Dash[a]-Kumara-charit[r]a"
- Bharavi's "Mahakavya"
- The Tamil stories in the "Tevaram" section of the "Thirumurai"
- The "Shishupal[a] Vadha" by Magha of Sri-Mal[a] Nagar [Gurjara-desa] (a revamping of the Mahabharata)

After Mohammed's death, the production of Hindu lore continued apace:

- Bhavabhuti's tales of Rama in the "Maha-vira-charit[r]a" and "Uttara-Rama-charit[r]a" (8th century)
- "Mahakavi" Swyambhudev's "Ritthanemichariu" and "Pauma-Chariu" (8th century)

- Jinasena's "Hari-vamsha" Puran[a] (8th century)
- Kanha and Abahatta's "Charyapada" (8th or 9th century)
- Silanka's "Cauppana maha-puri-sacariya" (9th century)
- The "Kalika-Puran[a]" (late 9th / early 10th century)
- Gunabhadra's "Trishasti-laksana" maha-Puran[a] [a.k.a. the "Adi-puran[a]"] (10th century)
- "Mahakavi" Pushpadant's "Naykumar-Chariu" and "Jasahar-Chariu" (10th century)
- Ranna's "Ajit[h]a-Puran[a]" (10th century)
- T[h]iruthakka T[h]evar's "Jeevaka Jinta-mani" (10th century)
- The [Jain] "Neelakesi" (10th century)
- Ksemendra's "Brhatka-thamanjari" (11th century)
- Somadeva's "Katha-sharit-sagara" (11th century) ****
- Hema-chandra's "Trishas[h]t[h]i-S[h]alaka Purus[h]a-charit[r]a" (11th or 12th century)

Meanwhile, the animal fables found in the Panchatantra (by Vishnu Sharma of Odisha; 3rd century B.C.) eventually led to Narayan Pandit's "Hitopadesha" over a millennium later (8th or 9th century A.D.)…as well as the "Kalila[h] and Dimna[h]" in the Middle East. Being animal fables, everyone recognized that these were fictional tales; but the tendency for hallowed stories to be unwittingly altered over time is nevertheless operative–irrespective of pretenses about presenting ACTUAL "history".

Hindu folktales–as sacred histories–continued to develop through the Middle Ages–as exemplified by Goswami Tulsidas' "Ram[a]-charitmanas[a]" and the great Telugu epic, "Amuktamalyada", commissioned by King Krishna-deva-raya of Vijayanagara (both during the 16th century). Hindu lore even indulged in prophecy–as with the "Bhavishya" Purana.

In sum: All folklore undergoes a metamorphosis over time. The tales found in ANY of the world's scriptures underwent the same sort of process that we see here with the tales in Hindu texts. The definitive form of a cherished tale is rarely its original form.

{* The earliest "Puran[a]" was from the 3rd century. The collection of fables continued to be developed through the 10th century. This long metamorphosis is demonstrated by such collections as the "Bhagavata", "Shiv[a]", "Brahmanda", "Vamana", "Kurma", and "Linga" Puranas. The origins of each it is difficult to date.}

{** This collection of Indian legends continued to be developed–especially in the 11th century. The three most notable: Somadev[a] in his "Katha-saritsagar[a]", Ksemendra in his "Brihat-katha-manjari", and Buddha-svamin in his "Brihat-katha-Shloka-Samgraha".}

{*** Also from the 6th century was Varahamihira's "Surya Siddhanta"–a formal text of Hindu cosmology. The earliest texts of Hindu cosmology was Sphujidhvaja's "Yava-najataka" ("Sayings of the Greeks"; 2nd century B.C.) That was followed by the "Vasishtha Siddhanta" (4th century), the "Romaka Siddhanta" (5th century), Gudapada's "Mandukya Karika" (6th century), and Adi Shankara's "Viveka-chudamani" (7th century). Funny how it never occurred to the Abrahamic deity to inform the peoples of the Far East of the "true" explanations of the universe. We're expected to believe he watched half the world get everything wrong for centuries upon centuries before he saw fit–at long last–to clarify things. And, further, we are entreated to suppose that he eventually opted to do so in the 7th century, by delivering a memo to an illiterate Bedouin merchant in the Hijaz.}

{**** The "Ocean of Streams of Stories" was based on the "Vetala Pancha-vimshati" collection of tales (i.e. the "Vetala tales"; a.k.a. the "Baital Pachisi"). It would, in turn, serve as the basis for the later "Sin[g]ha-san[a] Battisi" (alt. "Vikram[a]-ditya Simha-san[a] Dvatrim-shika"; "Sin[g]ha-san[a] Dvatrim-

shati”; “Vikram[a] Charita”). These were tales about the fabled emperor, Vikram[a]-ditya of Ozene [Ujjain; alt. Patali-putra], who is rendered king Shali-vahana of Pratish-thana in Jane legend.}