

JAVID-NAMA

Muhammad Iqbal

Translated by
Arthur J. Arberry

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Volume 14

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1966

This edition first published in 2011
by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge

270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1966 This Translation George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

Printed and bound in Great Britain

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-57033-6 (Set)

eISBN 13: 978-0-203-83010-9 (Set)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-60853-4 (Volume 14)

eISBN 13: 978-0-203-83303-2 (Volume 14)

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IQBAL

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*Translated from the Persian
with introduction and notes*

by

ARTHUR J. ARBERRY

London

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

RUSKIN HOUSE - MUSEUM STREET

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1966

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UNESCO COLLECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS
PAKISTAN SERIES

This work was prepared for the Pakistan Series
of the Translations Collection
of the United Nations
Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
in 12 point Perpetua type
BY UNWIN BROTHERS LIMITED
WOKING AND LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

The bare facts of the life and career of the author of the work here translated may be summarized in a few sentences; more extended biographies are not far to seek, and for the English-reading public A. Schimmel's *Gabriel's Wing*, Iqbal Singh's *The Passionate Pilgrim*, and S. A. Vahid's *Iqbal, his Art and Thought*, contain a wealth of detail and interpretation sufficient to satisfy the most exacting curiosity.

Muhammad Iqbal was born on February 22, 1873, at Sialkot, a populous centre of West Punjab near the borders of Jammu, of a family hailing originally from Kashmir. In 1895 he moved to Lahore to complete his formal studies, and there began to write. In 1905 on the advice of Sir Thomas Arnold, at that time teaching in Government College, he proceeded to England and for three years at Trinity College, Cambridge he applied his great energies chiefly to philosophy under McTaggart. Graduating from Cambridge in 1908, Iqbal qualified for the Bar in London and did post-graduate work in Germany before returning to India to teach in Lahore and to practise law; later he resigned his appointment at Government College and concentrated on his legal and political work. In 1924 he became a member of the Legislative Assembly of his native province, and in 1930 he was elected President of the Moslem League of India; meanwhile in 1922 a knighthood had been conferred upon him. Taking part in the London Round-Table Conference on India in 1931-32, he spent 1933 in Afghanistan as adviser on education. In 1934 his health began to decline, and on April 21, 1938, he died.

Throughout his extremely active life, in which he did so much to shape the destinies of the land of his birth and to mould the political future of the Moslem community (so that he has been called the spiritual founder of Pakistan), Iqbal maintained a steady and, towards the end, a torrential output of literature. Writing with equal facility in Urdu, Persian and English, and in his soaring range covering law, philosophy and religion as well

as politics, it was as a poet that Iqbal made his greatest contribution to letters. On his death Rabindranath Tagore wrote: 'The death of Sir Muhammad Iqbal creates a void in literature that like a mortal wound will take a very long time to heal. India, whose place in the world is too narrow, can ill afford to miss a poet whose poetry had such universal value.' Iqbal's first publication, in 1901, was a treatise on economics in Urdu, the earliest to appear in that language; his last, issued posthumously under the title *Armughan-i Hijaz* ('Present from Hijaz'), contained his final collection of Persian and Urdu poems. The volume here translated, the *Javid-nama*, came out in 1932.

'Iqbal's *magnum opus*', writes his biographer S. A. Vahid, 'is the *Javid Namah*. Within a few years of its publication the poem became a classic, and one great scholar proclaimed that the poem will rank with Firdausi's *Shah Namah*, Rumi's *Mathnawi*, Sa'di's *Gulistan* and the *Diwan* of Hafiz. Nor was this tribute an exaggeration, as subsequent criticism showed . . . In judging a poem we have to consider two things: the style and the substance. So far as the style is concerned, *Javid Namah* belongs to the very first rank of Persian verse. It is unsurpassed in grandeur of expression, in beauty of diction and in richness of illustration. As regards theme, the poem deals with the everlasting conflict of the soul, and by telling the story of human struggle against sin, shows to mankind the path to glory and peace. In every line the poet makes us feel that he has something to say that is not only worth saying, but is also fitted to give us pleasure. Thus, as regards style as well as theme the poem is a masterpiece.'

The *Javid-nama*, having been frequently reissued in lithograph—the edition on which the present translation is based was published in 1946 at Hyderabad (Deccan)—was first translated, into Italian, by Professor Alessandro Bausani under the title *Il Poema Celeste* (Rome, 1952). A version in German verse, *Buch der Ewigkeit* (Munich, 1957), has come from the pen of Professor Annemarie Schimmel. A French version, by E. Meyerovitch and Mohammed Mokri, has the title *Le Livre de l'Éternité* (Paris, 1962). In 1961 a translation in English verse was published in Lahore, *The Pilgrimage of Eternity*, by Shaikh Mahmud Ahmad. The poem has thus reached a truly international public, and has already taken its rightful place amongst the modern classics of world literature.

Iqbal composed three long Persian poems in which he gave artistic expression to his highly characteristic philosophical ideas. The first of these, the *Asrar-i Khudi*, was published in 1915 and 'on its first appearance took by storm the younger generation of Indian Moslems. "Iqbal," wrote one of them, "has come amongst us as a Messiah and has stirred the dead into life."' So wrote R. A. Nicholson, whose prose version of this work, *The Secrets of the Self* (Macmillan, 1920), first introduced Iqbal's writings to the western public. The second of the trilogy, the *Rumuz-i Bekhudi*, came out in 1918, but it was not until 1953 that the first translation appeared, an English blank-verse rendering by the present writer entitled *The Mysteries of Selflessness* (John Murray).

As their titles indicate, the central theme of both these poems is the Self, or human ego, in its relationship to society, more specifically the Moslem community, and the place of the Moslem community in the world at large. In common with all sensitive Moslems in India and elsewhere, Iqbal was deeply pained by the contrast between Islam in the days of its greatest power, and the status of colonial tutelage—to use a mild euphemism—to which most Moslem countries had sunk in modern times. He saw the only hope of reversing the process of decline to reside in the regeneration of every individual Moslem, and the working together of these regenerated individuals in a united and purposeful Community of Believers, in God's good time coextensive with the whole of humanity. 'Thus the Kingdom of God on earth', Iqbal wrote in a famous letter to R. A. Nicholson, 'means the democracy of more or less unique individuals, presided over by the most unique individual possible on this earth.' For a developed philosophical exposition of his doctrine of the Self, in its maturest form, the reader is recommended to consult Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (O.U.P., 1934), and especially chapter IV, 'The Human Ego—his freedom and immortality'.

Both the *Asrar-i khudi* and the *Rumuz-i bekhudi* were composed in rhyming couplets, following a very long tradition in Persian didactic poetry going back a thousand years. The metre chosen by Iqbal for these poems is the *ramal-i musaddas-i maqsur*, the same as that employed by the greatest of Persian mystics, Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273), in the greatest didactic poem in

Persian literature, the *Masnavi*. I have summarized the early history of this verse-form in the preface to my *Tales from the Masnavi* (Allen & Unwin, 1961), which the reader may wish to consult. One noteworthy feature of the convention is that the poet lightens from time to time the weight of formal exposition by the introduction of illustrative anecdotes; to this tradition Iqbal also conformed. When, however, he came to compose the third of his trilogy, Iqbal varied the pattern strikingly; the *Javid-nama* is conceived as a narrative poem, or rather, a poetic drama, in which the didactic is put into the mouths of the *dramatis personae*. A further remarkable novelty is the interspersing of lyrics, in various metres and in the monorhyme characteristic of the Persian ghazal, the effect of which is a very great enhancement of the poetic tension of the whole.

The *Javid-nama* is a description of a spiritual journey made by the poet, from earth through the 'spheres' of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, to beyond the 'spheres' and to the Presence of God. The antecedents of this heavenly adventure go back, within Islamic tradition, to the celebrated *mi'raj* of the Prophet Mohammed, that famous legend of his Ascension the germs of which are to be traced in the Koran. In his journey through the seven heavens Mohammed, mounted upon the winged horse Buraq, had as his guide the archangel Gabriel; in the course of his ascent he is said to have encountered and conversed with earlier prophets, from Adam in the first heaven to Abraham in the seventh, before enjoying the supreme felicity of colloquy with God. The Prophet's *mi'raj* naturally formed a theme of meditation and—as part of the *imitatio Prophetarum*—of emulation for many pious Moslems and mystics through the succeeding centuries, and so Iqbal did not lack for precedents and models when he came to adopt this very popular vehicle for the final expression of his doctrine of Moslem regeneration and self-realization. He nominated as his guide the poet to whose language, style and thought he felt himself rightly to be under a special obligation, the Sage of Rum, Jalal al-Din Rumi; whilst the personalities he encountered on his journey were drawn not from the hierarchy of the prophets, but from those who had played a leading part in the history of Islam, particularly in its later period.

Iqbal presents the translator with all the usual problems connected with translating poetry, and with further problems, still more difficult of solution, posed by his elusive style and idiosyncratic vocabulary. That this elusiveness was deliberate is proved by a remark he jotted down in a notebook dating from 1910, and published by his son Javid in 1961: 'Matthew Arnold is a very precise poet. I like, however, an element of obscurity and vagueness in poetry; since the vague and the obscure appear profound to the emotions.' In choosing Persian as the medium for conveying his universal message, Iqbal was not adding materially to the difficulties of interpretation; rather the contrary, for Persian had been preferred by Indian Moslem poets for centuries over the local idioms, Persian being the court language of the Moghul Empire. (The rise of Urdu, and the consequent decline of the knowledge of Persian, in fact happened during Iqbal's lifetime; his own genius did very much to enhance its status and mature its style.) But Persian is a language almost ideally suited to deliberate vagueness, on account both of its grammatical and syntactical simplicity, and of its rich and at the same time somewhat imprecise philosophical vocabulary. Or rather, imprecision is not the crux of the matter; the case is, that the terms available for use are capable of a variety of meanings, and Iqbal, like every original thinker, not infrequently attached to quite simple words and clichés his own private signification.

This last point has been well made by S. A. Vahid in his *Iqbal, his Art and Thought*. 'The remarkable point about Iqbal's poetry is the sense of "newness," and the main reason for this is that although Iqbal was not actually anti-traditionalist, he uses certain words and combination of words to express his visions which are entirely original. Some of these words are coined by him; others represent old words used in an entirely new sense . . . He is also a superb phrase-maker and has wonderful felicity of phrasing by which language acquires meanings beyond those formally assigned by the lexicographer. These words and phrases act as the keystone for the entire arch of the poetic inspiration. As the removal of the keystone is sure to cause the downfall of the entire arch, so if we try to substitute something else for the master word or phrase, the whole artistic expression is marred . . . The use of those words and phrases give to Iqbal's poetry not only a sense of "newness" found in very few Urdu and Persian poets, but

also the quality of surprise which characterises all great poetry.'

It has been said that the ideal at which the translator should aim is to produce a version as near as possible to what his original would have written, had he been composing in the translator's language and not his own. It so happens that in the case of the *Javid-nama*, we have been provided with material, though all too scanty, enabling us to test this theory; in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, Iqbal has himself translated into English two passages from this poem. The first of these passages represents verses 2733–2736, which in Iqbal's own version become:

The 'I am' which he seeketh,
Lieth beyond philosophy, beyond knowledge.
The plant which groweth only from the invisible soil of
the heart of man,
Groweth not from a mere heap of clay.

In the original Persian these lines read:

khvast ta az ab u gil ayad birun
khusha-yi k-az kisht-i dil ayad birun
anchi u juyad maqam-i kibriya-st
in maqam az 'aql u hikmat ma-vara-st

The poet thus not only reversed the original order of the two couplets, but also changed the tense of the main clause, itself in apposition to the immediately preceding sentence and having the same verbal construction, from the past to the present; nor, as will be seen, were these the only liberties he took with himself—liberties which would surely be condemned in any ordinary translator.

Iqbal's second self-translation is more extensive, representing lines 239 to 266 of the *Javid-nama*.

Art thou in the stage of 'Life', 'death', or 'death-in-life'?
Invoke the aid of three witnesses to verify thy 'Station'.
The first witness is thine own consciousness—
See thyself, then, with thine own light.
The second witness is the consciousness of another ego—
See thyself, then, with the light of an ego other than thee.
The third witness is God's consciousness—
See thyself, then, with God's light.

If thou standest unshaken in front of this light,
 Consider thyself as living and eternal as He!
 That man alone is real who dares—
 Dares to see God face to face!
 What is 'Ascension'? Only a search for a witness
 Who may finally confirm thy reality—
 A witness whose confirmation alone makes thee eternal.
 No one can stand unshaken in His Presence;
 And he who can, verily, he is pure gold.
 Art thou a mere particle of dust?
 Tighten the knot of thy ego;
 And hold fast to thy tiny being!
 How glorious to burnish one's ego
 And to test its lustre in the presence of the Sun!
 Re-chisel, then, thine ancient frame;
 And build up a new being.
 Such being is real being;
 Or else thy ego is a mere ring of smoke!

The foregoing passage affords a very fair example of how close and how remote Iqbal was prepared to make his own version of himself; for comparison, in addition to the translation offered in the present volume, the reader may like to consider the verse-paraphrase by Shaikh Mahmud Ahmad.

Art thou alive or dead or dying fast?
 Three witnesses should testify thy state.
 The first as witness is the consciousness
 Of self, to see thyself by thy own light.
 The second is another's consciousness
 That thou may'st kindle thus to see thyself.
 And thy third witness is God's consciousness,
 A light in which thou may'st see thyself.
 Before the Lord's effulgence if thou stand'st
 Thou art alive like Him. For life is but
 To reach thy destined end, that is to see
 The Lord unveiled. One who believes
 Shall never lose himself in Attributes
 For Mustafa insisted on the Sight.
 The flight to heaven means a longing for
 A witness who may testify thyself.