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Retranslation in Mughal South Asia: The Impressive Failure of a Persian *Panchatantra*

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Abstract

This paper explores Muṣṭafā Khāliqādā ‘Abbāsī’s 1590s Persian retranslation of the *Panchatantra*, commissioned by the Mughal emperor Akbar. Examining this text vis-à-vis other translations by Khāliqādā, other court-commissioned Sanskrit-Persian translations from Akbar’s time, and the long *Kalīla wa Dimna* tradition in the Persianate world, this paper argues that retranslations, particularly unsuccessful ones, are where literary traditions and translation norms are most clearly negotiated and contested. Studying retranslations, as shown here, is a useful methodology for revealing tensions between different contemporaneous perspectives on what it takes to fully Persianize a text.

Keywords: *Panchatantra*; *Kalīla wa Dimna*; translation; Khāliqādā; Mughals; Akbar; prosimetrum; Persian literary culture

Persian authors in the Mughal period (1526–1857) engaged intensively with texts in Sanskrit and other vernacular South Asian languages.¹ Narrative literature, scientific works, religious treatises, and historiography—many were rendered and commented on in Persian. The wide array of topics and quantity of texts might give the impression that the main concern of Persian authors and their patrons was to enrich Persian literary culture with unknown, new information and stories, submitting new texts to Persian-knowing audiences.² Quite a few Sanskrit texts, however, particularly narrative literature, were repeatedly retranslated and retold in Persian over a relatively short period of time. *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha*, for example, was rendered and commented on in Persian at least five times between 1597 and 1656, usually under the name *Jog Basisht*.³ *Bhagavadgītā* was rendered in Persian by at least three different authors in the seventeenth century, and perhaps even earlier.⁴ The collection of thirty-two stories of King Vikramāditya, known in Sanskrit as *Siṃhāsanadvātrimśikā*, was

¹ All transliterations from Persian and Arabic follow IJMES. Attention is given to *majhul* letters, common in Indo-Persian pronunciation. Transliterations from Sanskrit follow the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) scheme.

² Twentieth-century scholarship on Persian translations from the Mughal period tends to see such translations as an expression of Muslim “curiosity” about Indian sciences, history, and religion. Identifying Persian with Islam, several surveys of Sanskrit-Persian translations argue that the huge corpus of translations from the Mughal period points to an insatiable Muslim desire to learn anything and everything about India. See, for example, Gorekar, “Persian Language and Sanskrit Lore,” 107–119; Mujtabai, *Aspects of Hindu Muslim Cultural Relations*, 66–67; Shukla, “Persian Translations of Sanskrit Works,” 173–187.

³ Mujtabai, *Muntakhab-i Jog Basisht*; Alam, “In Search of a Sacred King”; Nair, *Translating Wisdom*.

⁴ Vassie, “Persian Interpretations of the *Bhagavadgītā*”; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 117.

retold in Persian at least three times under the name *Singhasan Battisi* between the 1570s and 1650s.⁵ The epic *Mahābhārata* was translated into Persian in 1586 and titled *Razmnama*, and shortly thereafter was partially rendered again.⁶ *Rāmāyaṇa* was retranslated into Persian the most times: between 1589 and 1715, the epic was retold in Persian at least eight times, and a dozen times more during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷

Since many of these retranslations were produced in the same circles, it is extremely unlikely that their authors were unaware of at least some previous renditions. Indeed, the prefaces and prologues of some of these texts explicitly mention previous renditions, and in some cases the same author rewrote his own translation.⁸ This list makes it clear that the purpose of these translations was not to introduce new knowledge in Persian. What, then, was at stake? Why were these texts retranslated so many times?

In some cases, depending on the author's background and skills, the patron's interests, and historical circumstances, retranslation was means of philosophical reappropriation. *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha*, for example, was first translated into Persian in 1598 by a group of three translators led by Nizam Panipati, per the orders of Prince Salim (later crowned as Jahangir). As Shankar Nair has recently shown, Panipati reclaimed the Sanskrit text as a Sufi text, heavily informed by *wujūdī* philosophy and peripatetic terminology. The preface, Nair notes, clearly frames the text as one dealing with Sufism, commenting on realities according to the religious path of Abhinanda, the Sanskrit author of *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha*.⁹ The emphases in the text's 1655 retranslation, commissioned by Prince Dara Shukoh, however, are quite different. Muzaffar Alam argues that the prince commissioned a new translation due to his interest in the text's teachings on how to reconcile temporal royal power and spiritual truth, not its philosophy. While earlier Persian renditions of *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha*—such as those of Panipati, Qutb-Jahani, and Mir Findiriski—focused primarily on the text's mystical doctrine, Dara Shukoh's retranslation consciously broke from previous Persian understandings of the text, focusing instead on notions of ideal kingship.¹⁰

Commissioning new translations also served political purposes, as monarchs used retranslated texts in their political self-fashioning. For rulers, translating was often a way not only to gain access to new knowledge, but also to claim ownership over a text's teachings.¹¹ As Audrey Truschke argues, Akbar's motivations for commissioning translations from Sanskrit included claiming ownership over and writing his monarchy into foreign knowledge. The translation of the *Mahābhārata* into Persian in Akbar's court, and subsequent renderings and abridgements of the Persian text, Truschke suggests, was an ongoing project by Mughal elites to redefine the epic as an Indo-Persian text "that spoke to the concerns of their expanding polity and had direct implications for Akbar's sovereignty."¹²

However, these reasons for retranslating still do not offer a convincing explanation for retranslations produced by the same author or for the same patron over a short period of time. Neither is the Translation Studies discourse useful to us in this case; the "retranslation hypothesis" can hardly be of help here, and might only illuminate Mughal retranslations

⁵ Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1106–1108. On the *Singhasan Battisi*, see Martin, "'Translator's Invisibility'."

⁶ Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 101–141.

⁷ Abidi, "The Story of Ramayana in Indo-Persian Literature."

⁸ 'Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni (d. 1615), for example, composed a Persian *Singhasan Battisi* in the 1570s and then rewrote it twenty years later. See Ethé, 1106. The famous poet Abu al-Fayz ibn Mubarak Fayzi (d. 1594) was involved in several *Mahābhārata*-related projects between the years 1586–1593: he began rewriting the Persian *Razmnama* in an elevated style (and dropped the project after two books) and composed a *maṣnawī* entitled *Nal Daman*, based on the *Mahābhārata* story of Nala and Damayantī. See Abu al-Fayz ibn Mubarak Fayzi, *Nal u Daman*; Abu al-Fayz ibn Mubarak Fayzi, *Mahabharat*. Chandarman Bedil wrote two Persian *Ramayans* within less than a decade between 1686–1693. See Chandarman Kāyath Bedil, *Ramayan*; Chandarman Kāyath Bedil, *Ramayana: Tarjuma-i Manzum-i Farsi ba 'Unwan-i Nargisistan*.

⁹ Nair, *Translating Wisdom*, 144–145.

¹⁰ Alam, "In Search of a Sacred King."

¹¹ Pym, *Method in Translation History*, 82–83.

¹² Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 103.

through its faults. Antoine Berman's "retranslation hypothesis" on literary retranslations posits that "translation is an 'incomplete' act and that it can only strive for completion through retranslations." First translations are considered more domesticated than subsequent retranslations, as they suppress the particular qualities of the translated text to increase readability. Retranslations, in contrast, are more attentive to the source text, attempting to remain close to the original through maintaining cultural distance.¹³

Even if taken at face value, this hypothesis can be—and indeed has been—easily disproved by other instances of retranslation.¹⁴ What makes this theory an unsuitable prism through which to examine Mughal retranslations, however, is: a) it views retranslation teleologically as a process of improvement, leading to a "better" text; b) it arbitrarily defines foreignized translations as "better" and thus prioritizes foreignization strategies over domesticated translation; and c) it sees the process of improvement as unidirectional, from one end of an imagined spectrum to another.¹⁵ In the context of Mughal era Persian retranslations, especially literary ones, it would be wrong to assume that first translations were more domesticated than subsequent translations, or that foreignization strategies were preferred over domesticating ones. In fact, South Asian Persian translations of Sanskrit epics and story collections from the early modern period were mostly target culture-oriented, emphasizing the Persian-ness of the resulting text. Persian literary translations from South Asia were not governed by concerns of equivalence or faithfulness, but by cultural values, genre expectations, and contemporary taste. The many stylistically elevated and versified adaptations of Indian stories, especially the epics, point to the fact that Persian authors in early modern South Asia had different priorities and literary commitments than those expected by modern, Western ideas of translation.

In scholarship, the focus on Sanskrit-Persian translations as sites of encounter in which new knowledge was rendered in Persian in order to inform Muslim readers of Indian sciences and traditions has led to the severe neglect of retranslations in the study of the so-called "Mughal translation movement." If, for centuries, orientalists and colonial officials considered Mughal translations to be inaccurate or derivative, and thus unworthy of scholarly attention, retranslations suffer from even worse neglect.¹⁶ First translations at least enjoy some fame as texts that introduce new knowledge to the target culture. Retranslations, following this logic, are even more derivative and uninteresting: how can they possibly bring forth anything new?

This article suggests that retranslations can teach us a great deal about textual practices, literary taste, and how these may change over time. Retranslating compelled authors to engage critically in their literary tradition, inherited norms of translation, and explain clearly and convincingly what kind of intervention they made compared to previous renditions. Were retranslations meant to be better? How? Were they meant to be different? In what sense? I argue that retranslations, especially those that did not eclipse earlier translations in significance or circulation, are where literary traditions and translation norms are most clearly negotiated and contested. Studying retranslations, I show, is a useful methodology for revealing tensions between different contemporaneous perspectives on what it takes to fully Persianize a text.

The literary oeuvre of Mustafa Khaliqdad 'Abbasi

The most productive entry point into the textual corpus of retranslations in the Mughal period is the work of Mustafa Khaliqdad 'Abbasi, who made a career of retranslation at

¹³ Gürçağlar, "Retranslation," 232–236.

¹⁴ Paloposki and Koskinen, "A Thousand and One Translations."

¹⁵ Lawrence Venuti also argues that the translator has an ethical responsibility to use foreignizing strategies to "prevent the translating language and culture from effacing the foreignness of the foreign text." Venuti, "Retranslations: The Creation of Value," 36.

¹⁶ Sir William Jones (1746–1794), for example, famously denigrated Persian translations of Sanskrit texts for their inability to accurately and objectively transfer the contents of Sanskrit sources. See Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 29; Gallien, "From One Empire to the Next," 233.

the Mughal court between 1588 and 1611. While we know absolutely nothing about his life and background, he left three Persian retranslations—two from Sanskrit and one from Arabic—with lengthy prefaces in which he contemplates the craft of translation, the tasks before him, and the circumstances in which he produced his work. The first translation he completed, some time after 1588, was *Panchakiyana* or *Panj Dastan* (Five Stories), a translation of Pūrṇabhadra's twelfth-century *Pañcākhyāna*, which is a Jain rewriting of the famous *Pañcatantra* (Five Strategies). Soon after, during the 1590s, Khaliqdad completed a second translation entitled *Darya-yi Asmar* (Ocean of Nighttime Stories), a translation of Somadeva's eleventh-century *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Ocean of Story-Rivers). Lastly, in 1611, during Jahangir's reign, Khaliqdad was tasked with retranslating Muhammad al-Shahrastani's Arabic twelfth-century *Kitab al-Nihal wa-l-Milal* (The Book of Sects and Religions), entitled *Tawzih al-Milal* (Explanation of Religions) in Persian.

All three texts had been previously translated into Persian, either in South Asia or Iran. *Kathāsaritsāgara* was translated first into Persian in the fifteenth century at Zayn al-ʿAbidin's court in Kashmir, and did not come down to us. *Kitab al-Nihal wa-l-Milal* was translated from Arabic into Persian at Shahrukh's Timurid court in Isfahan in 1439.¹⁷ The *Pañcatantra*—the famous collection of stories on political wisdom—has gained a life of its own in the Islamic world and come to be known as *Kalila wa-Dimna*: first translated into Pahlavi at the court of Anushirwan in the sixth century, it was later translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ at the Abbasid court in the eighth century, then partially into Persian by the poet Rudaki in the tenth century, retold again by Nasrallah Munshi in the twelfth century, and then again by Waʿiz Kashifi at the Timurid court in Herat in the early sixteenth century. The *Pañcatantra* was retold in Persian once more before Khaliqdad's version, by Akbar's vizier, Abu al-Fazl, at the Mughal court in 1588.¹⁸

In what follows, I focus mainly on Khaliqdad's *Panchakiyana*. It is there—in the preface and body of the translation—where he contests the norms and ideals of Persian prose writing most forcefully and enunciates his approach to translation. Khaliqdad's work is a productive entry point to these questions, not only because he was such a prolific translator, but also because his *Panchakiyana* was an unsuccessful retranslation project. The fact that it survives in only one manuscript and was never even finished points to its reception.¹⁹ In fact, Khaliqdad's comments in the preface reveal that the text was only a draft, intended to be later improved and embellished in collaboration with Akbar, his patron.²⁰ This statement, together with the discrepancies between the text as we have it and the text as Khaliqdad envisioned it to be after the emperor's embellishment, suggest that Akbar was not impressed by the draft and discontinued the project. Moreover, Khaliqdad's name was completely forgotten and is not mentioned in any historical work or literary compendium from the time. His translation strategies do not seem to have influenced other authors at the time or in the years that followed. While there are some similarities between Khaliqdad's strategies and those of other authors who

¹⁷ The first Persian translation of Shahrastani's *Kitab al-Nihal wa-l-Milal* was produced by Afzal al-Din Sadr Turka-yi Isfihani for the Timurid emperor Shahrukh (r. 1405–1447) and was completed in Isfahan in December 1439. The translation was named *Tanqih al-Adilla wa al-ʿIlal fi Tarjuma al-Milal wa-l-Nihal* (An Investigation of the Arguments and Problems in the Interpretation of Sects and Religions). Afzal al-Din Sadr Turka-yi Isfihani, *al-Milal wa-l-Nihal*, 70–91.

¹⁸ Traditionally, *Kalila wa Dimna* retellings and rewritings list in their prefaces all the versions completed in the past. For recent analyses of other *Kalila wa Dimna* rewritings, see de Blois, *Burzūy's Voyage to India and the Origins of the Book Kalilah wa Dimna*; van Ruymbeke, *Kāshefi's Anvār-e Sohayli*; van Ruymbeke, "Authorship, Ownership and Rewriting"; de la Perrière, El Khiari, and Vernay-Nouri, *Les périples de Kalila et Dimna*; d'Hubert, "Homecoming: The Journey Back to India of Kalila wa-Dimna." Nasrallah Munshi's *Kalilah wa Dimna* was recently translated into English by Wheeler M. Thackston: Nasrallah Munshi, *Kalilah and Dimna*. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ' s Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimna* was also recently translated into English: Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Kalilah and Dimna: Fables of Virtue and Vice*.

¹⁹ This one manuscript, of which several folios are missing, is kept at the National Museum in Delhi. It was edited in 1973 and then published in a second corrected edition in 1984. See Mustafa Khaliqdad ʿAbbasi, *Panchakiyana ya Panj Dastan*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

engaged in translation under Akbar, Khaliqdad's case makes it clear that what worked in genres such as historiography or expository mystical treatises could not work in wisdom literature. Other translations produced at Akbar's court in the 1580s and 1590s, which aimed to conform with their royal patron's literary preferences, were quite successful. Khaliqdad's translation strategies in his *Panchakiyana*, however, did not produce a piece of literature, but instead a strange translation that did not adhere to the requirements of belletristic writing. Persian belletristic writing (or *adab*, as explained in the penultimate section of this article) emphasizes not only appropriate social conduct and ethics, but also the elevated literary style in which these are formulated and offered to the educated reader. Persian *belles lettres* thus incorporates clever poetry—both original and canonical, harmonized prose, puns, diverse quotations from stories and anecdotes, and Arabic words and verses for referential and aesthetic purposes alike.

Khaliqdad's translation was unsuccessful, I argue, because his attempt to balance the literary conventions of Persian belletristic writing, his own convictions about translation ideals, and the literary expectations of his patron entailed trying to have his cake and eat it too. These mutually exclusive goals resulted in awkward prose, an odd mixture of registers that did not fulfil the standards of eloquent prose writing and advice literature. Thus, even though Khaliqdad was active during what is considered the heyday of Sanskrit-Persian encounters at the Mughal court, he was very much a stylistic outlier. Being unable to establish a new style of Persian prose writing, then, was a major part of Khaliqdad's unsuccessfulness. When considering how Ibn al-Muqaffa's Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimna* and Nasrallah Munshi's Persian *Kalila wa Dimna* were considered as inaugurating a new style of prose writing in their respective languages, it becomes clear that Khaliqdad's task was more than simply translating any text. He was unable to live up to what the rich *Kalila wa Dimna* tradition required of him.

A Persian theory of translation in Khaliqdad's prefaces

Khaliqdad begins his preface by narrating how the *Pañcatantra* came to be known in the Islamic world. He begins with the story of the first Pahlavi translation from the sixth century and moves on to mention all renditions of *Kalila wa-Dimna* composed in the following millennium, up until his time.²¹ Much like his predecessors in the *Kalila wa-Dimna* tradition, Khaliqdad points out the problems he identifies in previous renditions, which justify a new translation. Such comments can be found in the three most famous Persian renditions of the text by Nasrallah Munshi, Wa'iz Kashifi, and Abu al-Fazl. Munshi, for example, in his twelfth-century Persian *Kalila wa Dimna*, explained in his preface:

Others have also translated this book after Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation and Rudaki's versification. Everyone stepped into the field of eloquence to the best of their abilities, but it appears that their wish was to relate the stories and write the tales, not to explicate their wisdom and advice, and so they left their discourse incomplete, and only briefly summarized the point of the stories.²²

If Munshi's problem with existing renditions was that they were more interested in the embedded stories than the book's teachings, and therefore rendered it in an incomplete manner, Kashifi, in his early sixteenth-century *Anwar-i Suhayli*, raises a different issue with Munshi's text: the style.

By explaining uncommon words and hyperboles with the beauties of Arabic and rhetoric in various metaphors and similes, and [consequently] prolonging and extending

²¹ While the story of the first Pahlavi translation and its translator, Burzoya, is included in many earlier *Kalila wa-Dimnas*, the story usually appears as the first chapter rather than as part of the preface. After Wa'iz Kashifi dropped this story entirely from his early sixteenth-century *Anwar-i Suhayli*, Abu al-Fazl, in his rewriting of Kashifi's text in 1588 entitled *'Iyar-i Danish*, added it back in. See d'Hubert, "Homecoming," 443.

²² Abu al-Ma'ali Nasrallah Munshi, *Tarjuma-yi Kalila wa Dimna*, 25.

difficult words and expressions, the listener's mind is kept from savoring the meaning of the book and understanding its essence. The disposition of the reader, too, cannot make sense of the relationship between the origins of a story to its sections and the beginning of a discourse to its end. And this will inevitably cause fatigue to the readers and listeners, especially in this time, marked by elegance, when the disposition of its inhabitants has reached such refinement that they desire to understand meanings without whatever appears in the text. Not only that, with some of the words they need to closely consult a dictionary and carefully try to reveal the words' meanings. For this reason, it becomes clear why this book, albeit precious, will be abandoned and rejected, and the people of the world will remain bereft and deprived of its merits.²³

Abu al-Fazl points the exact same criticism at Kashifi in the introduction to *ʿIyar-i Danish*. Abu al-Fazl mentions Akbar's request that he rewrite Kashifi's *Anwar-i Suhayli* and, with respect to Kashifi's style and language, says:

Even though *Anwar-i Suhayli*, in comparison with *Kalila wa Dimna*, is famous for its contemporary language, it is still not free of Arabic rhetoric and Persian figurative speech. It is necessary, then, to get rid of some words, clear it from long poetic images, and write it clearly, following the same arrangement, so that its benefits become known and its intentions—complete.²⁴

Yet, even with these presumed stylistic problems, all three texts—*Kalila wa Dimna*, *Anwar-i Suhayli*, and *ʿIyar-i Danish*—were considered among the best examples of Persian *belles lettres* for centuries. Censuring earlier renditions of *Kalila wa Dimna* in prefaces by later authors was thus a norm in itself, and served as the primary reason for undertaking the book's rewriting, even if earlier renditions already observed the dominant literary norms of Persian *belles lettres*.²⁵

Khaliqdad thus continues the tradition of addressing issues with previous renditions, discussing two kinds of problems in the existing textual tradition of *Kalila wa-Dimna*. The first set of problems can be defined as related to style. Khaliqdad argues that a new translation is needed because earlier renditions are convoluted and do not impart the meaning of the text clearly enough. The culprits are ornate language in the style of secretaries and the excessive use of Arabic. This view is shared across his translations. In his preface to *Darya-yi Asmar*, he unequivocally condemns ornate language, arguing: "The writer must [...] forsake completely the use of rhetoric, as its metaphors veil the face of meaning, or distract the already stretched out mind of the listener from the apprehension of meaning."²⁶ In *Tawzih al-Milal*, he also criticizes the style of secretaries:

The resolution of the rhetorical-minded author to explain everything with ornate speech, abstruse language, and convoluted metaphors, and write it in the style of secretaries, who essentially present what's already understood in another style, leads [...] the seeker of meaning to a state of fatigue as the subject's essence gets farther away. Most Persian-readers cannot grasp its meaning.²⁷

The whole purpose of writing a foreign book in Persian, Khaliqdad writes in all three prefaces, "should not be anything but making its meanings easier to understand for

²³ Husayn Waʿiz Kashifi, *Anwar-i Suhayli*, 44.

²⁴ Abu al-Fazl bin Mubarak, *ʿIyar-i Danish*, 8.

²⁵ On the literary practice of critiquing "proto-texts" for their alleged incomppliance with the literary norms of Persian literature of the time, and declarations by authors regarding their chosen "simpler" literary style, even when it is only stated and not practiced, see Rubanovich, "Literary Canon and Patterns of Evaluation," 58–63.

²⁶ Khaliqdad, *Darya-yi Asmar*, 3.

²⁷ Khaliqdad, *Tawzih al-Milal*, 3.

Persian-knowing people.”²⁸ According to him, rhetorical figures and poetic language do a disservice to this purpose. Ornate language is a barrier to comprehension and should be avoided entirely in translations. In *Tawzih al-Milal*, he elaborates further:

[The purpose] is not inserting distant and long metaphors, or writing words and compounds of unfamiliar nature, so it becomes hard to understand, even more so than the Arabic. So if the [author’s] intention would be to announce his proficiency in the style of various kinds of compositions, and [to announce] his mastery of rhymed prose and rhetoric, he should be able to express that [eloquent] speech in composing other works like *Maqamat-i Hariri*, [*Maqamat-i*] *Hamidi*, *I‘jaz-i Khusrawi*, and other great books of that art; not through the subjects and meanings of religion and faith [...].²⁹

Khaliqdad’s emphasis on clarity of meaning is repeated in every preface, regardless of the fact that his three translations do not belong to the same genre. Ornate speech should not be part of the practice of translation.³⁰

Another impediment to clarity of meaning in earlier translations, according to Khaliqdad, is the presence of many Arabic words, expressions, and verses. In *Panchakiyana*, Khaliqdad writes that even though Nasrallah Munshi’s version is “the touchstone for Persian-knowers in terms of depth, freshness of expression, and simplicity,” it still has many Arabic verses and words that are difficult to understand.³¹ While Wa‘iz Kashifi saw his own rewriting of Munshi’s text as a Persianization project that cleared the text of its excessive use of Arabic and uncommon words and expressions, Khaliqdad mentions in his preface that Akbar also did not approve of Kashifi’s *Anwar-i Suhayli*, as it was still “not free of Arabic rhetoric and words that are hard to understand.”³²

In *Darya-yi Asmar*, Khaliqdad makes an interesting comment about the admixture of Arabic and Persian, attributing this practice to an author’s lack of knowledge in Persian. One of the things that obstruct meaning, Khaliqdad writes, is when “some of those who have partial knowledge, by mixing Arabic and Persian together [...], organize it [i.e., a discourse] in disarray, and by abusing the inkstand and the pen, they sinfully turn the innocence of the white page to black.”³³ He then continues: “the writer must refrain from tempering with the discourse by mixing in it another language in a way that causes obstruction and difficulty in understanding the content.”³⁴ The admixture of Arabic and Persian is, to him, the main culprit for the lack of success of the previous *Kathāsaritsāgara* Persian translation, which was prepared in Zayn al-‘Abidin’s court in Kashmir in the first half of the fifteenth century:

Someone translated it into Persian following the order of Sultan Zayn al-‘Abidin, the famous ruler of Kashmir, but the translator, laboring to the best of his ability to mix Persian and Arabic, pushed it so far away from common understanding towards meaningless discourse and faulty standards that intellectuals, too, were deprived of its meaning. Therefore, the meaning of the stories remained veiled among both peoples [i.e.,

²⁸ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 4; Khaliqdad, *Tawzih al-Milal*, 3; Khaliqdad, *Darya-yi Asmar*, 3.

²⁹ Khaliqdad, *Tawzih al-Milal*, 3.

³⁰ Discussions around the appropriate ways to write Persian prose emerged among Persian literati from the very beginning of the second millennium, when New Persian rose to prominence in the eastern Islamic world. These discussions addressed questions such as whether poetry is superior to prose, how to strike a balance between ornate speech and clear discourse, and the literary contexts in which ornate prose can and should be used. See, for example, Rubanovich, “Literary Canon and Patterns of Evaluation”; Hanaway, “Secretaries, Poets, and the Literary Language”; Mitchell, “Persian Rhetoric in the Safavid Context”; Mitchell, “A Medieval Nexus: Locating Enshâ’ and its Ontology in the Persianate Intellectual Tradition”; Dhavan, “Persian Scholarly Networks in Mughal Punjab.”

³¹ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.

³³ Khaliqdad, *Darya-yi Asmar*, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

commoners and intellectuals], and the whole purpose, which was to educate and sharpen the mind, was not accomplished.³⁵

These are somewhat odd statements, as Persian authors did not mix Arabic and Persian due to their lack of knowledge of Persian prose. In fact, the situation was quite the contrary: incorporating Arabic in Persian literature was a matter of aesthetics and literary style. Julia Rubanovich argues that, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, two developments in Persian literary culture influenced the shaping of the prose repertoire. The first was “the increasing tendency towards ‘poeticalness’ of prose,” and the second was “the establishing of the literary aesthetic (versus referential) function of Arabic in prose texts written in Persian.”³⁶ The two processes, I would add, are closely interconnected. Arabic’s grammatical and morphological characteristics, alongside its system of noun derivation, are among the things that enable, for example, the writing of rhymed prose (*saġ*) in Persian or the employment of other common practices in prose-writing, such as *ishtiġāq* and *tajnīs* (the use of different derivatives of the same root and the use of similar sounding words, respectively).

It is hard to imagine that an author working at a Persianate court after the twelfth century would lack knowledge of Persian. A lack, so to speak, especially in those formative decades in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when New Persian gained more ground, might be attributed to the language itself rather than its users.³⁷

Thus, the mere presence of Arabic vocabulary in Persian texts does not tell us much about an author’s skill or competence in either language. Further questions should be asked to determine the function of Arabic vocabulary in each text: when and where were they written? What is their genre? What are the Arabic words in these texts, and in which context do they appear? Only then will we be able to say something meaningful about an author’s linguistic usage. Authors such as Nasrallah Munshi or Wa’iz Kashifi, for example, who produced Persian prose renditions of *Kalila wa Dimna* before Khaliqdad’s time, were clearly using Arabic for aesthetic purposes, not out of lexical necessity.

This is made clear when comparing Kashifi’s *Anwar-i Suhayli* with Abu al-Fazl’s *‘Iyar-i Danish* (1588), a Mughal rewriting of Kashifi’s work commissioned by Akbar. Abu al-Fazl, like Khaliqdad, writes in his preface that, according to Akbar, “even though *Anwar-i Suhayli*, in comparison with *Kalila wa Dimna*, is famous for its contemporary language, it is still not free of Arabic rhetoric and Persian figurative speech.”³⁸ Abu al-Fazl, therefore, was entrusted with the task of rewriting Kashifi’s *Anwar-i Suhayl*. Abu al-Fazl thus purges *Anwar-i Suhayli* of Arabic verses and expressions, simplifying the syntax while sporadically leaving some of the descriptions and ornamentation. To illustrate this point, a comparative reading of a short section is sufficient. Below is a translation of the opening lines of the famous story of two ducks and a tortoise, as told by Kashifi in his *Anwar-i Suhayli*.

آوردهاند که در آگیری که آبش از صفای ضمیر چون آئینه صافی عکس پذیر بوده و به عذوبت و لطافت از عین
 ا حیات و چشمه سلسبیل خبر داده دو بط و سنگشستی ساکن بودند و به حکم مجاورت سررشته حال ایشان به
 مصادقت کشیده بود و همسایگی به هم خانگی پیوسته . مصراع
 خوش است عمر که با روی یار میگذرد
 ناگاه دست روزگار غدار ناخذهای حادثه رخساره حال ایشان خراشیدن گرفت و سپهر آئینه فام صورت مفارقت
 در مرآت اوقات ایشان نمودن آغاز کرد. مصراع
 و ائ نَعِيم لا يُكْدِرُهُ الذَّهْر
 شعر

³⁵ Ibid., 4.

³⁶ Rubanovich, “Literary Canon,” 50.

³⁷ Julia Rubanovich explains that Persian prose authors borrowed Arabic words due to the absence of appropriate terms in Persian for writing on certain topics, mostly theology, astrology, astronomy, and medicine. Borrowed Arabic words, then, functioned referentially, and were meant to communicate information as lucidly as possible. Ibid., 51–52.

³⁸ Abu al-Fazl, *‘Iyar-i Danish*, 8.

خوش است از جام وصل دلبران می
ولی هستش خمار هجر در پی
بر این خوان کس نخاید لقمه نان
که سنگی ناپیش در زیر دندان
در آن آب که ماده حیات و مدد معاش ایشان بود نقصانی کلی و تفاوتی فاحش پدید آمد

It is told that two ducks and a tortoise inhabited a pond, the water of which reflects the purity of the mind like a clear mirror, and the purity and delicacy of which resembles the fountain of life and the spring of Salsabil. Because of their vicinity, the rope-ends of their lives were pulled together in friendship, and their neighborliness led to cohabitation. A *hemistich*:

Life is better when one passes it with a friend

Suddenly, the hand of treacherous times, with the fingernails of misfortune, scratched the face of their lives, and the mirror-like heavens showed the image of separation in the looking-glass of their times. A *hemistich*:

And what blessings are not troubled by Time?

A *poem*:

Wine from the cup of lovers' union is good
but it is followed by a hangover of separation
On this table one should not eat even a morsel of bread
so that a rock won't come between the teeth

A great damage and an enormous loss occurred in that water, which was their substance of life and their habitat.³⁹

In Abu al-Fazl's *'Iyar-i Danish*, the same section is briefly told as follows:

آوردهاند که در آبیگری دو بط و سنگپشتی خانه داشتند و کار ایشان از همسایگی بدوستی رسیده بود و بیدار از هم خوش میگذرانیدند ناگاه حادثه پدید آمد و در آب که سرمایه زندگانی ایشان بود نقصانی کلی ظاهر شد

It is told that two ducks and a tortoise lived in a pond, and they were on friendly terms because of their neighborliness. They enjoyed each other's company. Suddenly, a misfortune fell upon them, and a great rupture occurred in the water, which was their resource of life.⁴⁰

As is readily apparent, Abu al-Fazl strips the narrative of rhetorical devices and ornamentation, such as inserted verses (either in Persian or in Arabic), internal rhyming, descriptions, analogies, and metaphors. For example, out of the fifteen inserted verses in the *Anwar-i Suhayli*'s telling of the story—either hemistiches (*miṣra'*), full verses (*bayt*), or poems (*shi'r*)—Abu al-Fazl keeps only one hemistich in his rewriting.

But if Abu al-Fazl rewrote *Anwar-i Suhayli* in 1588 and followed Akbar's wishes to simplify the text and purge it of Arabic, why was Khaliqdad asked to produce another version so quickly after? Khaliqdad's text, we learn from his preface, was an entirely different project a project only made possible after Abu al-Fazl had finished his rewriting. As Khaliqdad explains: "When the original Indian version appeared in the grand library, it entered the alchemical sight of His Majesty the Divine Caliph."⁴¹ Khaliqdad's project, therefore, was not a rewriting of *Kalila wa Dimna*, but a new Persian translation of the Sanskrit source.

The nature of this project explains Khaliqdad's critical position vis-à-vis the entire tradition of *Kalila wa Dimna*. While previous renditions of the text were replete with Arabic and too ornate for his and his patron's taste, the main problem, as Khaliqdad saw it, related to issues of textual criticism and faithfulness. As he writes: "This book has been translated from one language into another numerous times and rendered from one mode of expression to another, and so obviously changes and modifications occurred in it and elisions and

³⁹ Kashifi, *Anwar-i Suhayli*, 180.

⁴⁰ Abu al-Fazl, *'Iyar-i Danish*, 87.

⁴¹ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 4.

additions took place.”⁴² Since the first Pahlavi translation in the sixth century, Khaliqdad reminds the reader, not one *Kalila wa Dimna* rewriting had relied on the Sanskrit source. In Khaliqdad’s eyes, this was a problem, as translations should be both clear and faithful to the source text. The best way to rectify these problems of style and faithfulness, per Khaliqdad, was to return to the source and translate the *Pañcatantra* afresh. Khaliqdad thus uses the preface to introduce himself as the first *translator* in a thousand years to closely read the Sanskrit source for his translation.⁴³

Khaliqdad’s statement regarding the “original Indian version” compels us to ask: which text was Khaliqdad translating? The text’s modern editors mention in their introduction that the original Sanskrit manuscript from which Khaliqdad was translating does not exist today. However, they identify the recension that Khaliqdad translated as the *Pañcākhyāna*, a twelfth-century recension of the *Pañcatantra*, written by a Jain monk named Pūrṇabhadra.⁴⁴ Given the strong ties between Jains and the Mughal court during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it should be no surprise that this was the recension that found its way to the Mughal imperial library. It is known from Jain sources, for example, that after the death of the Jain monk Padmasundara in Akbar’s court in 1569, Akbar held onto the deceased’s manuscript collection for about a decade, until he gifted it to another Jain monk at the court, Hīravijaya, in 1583.⁴⁵ As the analysis in the final part of this article shows, Khaliqdad read Pūrṇabhadra’s *Pañcākhyāna* closely and carefully, and took every measure to make this fact known through his translation.

Khaliqdad’s emphasis on returning to the sources raises questions around his criteria for authenticity and how the Mughals perceived the Sanskrit language and literature. The text he ended up translating was, after all, a late recension of the *Pañcatantra*, although he does not acknowledge this fact. Whether Khaliqdad was unaware of the text’s various recensions in Sanskrit or simply disregarded its textual history, the fact that the question of sources or manuscripts never comes up in the context of his translations from Sanskrit might suggest that working directly with a Sanskrit text was enough for him to determine that this is the true source, or at least a reliable one. This is particularly striking when compared with Khaliqdad’s prefatory comments on his translation from Arabic. When explaining why a new translation of Shahrastani’s *Kitab al-Nihal wa-l-Milal* was needed, Khaliqdad argues that manuscripts of the earlier Timurid translation were useless, as

Every copy that was prepared for emendation, was surely written based on one manuscript which had faults, or which was not looked at a second time by the translator. Moreover, the translation, in certain parts, is not faithful to the Arabic book. The

⁴² Ibid., 4–5.

⁴³ The name Khaliqdad gave his work further emphasizes his departure from the established textual tradition: he avoids using the title *Kalila wa Dimna*, the names of the two jackals in the first book, and instead maintains the Sanskrit title of the version from which he worked, *Panchakīyana*. Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. after 1048) was the only other premodern Muslim author who referred to this collection of stories using its Indian name, briefly discussing the book *Banj Tantar* in his work on Indian knowledge entitled *Tahqiq ma li-l-Hind min Maqula Maqbula fi’l-Aql aw Mardhula* (Book of the Investigation of Things Indian, Whether Discourses Agreeable to Reason or Despicable). Al-Biruni was concerned, like Khaliqdad, about reliability, transmission, and faithfulness in Ibn al-Muqaffa’s Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimna*, which relied on Burzoya’s Pahlavi’s texts and not directly on the original. See d’Hubert, “Homecoming,” 439n19.

⁴⁴ Khaliqdad, *Panchakīyana*, xxxvii, lxxx. Pūrṇabhadra’s recension is the only Sanskrit *Pañcatantra* for which any bibliographical information is available. The text was commissioned by a minister named Śrī Soma and the compilation was completed in January 1199. Pūrṇabhadra was almost certainly active around Jaisalmer, i.e., the northwestern part of the subcontinent, a region of thriving Jain culture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Pūrṇabhadra must have been of the Śvetāmbara tradition. Taylor, *The Fall of the Indigo Jackal*, 24–26.

⁴⁵ Audrey Truschke, “Jains and Muslims.” On Hīravijaya’s career at the Mughal court, see Jain, “Interaction of the ‘Lords’: The Jain Community and the Mughal Royalty under Akbar.” On the history of the cultural and religious ties between Jains and the Mughals, see, for example, Truschke, “Dangerous Debates: Jain Responses to Theological Challenges at the Mughal Court”; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 27–46; Truschke, “The Mughal Self and the Jain Other.”

translator brushes it off by writing that there was only one Arabic manuscript where the translation was produced.⁴⁶

In other words, not only are various manuscripts of the first Persian translation faulty due to scribal errors, but the translation itself is also not faithful to the Arabic source because it was based on only one copy, which probably had errors of its own. This passage reveals Khaliqdad's double standard with respect to the authenticity or trustworthiness of Arabic and Sanskrit sources: his comments on the issues in existing Persian and Arabic manuscripts suggest that, for him, simply returning to some Arabic source was not enough. Khaliqdad deemed it necessary to examine his sources more critically and trace their textual lineage, while also considering the human agents that participated in their production. Sanskrit texts, however, were almost ahistorical to him. Working on Sanskrit sources while disregarding their textual history satisfied his search for origins.⁴⁷

Did Khaliqdad really know Sanskrit?

Other Mughal translations from the late sixteenth century show that most translators did not have direct access to the Sanskrit sources. The Persian translations of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha* from the 1580s and 1590s, for example, were all produced by a group of Persian translators who relied on Sanskrit informants to mediate the Sanskrit texts in Hindavi. These informants were usually mentioned by name in prefaces or colophons. Khaliqdad, however, does not mention anyone. Is this enough for us to determine that Khaliqdad was indeed working by himself? While this omission alone does not prove anything, combined with the multilayered analogy Khaliqdad draws between himself and Burzoya—the sixth-century translator of the *Pañcatantra* from Sanskrit to Pahlavi—throughout his preface, it is clear Khaliqdad is trying to convince his readers that he was the only translator with a unique knowledge of Sanskrit.

Khaliqdad begins his survey of *Kalila wa Dimna's* textual history with Burzoya's translation, greatly elaborating on that story compared to the description he dedicates to later renditions. Moreover, Khaliqdad's account of Burzoya's tale differs somewhat from the story in most Arabic and Persian manuscripts. The most common version tells of the Persian king Anushirwan, who heard of a book in India called *Kalila wa Dimna* that contained everything a king should know. The king thus sent a person named Burzoya to India to bring that book back to Persia. Burzoya reached the court of the Indian king, but did not tell anyone of his plan. Since the book was a secret possession of the Indian king, his most prized treasure, Burzoya could not gain access to it. Eventually, a friend at the court obtained the precious book from the royal library for Burzoya, who copied and translated it into Pahlavi and quickly returned to Persia. As a reward for his efforts, Burzoya asked the Persian king that the story of his life and journey to India be written. This task was entrusted to Buzurjmihr, the king's minister, who wrote a chapter about Burzoya.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Khaliqdad, *Tawzih al-Milal*, 3–4.

⁴⁷ While Khaliqdad clearly states, in his preface to *Tawzih al-Milal*, the significance of textual criticism for the translator, the extent to which he actually relied on the original Arabic text is unclear. In an ambiguous statement regarding his work process, Khaliqdad writes: "I made every effort to write it in commonly understood Persian, except when explaining the intellectual introductions and technical terms of the various religions, or when explicating those expressions written in a very negligent and ugly manner. In those passages, I wrote what was suitable for each place." Muhammad Riza Jalali-Na'ini, who edited the text, suggests that this means we cannot consider Khaliqdad's work an independent translation, as he merely rewrote the first translation by simplifying its language and explaining difficult passages to the best of his ability. A comparative analysis of Khaliqdad's and the Timurid translation, which is beyond the scope of this article, might clarify how closely Khaliqdad worked with the original Arabic and how much he simply rewrote the existing translation. Khaliqdad, *Tawzih al-Milal*, 6.

⁴⁸ de Blois, *Burzūy's Voyage to India*, 40. Some versions of Burzoya's story do not even attribute the translation to him; rather, they tell of his memorization of the text, which he also wrote in Sanskrit and returned to Persia for Buzurjmihr to translate. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Borzūya."

Khaliqdad goes into great detail in narrating the story of Burzoya, stressing the importance of Burzoya's task and the uniqueness of his linguistic skills. However, Khaliqdad's account omits several details and emphasizes others, highlighting certain aspects of the story to make the analogy between the two most flattering for Khaliqdad and his patron.

The first piece of information Khaliqdad provides about Burzoya is that the latter was chosen by Anushirwan due to his particular skill in both Persian and Hindavi, i.e., Sanskrit.⁴⁹ Second, in closing his narrative about Burzoya, Khaliqdad mentions that Anushirwan kept the translation as part of the literary canon on kingship, and it remained there until the end of the rule of Yazdjird, the last king of 'Ajam.⁵⁰ By mentioning the centrality of Burzoya's translation in the libraries of the kings of 'Ajam, it seems Khaliqdad was attempting to speak to Akbar's desire to claim a long-lasting civilizational connection between India and pre-Islamic Persia, thus situating Mughal India as the true heir of ancient Persian civilization. This desire was expressed by Akbar himself, as we know from the preface to *Farhang-i Jahangiri* (1608), a Persian dictionary composed by Hasan Jamal al-Din Husayn Inju and commissioned by Akbar. According to the dictionary's author, Akbar blamed the Arabs and the Arab conquest of 'Ajam for the decline of Pahlavi and fashioned himself as recovering the lost cultural heritage of 'Ajam.⁵¹ The recovery process comprised philological projects of writing dictionaries and Sanskrit-Persian translations that were motivated, in part, by Mughal interest in pre-Islamic culture.⁵²

The reference to 'Ajam, together with the analogy between Khaliqdad and Burzoya, allowed the former to draw another analogy, between his own patron, Akbar, and Burzoya's patron, Anushirwan. Such analogies are commonly found in Persian texts, with Anushirwan used as the model for a wise and just king. Here, however, I would suggest that Anushirwan's figure is invoked not only for his great wisdom, but also for his patronage of Pahlavi literature and translations of Indian texts. Thus, Khaliqdad's portrayal of his patron as Anushirwan, the wise king, the great patron of Pahlavi literature, further substantiates the Mughal fashioning of themselves as heirs of the ancient Persian civilization.⁵³

Finally, Khaliqdad conveniently omits the fact that Burzoya was forbidden from reading the book and had to copy and translate it in secret, without the cooperation of the Indian court. This omission is necessary to making the analogy between Khaliqdad and Burzoya, as the circumstances of Khaliqdad's translation were not as politically challenging. Unlike Burzoya, Khaliqdad was both a member of the Mughal court and one of the few who worked closely with the emperor on translating Sanskrit texts. Khaliqdad had no trouble accessing the imperial library. In fact, he was specifically asked by the Indian ruler himself, i.e., Akbar, to render this precious book in Persian.

The analogy between Khaliqdad and Burzoya is brought home in the last paragraph of the preface, where the author explains how he was tasked with retranslating the *Pañcatantra*:

⁴⁹ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

⁵¹ In the author's preface, Akbar is quoted as saying: "Persian, Pahlavi, and Dari got ruined [...] for since the Arabs conquered the lands of 'Ajam, the Persian language got mixed with Arabic words, and most Persian, Dari and Pahlavi words were forsaken, let alone disappeared [...]." Mir Jamal al-Din Husayn Inju Shirazi, *Farhang-i Jahangiri*, 4.

⁵² Kinra, "Cultures of Comparative Philology in the Early Modern Indo-Persian World," 263–265; Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian," 336.

⁵³ Anushirwan, also known as King Khusraw I (r. 531–579), employed various intellectuals to translate numerous works from Greek and Sanskrit into Pahlavi. The king was identified with learning and education to such an extent that many collections of advice literature are attributed to him; Frye, "The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians," 161–162. Mika Natif makes a similar argument regarding the analogy between Akbar and Anushirwan based on analysis of several illustrated manuscripts of *Iyar-i Danish*, composed by Abu al-Fazl. These illustrations, she argues, portray Akbar as the Sassanian emperor and Abu al-Fazl as Burzoya. See Natif, "The Patron and the Author."

[...] then, after a long search, one such Burzoya, who is capable of this service, was found. Here, at every rank of the court there are close to a thousand Burzoyas. The fittest is the one who translates this book. Thus, the dice of fortune, i.e., this service, fell upon me, Mustafa Khaliqdad ‘Abbasi, the lowliest among the people of this court [...]. Accordingly, I wrote this rough draft, translating word for word and using simple, conversational Persian, without observing the norms of ornate speech.⁵⁴

Khaliqdad’s rhetoric here, presenting himself as modest and unworthy, is meant to state the exact opposite: it allows Khaliqdad to boast and, in fact, present himself as the best among the “thousand Burzoyas” at the court. In this way, Khaliqdad’s detailed account of Burzoya’s first translation, and the glorious light in which it is portrayed, serves as a model for Khaliqdad to imitate and to which he would like to be compared. The direct line he draws between Burzoya and himself emphasizes his authority and skills, as well as the special circumstances of the two: all the translators mentioned, who produced versions of *Kalila wa Dimna* during the millennium separating Burzoya and himself, did not work in India, had no direct access (physically and linguistically) to the Sanskrit source, and did not rely on the “original text” in their work.

Khaliqdad’s preface to *Panchakiyana*, read together with sections of his prefaces to *Darya-yi Asmar* and *Tawzih al-Milal*, contains a consistent discourse on translation. Khaliqdad is not concerned solely with questions of style and literary taste, but also the translator’s obligation to the source text and duty to convey it faithfully and accurately. Khaliqdad’s strong emphasis on faithfulness to the source text, combined with his criticism of ornate prose in translation, is what made his translation different from earlier *Kalila wa Dimna* renditions on the one hand, and rendered his project a failure on the other. The following section carefully analyzes Khaliqdad’s translation practices through a close reading of sections from the *Panchakiyana* to determine whether Khaliqdad indeed followed his prefatory statements and explore how he tackled challenges along the way.

Juggling between contradicting literary commitments

Khaliqdad’s task seems, at first, straightforward. As he writes in *Panchakiyana*, “I wrote this rough draft, translating word for word and using simple, conversational Persian, without observing the norms of ornate speech.”⁵⁵ He makes similar comments in his other translations, emphasizing his use of simple, conversational, easy-to-understand Persian, but the reader quickly learns that translating faithfully does not exclude additions to the final text. We also learn that Khaliqdad did not in fact have the final say in his translations. Akbar, Khaliqdad’s patron, was actively involved in their production. In the preface to *Darya-yi Asmar*, the author briefly notes that “the patron also signed off on that style and arrangement.”⁵⁶ In *Panchakiyana*, Khaliqdad elaborates further on Akbar’s contribution: “When it [i.e., the translation] arrives at the noble ears of his majesty, it shall receive the glory of correction, as he’ll be in charge of reductions and additions, the arrangement of remembrances, adding other chapters, dicta, proverbs, stories, rare poems, etc.”⁵⁷ Thus, we learn that Akbar was directly involved in these projects and acted as an arbiter of taste with respect to the stylistic and aesthetic aspects of the final work.⁵⁸ This excerpt

⁵⁴ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁶ Khaliqdad, *Darya-yi Asmar*, 4.

⁵⁷ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 5. By “remembrances” (*dhikr*), Khaliqdad is probably referring to prefatory chapters praising past rulers, as one can find in Nasrallah Munshi’s *Kalila wa Dimna*, such as remembrances for the Abbasid ruler al-Mansur (d. 775) or Mahmud of Ghazna (d. 1030).

⁵⁸ The patron’s creative involvement in literary production was not unique to the *Panchakiyana*. Akbar was also involved in the *Razmnama* project, as Bada’uni tells us, and presided over the learned gathering for several nights. Bada’uni famously complained that Akbar often wrongly suspected that he was trying to make interpolations. Rizvi,

sheds light on the division of labor between translator and patron and reveals the gap between the text as we know it and what it was meant to be, had it been completed. Apart from the occasional inserted verse (explored below), the one surviving manuscript of the *Panchakiyana* does not include any of these “remembrances, other chapters, dicta, proverbs, stories, rare poems, etc.”

What kind of text is produced by translating faithfully into plain, conversational Persian? For Khaliqdad, it seems that faithful translation meant making the source text as present as possible in the translation, constantly proving to his readers—even those who could not read the original Sanskrit for comparison—that he was indeed working closely with Sanskrit sources. In this sense, Khaliqdad foreignized his text to a great extent; only an interlinear translation would be more foreignized.⁵⁹

Including Sanskrit words in Persian transliteration was a common practice in many Mughal-era translations. As such, Khaliqdad also followed this practice, retaining all “untranslatable,” i.e., too culturally specific, words and providing a brief gloss immediately after. For example, words such as *kṣatriya*, *purohita*, and *gandharva vivāha* are transliterated in Persian script as *chhatrī*, *purohit*, and *gandharb biyāh*, with the added glosses usually giving cultural context. Thus, *rikhīshars* (*ṛṣīśvaras* in Sanskrit) are explained as “worshippers who are the saints in the brahmins’ religion.”⁶⁰ When explaining the difference between a *kṣatriya* king and a *vaiśya* weaver, Khaliqdad transliterates these words and explains: “he [i.e., the king] is of a great tribe and his lineage is very elevated, while you [i.e., the weaver] are of a lowly tribe and your lineage is base.”⁶¹

However, Khaliqdad also goes further in foreignizing the source text, as he attempts to conserve the formal aspects of the original Sanskrit prosimetrum. To indicate that the original Sanskrit text was prosimetric, for example, Khaliqdad distinguishes between narrative sections originally composed in prose and the proverbs and dicta originally expressed in verse. He does not attempt to re-versify the Sanskrit verses according to Persian prosody, however, instead marking these parts as *ishlok* (Skt. *śloka*) and translating their contents literally.⁶² For example, the Sanskrit verse “While being alone, roaming the forest/ Without any royal signs or knowledge of statecraft/ Because the lion is naturally powerful/ They all worship him as king” is translated by Khaliqdad impressively accurately as follows:

ishlok: The lion is all alone, lives in the jungle, does not have any noble retinue or royal insignia, and he is unaware of royal conduct. And yet, since he is the strongest, all the wild beasts accept him as their king.⁶³

Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar’s Reign, 210–211. Akbar was also involved in Abu al-Fazl’s *‘Iyar-i Danish*, and Kashifi’s patron was involved in his *Anwar-i Suhayli*. Christine van Ruymbeke writes: “both works [...] appear to result from the collaboration of creative duos, where the patron of letters commissions the work and encourages its writing, and might even have participated actively in the creative process. This blurring of the financial and the intellectual aspects holds the probable understanding that the patrons were the real owners of the finished product.” van Ruymbeke, “Authorship, Ownership and Rewriting,” 28.

⁵⁹ On the practice of interlinear translation in Islamicate languages, see Zadeh, *The Vernacular Quran*, 263–268; Ricci, “Reading between the Lines,” 68–80.

⁶⁰ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 31–32.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶² In Persian prosimetrum, verses are usually marked by meta-textual markers such as *bayt* or *shīr*, *maṣnawī* or *rubāī*. When inserting Persian verses from the canon, Khaliqdad uses these markers occasionally, and it might be the case that the practice of indicating a *śloka* derives from that, as Sanskrit texts do not distinguish between prose and verses section in the same manner. On the practice of verse insertions in Persian prose, see Rubanovich, “Aspects of Medieval Intertextuality,” 252–253.

⁶³ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 13. The Sanskrit verse reads:

*ekākini vanavāsiny arājalakṣmany anitīśāstrajñe |
sattvotkaṭe mṛgapatau rājeti girah pariṇamanti ||*
See Hertel, *The Pañchatantra*, 5 (verse 5).

Often, after translating a verse literally, Khaliqdad adds a paraphrastic explanation of the proverb to further elucidate its meaning. For example, he offers the following translation of a proverb comparing the vile nature of an easy-to-please dog to the superior elephant, who is not as inclined to please its human caretaker:

Whenever one gives a bone or some food to a dog, the dog wags its tail in front of them, shows its belly, and puts its mouth on the ground. The elephant keeper, however, when giving grains to the elephant, must perform a hundred thousand kind and soothing gestures until it eats a single grain.⁶⁴

Following the literal translation, Khaliqdad provides an explanation:

What is meant is that the dog, because of its inferior nature and despicable disposition, humiliates itself for [filling up] its stomach. The elephant, because it is inherently of superior nature, does not eat even when its caretaker puts the food right in front of it. He must feed the elephant with great kindness and skill.⁶⁵

Khaliqdad's added explanations are mostly paraphrastic and do not draw upon discourses external to the text. Even when diverging from the original Sanskrit and inserting glosses and clarifications, the author remains close to the text at hand. Similar to conventional commentarial writing in the form of *hāshiyā* (marginalia), Khaliqdad's comments are explanatory in nature and do not offer much insight into the meanings, interpretive controversies, or application of the text. Formally, however, the author's intervention is not styled as marginalia. His explanations are inserted in the body of the text as running commentary, albeit somewhat inconsistently. Not every Sanskrit verse is followed by a paraphrastic explanation, and the logic guiding Khaliqdad's choice of which verse to comment on is not readily apparent.

On occasion, the author analyzes the rhetorical figures used to make puns in the Sanskrit verse to demonstrate his intimate knowledge of Sanskrit literature. For example, in a section discussing the relationship between a king and his subjects, Khaliqdad translates a Sanskrit verse in such a way that one could almost hear the original Sanskrit compounds making the pun: "A king, who is like a lamp, skillfully draws wealth, that is like oil, from his subjects, without anyone noticing; like a lamp that draws up the oil through the wick, and no one notices that."⁶⁶ Following this literal translation, Khaliqdad explains what is lost in the translation:

It should not be hidden that the subtlety of this simile in the Indian language is found when it is said that the king draws wealth and the lamp draws oil through *gun*, so that no one notices; and *gun* with a Persian *kāf* with a *ḍamma* vowel, and a quiescent *nūn*, means both "wick" and "skill."⁶⁷

In addition to exemplifying Khaliqdad's familiarity with Sanskrit, this passage sheds further light on the author's philological training. His clarification of the correct pronunciation of the Sanskrit word *guṇa*, using Perso-Arabic grammatical terminology, suggests his familiarity with the range of Persian philological enterprises characterizing the early modern

⁶⁴ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 15.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 63. The original Sanskrit is as follows:

nṛpadīpo dhanasnehaṃ prajābhyaḥ saṃgrhann api |
antarasthair guṇaiḥ śubhair lakṣyate naiva kenacit ||
Hertel, *The Pañchatantra*, 41 (verse 180).

⁶⁷ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 63.

Persianate world, most notably South Asia. This kind of clarifying comment, itself based on earlier Arabic commentarial practices, echoes terminology from early modern Persian dictionaries and Persian commentarial writing on poetry. In another place, Khaliqdad adds a brief clarification regarding the meaning and pronunciation of the word *palwal*: “*Palwal*, on the pattern of *hanṣal*, with a Persian *bā* and two *lāms* in the middle. It is a bitter medicine unique to India that makes one vomit.”⁶⁸ Here, Khaliqdad maps a word from an Indian language into Perso-Arabic grammar. The Arabic word *hanṣal*, the pattern of which Khaliqdad compares to the word *palwal*, also serves as a gloss, as it is the name of a bitter fruit used for medicinal purposes.⁶⁹ Perso-Arabic grammatical discourse and conventions of commentarial writing, then, are the main discourses on which Khaliqdad draws to keep his translation as close to the original Sanskrit as possible, while also clarifying what requires clarification.⁷⁰

Khaliqdad diverges from the original Sanskrit in another major way, by inserting verses from the Persian canon throughout his text. Prosimetrum is so strongly identified with the literary traditions of *Pañcatantra* and *Kalila wa Dimna* that it would have been surprising not to find inserted verses in his translation, despite the author’s professed goal of avoiding ornate prose and remaining as faithful to the source text as possible. This is because the function of verses in this tradition of wisdom literature is not merely ornamental. Not only is poetry considered the founding form of both Arabic and Persian literature, to which all other forms are poor relations, it would be wrong, as Julie Meisami argues, to give primacy to prose “frame” narratives over inserted lyric verses.⁷¹

In the Sanskrit tradition, the versified proverbs and maxims in the various *Pañcatantra* recensions cannot be definitively attributed to an author or even to a text, as many were borrowed from existing Sanskrit literature—such as the epics or Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra*—but their origins are also unknown. These *subhāṣitas* (“well-spoken” sayings or counsels) were likely borrowed from “the floating mass of oral tradition.”⁷² The structure of *Pañcatantra* recensions also supports Meisami’s rejection of the primacy of “frame” narratives. Most stories in the text begin with a verse relevant to the situation at hand. Upon another character’s request to explain the saying, the first speaker then responds with a story, elucidating and exemplifying the lesson to be learned from the proverb.⁷³ Rather than decorating a prose narrative, then, the verses in fact frame prose narratives that act as examples or explanations of the versified *subhāṣitas*.

In the Persian tradition, inserted verses in works of *adab* also often precede, at least temporally if not in terms of authority, the prose narratives. *Adab* denotes both the appropriate social conduct, its ethics and practices, as well as the literature that gathers proverbs, poetry, and parables dedicated to these issues, preserving their wisdom and edifying literati and nobility through them.⁷⁴ The term *adab*, then, encompasses both the what and the how: the contents as well as how it is gathered, styled, and composed. The contents could be gathered from a range of sources, such as pre-Islamic poetry and collections of sayings, the Quran, verses from the great masters of Persian poetry, historiography, and more. The knowledge and skills required for styling, quoting, compiling, and composing could be

⁶⁸ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 141. *Palwal* is used in Urdu as a name for *Trichosanthes dioica*. It comes from the Sanskrit word *paṭola*; *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English*, comp. John T. Platts, s.v. “*palwal*.”; *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, comp. Monier Monier-Williams, s.v. “*paṭola*.”

⁶⁹ *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, comp. Edward William Lane, s.v. “*hanṣal*.”

⁷⁰ In incorporating glosses and commentary throughout his translation, Khaliqdad further places himself in conversation with the tradition of *Kalila wa Dimna*. Nasrallah Munshi’s twelfth-century book, as it consisted of so many Arabic words and verses, was one of the first literary texts to receive Persian commentaries as early as the thirteenth century. Multilingualism then was a defining feature of this tradition from the very beginning. See d’Hubert, “Homecoming,” 441.

⁷¹ Meisami, “Mixed Prose and Verse in Medieval Persian Literature.”

⁷² Sternbach, *The Kāvya-Portions in the Kathā-Literature*, 27.

⁷³ Taylor, *The Fall of the Indigo Jackal*, 9.

⁷⁴ Kilpatrick, “*Adab*,” 54–56.

found in treatises on literary criticism and literary manuals. These texts make it clear that *adab* was understood to comprise a range of philological sciences (*‘ulūm*), and the practitioner of *adab*, or *adīb*, should master them all: memorization of the lexicon, memorization of grammatical inflections and the rules of prosody, composition of prose and verse, calligraphy, and the art of quotation.⁷⁵ The practice of verse insertion is not only a matter of selection and combination, as such, but instead establishes the author/compiler as the final authority of the work, higher even than the authority of the material they used, even if the author quotes from highly esteemed works to confer their own text with greater authority. Each verse is separate and discrete, detached from context, without an overarching frame, but are all unified by their compiler's voice and masterful ways of inserting quotes in appropriate places.⁷⁶

Khaliqdad, thusly, not only aimed to represent the original prosimetric structure of the Sanskrit text, but also recreated the form by drawing from the Persian canon. His text, however, is not overflowing with verses like the works of his predecessors in the *Kalila wa Dimna* tradition. There is a total of twenty-three verse insertions throughout the text, varying in length from one hemistich to twenty-one consecutive verses. Eighteen verses appear in the first book, which is also the longest in both Persian and the original Sanskrit. In only six out of the twenty-three cases does Khaliqdad provide the name of the poet from whom he quotes. Sa‘di is the most quoted poet, with a total of seven quotes. Next in line is Hafiz with five quotes. Jami, Anwari, ‘Iraqi, Amīr Khusraw, and Nasrallah Munshi are each quoted once. There are six verses whose origins I could not identify.

Khaliqdad's inserted verses function in two ways: they explain and entertain. In some cases, when the laconic phrasing of a translated *śloka* does not convey the point clearly enough in Persian, Khaliqdad attaches a Persian verse quoted from the canon, which expresses the same idea, to further clarify the lesson to be learned. For example, in one of the very first stories, Khaliqdad translates a verse literally, paraphrastically explains it in his own words, and finally quotes a verse from Sa‘di's *Gulistan* that encapsulates the same lesson as the original Sanskrit.

ishlok: If you don't want a calamity and misfortune to happen to someone, you must talk to them without being asked, for this is an act of good men; it would be immoral otherwise. The intention is that if someone is unaware of the injury and harmfulness in front of them, you must warn them even without being asked, i.e.,

When you see a blind man and a well
if you remain silent it is a sin.⁷⁷

In some cases, a well-known Persian verse repeats the same meaning so neatly that Khaliqdad is almost compelled to insert it to point out the similarities between Sanskrit and Persian wisdom literature, confer greater authority on his translation, and please connoisseurs of Persian poetry. For example, following his translation of the Sanskrit *śloka* "A friend is one who helps out at difficult and painful times, even if that person is of another

⁷⁵ Heinrichs, "The Classification of the Sciences," 136–139.

⁷⁶ Meisami, "Mixed Prose and Verse," 295–316. Christine van Ruymbeke disagrees. In contrast to Meisami's claim that prosimetrum manifests a rather strong authorial presence, van Ruymbeke believes that "a prosimetric text, by its avowed inclusion of intertextual elements and different voices, is in all cases blurring the notion of *auctoritas*." van Ruymbeke, "Authorship, Ownership and Rewriting," 200.

⁷⁷ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 21. The verse is taken from the first chapter, story no. 38 in the *Gulistan*. Khaliqdad only slightly changes the verse by turning the first person in the original into second person in his quotation. See Yusufi, *Gulistan-i Sa‘di*, 83 (line 24). The Sanskrit verse is as follows:

apṛṣṭas tasya tad brūyād yasya necchet parābhavam |
eṣa eva satām dharmo viparītas tato 'nyathā ||
Hertel, *The Pañchatantra*, 9 (verse 49).

family. However, in days of ease and prosperity, everyone is a friend,” Khaliqdad is reminded of a two-verse sequence from Sa’di’s *Gulistan*, which expresses the very same wisdom.⁷⁸

A friend isn’t that who, at times of ease
self-praises his friendship and fraternity
A friend is that who holds a friend’s hand
through pain and melancholy⁷⁹

These verses are not offered as an explanation. Explanatory verses are usually preceded by common phrases such as “the intention is that” (*murād ān ast ki*) or “that is to say” (*ya’ni*). Rather, when Khaliqdad appeals to his readers’ literary taste and familiarity with the canon, he uses phrases such as “on this topic, too” (*ham darīn bāb*) or “on this meaning, too” (*ham darīn ma’ni*) before quoting verses from the great masters of Persian literature.

Khaliqdad quotes verses not only from works of *adab*—such as Sa’di’s *Gulistan*—but also from lyric poetry. Sometimes, inserted verses do not express the Sanskrit lesson in such similar terms as we have seen above. For example, as an explanation for the Sanskrit *śloka* “a wise man cannot stay even one minute in a place where they don’t know left from right,”⁸⁰ Khaliqdad offers a verse quoted from Hafiz.

Tell the Huma: “Don’t ever cast your shadow of nobility
over a land filled with more sparrows than parrots”⁸¹

The clearest example of inserted verses meant to please and entertain the reader is also the longest sequence of verses Khaliqdad quotes. While most of his insertions consist of one to two verses in a row, this passage contains twenty-one verses, and poetically retells the entire story Khaliqdad had just translated from Sanskrit. This is the famous story of the tortoise and the two ducks, also mentioned above. Khaliqdad gives a long credit to Jami, the poet from whom he quotes, and repeats the entire narrative in Jami’s words.⁸² For the

⁷⁸ The Sanskrit verse is as follows:

sa suhrd vyasane yaḥ syād anyajātyudbhavo ‘pi san |
vṛddhau sarvo ‘pi mitraṃ syāt sarveṣāṃ eva dehinām ||
Hertel, *The Pañchatantra*, 90 (verse 340).

⁷⁹ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 129. The verse is taken from the first chapter, story no. 16 in the *Gulistan*. Here, too, Khaliqdad slightly changes the wording in the first *misra* of each verse. Sa’di’s two verses are as follows:

دوست مشمار آن که در نعمت زند	لاف یاری و برادر خواندگی
دوست آن دانم که گیرد دست دوست	در پریشان حالی و درماندگی

Yusufi, *Gulistan-i Sa’di*, 71 (lines 11–12).

While in Khaliqdad’s text they are quoted as follows:

دوست آن نبود که در راحت زند	لاف یاری و برادر خواندگی
دوست آن باشد که گیرد دست دوست	در پریشان حالی و درماندگی

⁸⁰ The Sanskrit verse is as follows:

savyadakṣiṇayor yatra viśeṣo nopalabhyate |
na tatra kṣaṇam apy āryo vidyamānagatir vaset ||
Hertel, *The Pañchatantra*, 11 (verse 65).

⁸¹ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 24. This line is taken from *ghazal* no. 156 by Hafiz. See Khanlari, *Diwan-i Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz*, 312.

⁸² The story is taken from Jami’s *Tuhfat al-Ahrar* (1481). This is not another *Kalila wa Dimna* rendition; the long poem comprises twenty discourses on various religious and moral topics, accompanied by allegorical anecdotes. See Losensky, “Jāmi I. Life and Works.”

sake of brevity, I do not include a translation of the entire versified narrative here, but only the closing lines in which Jami concludes the moral of the story:

Jami, when it comes to idle speech
 practice caution and shut up!
 So when you're in this frightful wilderness
 you won't fall down from the sky!⁸³

Jami's versified narrative does not add much nuance or clarity to the story as it is told in prose; it simply offers the same narrative in a neatly wrapped, nicer package. Not only that, but the verses are also quoted from one of the Persian poets most beloved by the Mughals: Jami's popularity among Mughal elites was closely related to the "Mughal revival of Herat" as their direct source of illustrious cultural inheritance.⁸⁴ Inserting the entire famous story in its versified form, then, seems to have been considered appealing to Mughal literary connoisseurs.

Sometimes, Khaliqdad plants quoted verses as part of the narrative, not metatextually in his own voice as a narrator. Quoted from love poems by poets such as Hafiz or 'Iraqi, Khaliqdad uses these poetry lines to advance the narrative, as he puts them in the mouths of various characters. One beloved, for example, recites a line from Hafiz when meeting her lover:

Who am I to deserve crossing your noble mind?
 You're too kind to me, even as I wear your doorstep-dirt as my crown.⁸⁵

Having characters speak the words of Hafiz and other poets in these amusing, irreverent, and sometimes violent stories, Khaliqdad must have aimed for a surprising, even comic effect. This is, of course, in addition to him demonstrating his familiarity with the Persian canon and his ability to quote from it cleverly.

Translation, literariness, and literalness at Akbar's court

This article has suggested that studying failed or unfinished translations can teach us a great deal about textual practices, literary taste, and how these may change over time, arguing that failed retranslations are where literary traditions and translation norms are most clearly negotiated and contested. Studying the work of Mustafa Khaliqdad 'Abbasi, specifically his *Panchakiyana*, this article showed his unique approach to translation. The analysis offered here unpacked his layered approach to textual transposition, consisting of literal translation, paraphrastic explanations, and creative quotation from the Persian canon. In my reading, Khaliqdad emerges as a gifted Sanskritist, a careful philologist, and an educated man of letters.

It was Khaliqdad's endeavor to reconcile his commitment to the source text with his commitment to the genre and practices of *adab* literature, while at the same time striving to please his patron, that eventually rendered his project unsuccessful. Khaliqdad was trying to hold both ends of the spectrum between foreignization and domestication: extreme literalness in translation and unwavering commitment to a faithful representation of the source text on the one hand, and paying homage to the Islamicate tradition of *Kalila wa Dimna* in embracing many of its conventions on the other.

⁸³ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 122.

⁸⁴ Alam, "Scholar, Saint, and Poet," 171-172.

⁸⁵ Khaliqdad, *Panchakiyana*, 74. This line is the *matla'* from *ghazal* no. 312 by Hafiz. See Khanlari, *Diwan-i Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz*, 632.

The analysis above reveals why Khaliqdad's *Panchakiyana* did not receive acclaim at the time: while his control over Sanskrit is impressive, his linguistic knowledge and meticulous philological approach to translation did not seem to have impressed the literary circles at the Mughal court. His verse insertions were not enough to cover the fact that his literal translations, accompanied by long paraphrastic comments, produced repetitive prose without flow. This combination resulted in an odd mixture of registers that did not fulfil the standards of eloquent prose writing and advice literature.

Akbar's literary preferences, notably his distaste for Arabic and ornate prose that heavily relied on Arabic grammatical inflections, were undoubtedly a major factor in how Khaliqdad composed his book. But Akbar's literary taste, albeit reflected in other contemporaneous Persian translations, cannot be seen as representative of broader Persian literary trends. Akbar's explicit request that his translators limit their use of Arabic and avoid ornate speech was not a culmination of shifts in style and literary standards in the broader Persianate world, did not have a lingering effect on later productions of Persian translations, and did not succeed in setting new standards for Persian literary production more broadly.

Although Akbar's involvement in his translators' work was formative, he cannot be blamed for Khaliqdad's lack of success. Other translations produced at Akbar's court, which strove to speak to their royal patron's literary preferences, proved to be quite successful at the time and in the years that followed. Khaliqdad's failure is to be found in his attempt to reconcile innovative translation strategies with traditional literary expectations and genre requirements. What might have been acceptable in other genres, such as historiography or expository mystical treatises, was unacceptable in wisdom literature.

Khaliqdad's approach to translation did not have immediate effects on translation norms and strategies. It might, however, be seen as a very early precursor to the later professionalization of translation practices among munshis during the colonial period. While it may not be easy to draw a direct line from Khaliqdad at the end of the sixteenth century to munshis translating into Persian in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Khaliqdad's discourse on and strategies of translation suggest that what we now call proper or faithful translation was not introduced to South Asia, as commonly believed, in the colonial period. Khaliqdad's insistence on origins and sources, as well as his commitment to literalism and plain language, show that these issues of faithfulness, searches for Ur-texts, and accuracy already concerned Akbar's milieu in the 1590s.

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