

Faquir M. Hunzai and Shafiqe N. Virani, "This Old Hag by Nāṣir-i Khusrāw," in *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi'i Vision of Islam*, ed. Hermann Landolt, Samira Sheikh, and Kutub Kassam, London: I.B. Tauris, 2008, 276-278.

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AN ANTHOLOGY OF ISMAILI LITERATURE

A SHI'I VISION OF ISLAM

Edited by Hermann Landolt, Samira Sheikh & Kutub Kassam

THIS OLD HAG¹

Made off with her own children she did, once more, this old hag – the world.
We became old and she's young again, now isn't that a nice
piece of witchcraft!

Have you ever seen a mother whose son grows old
While his old mamma becomes young over and over?

Really! Someone whose mother becomes youthful while he ages;
Now doesn't that sound like the inverse of sound reasoning?

How can you be fooled by this repulsive old hag's colourful, deceptive garb
When you're well aware of her abominations?

You certainly can't marry this worthless bride.
After all, she's never played the matron for anyone.

When you don't call her, she'll call on you with her endless coaxing,
But when you pursue her, that's when you'll see her true colours!

Day and night, how like a dragon she confronts the wise
While fools she approaches like a cat or weasel.

Chameleon-like she is, her colours ever changing,
Sometimes friend, sometimes foe, like an Indian sword.

This world is like your shadow, always running ahead of you.
Nobody can ever overtake their shadow, so how long will you keep running
after it?

Hoping that a beautiful Turk will serve you,
You've become the slave of a Khān, and dust at the feet of a Turk.

Oh you whom the old world has aged, have you no sense?
How long will you wail over your youth and the springtime of your life?

Anything subject to the course of time, the passage of night and day
Cannot remain changeless. Oh sages, this is where the Manicheans lost
their way.

1. Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān*, ed. M. Mīnūvī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1978), pp. 344–347, no. 164, this selection tr. Faquir M. Hunzai and Shafique N. Virani.



The moment you imagine that it's befriended you single-heartedly,
Take heed! For it will show itself to be two-faced.

If you truly know that He never slumbers,
Then it behoves you not to slumber in obedience to Him.

Follow the path of obedience and hearken to knowledge with the ear
of understanding.
After all, you while away the time listening to every type of music.

Oh you who are occupied in the arts, make the good works of faith
your eternal occupation,
Such that your goodness may find goodness as its reward.

How delighted you are when people speak of the justice of
King Anūshirwān.
So why not be just, so that you really become Anūshirwān yourself?

If you wish to be well-spoken, then listen;
How can you speak well if you don't listen first?

Those who have never approached the learned on their knees
Can never sit with them, knee-to-knee.

When they become pure of conduct, people become strong of heart.
When your conduct is pure and your heart is strong, how secure you
become.

You became well-bred when you ceased coveting from all and sundry,
You became a leader when you became a follower of the wise.

O farmer, this life's your tillage and you're asleep in heedlessness.
Surely, what you sowed today you will reap tomorrow

You must become like wheat that you may be worthy of human beings.
So long as you're tasteless as barley, none save donkeys would relish you.

The only true humans are the folk of God's true faith,
But your ignorance has made you a hermit, isolated from the folk
of faith.

You're such a coward, you fear following the path of lions.
Go – follow those lions! Forsake this deer-like timidity.

Take on the sweetness of a delicious date that human beings may crave you.
Who would like you if you're bitter as a gall-apple?

If you don't exert yourself to the point of exhaustion, you will never learn,
So don't bother seeking equality with the wise.

For no matter how pearl-like a rounded bead may be,
Though it may fool you, a jeweller will know it instantly.

It is through faith that you can make yourself part of the *ahl al-bayt*
of Muṣṭafā
If you have faith, don't fret for not having long locks like 'Alid offspring.

You've heard the tale of Salmān, the words of Muṣṭafā,
That Salmān was of his *ahl al-bayt*, despite his Persian tongue.¹

If you learn you can lift your crown to the heavens,
Though you be in this dark ditch and fettered in heavy chains.

Ignorance has made you cowardly and lazy so that in weakness
Your soul is incapable of circling the people of strength.

To my mind your cure is knowledge, knowledge of the truth,
Yet day and night from this medicine you fly in terror, fleeing.

All who catch the fragrance of my medicine will doubtless say to you:
'Ah, you're on the path of Nāṣir, son of Khusraw'

If you desire delightful verse and metres sweet, elegant words brimful
with meaning
Read the poetry of *ḥujjat!*²

(Translated by Faquir M. Hunzai and Shafique N. Virani)

1. For Salmān al-Fārisī, see n. 1, p. 274 above.

2. That is, Nāṣir-i Khusraw himself.