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Title:

Imagining India and the canon of Arabic poetry in al-Yamanī al-Shirwānī's *Ḥadīqat al-afraḥ li-izālat al-atrāḥ*

Arabic literature has been neglected by single-language literary histories of India, and more recent attempts to tackle India's multilingual literary history have also tended to take little account of Arabic. When Arabic is mentioned in the context of Indian cultural and intellectual history, it is often caricatured as a 'religious' language, a label that belies its plurality of functions and the nuanced part it played in the articulation of cultural and linguistic identities.

The field of Arabic poetry in the 18th and early 19th centuries was a vibrant one, a reflection of the continuing importance of Arabic to intellectual elites in India during the period. This paper will consider how the Indian contribution to the Arabic poetic canon is conceived of in *Ḥadīqat al-afrāḥ li-izālat al-atrāḥ* by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Yamanī al-Shirwānī (d. 1840). The work is a geographically arranged biographical dictionary of Arabic poets, modelled on earlier Arabic biographical dictionaries of the 17th century, and within the tradition of geographical arrangement established by al-Thaʿālibī (d. 1038). However, unlike its precursors, *Ḥadīqat al-afrāḥ* includes a section on Arabic poets of India, alongside other sections on Yemen (the author's birthplace), the Hijaz, Egypt and Iraq. al-Shirwānī cites Arabic poetry by well-known 18th century figures such as Āzād Bilgrāmī and Shāh Walīullāh, in addition to lesser known poets and al-Shirwānī's own contemporaries in early 19th century North India.

By examining the geographical arrangement of *Ḥadīqat al-afrāḥ* and the juxtaposition of older with more recent poets, this paper will explore how al-Shirwānī imagines the spatiality and temporality of the Indian contribution to Arabic poetry. By probing imaginings of India, Arabia and Mecca, as well as the ethno-linguistic categories of ʿarab and ʿajam, an attempt will be made to better understand what it meant for Arabic to be a cosmopolitan, transregional language.