

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship

Lecture cum Seminar

Thursday, January 12, 2012, 16.00 – 19.00

Freie Universität Berlin, Room J 23/16, Habelschwerdter Allee 45

Prashant Keshavmurthy

(Zukunftsphilologie Fellow 2011/12 / McGill University)

The Local Universality of Poetic Pleasure: Sirājuddīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū and Persian Literary Theory

Chair: Islam Dayeh

(Freie Universität Berlin)

The concept of the speaking subject that fundamentally underlay all Islamicate discourses on language came to be constituted as a problem in mid eighteenth century Mughal India when Persophone Indians, Iranians and Central Asians competed for courtly patronage. Sirājuddīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū (1689-1756), the Indo-Persian polymath of the period, responded in a variety of genres to this problematization of the subject of speech, retrieving in Persian ancient Arabic theories of mimesis and reinterpreting ancient Perso- Arabic ethico-aesthetic attitudes for his purposes. Central to the older discourses on language that Ārzū interpreted was the category of 'a balanced nature'. Ārzū marshaled his treatises, dictionaries, commentaries and poetry to decisively demonstrate that this universal aesthetic category had always and everywhere contained historically local content. This essay explicates the conceptual grid traversing Ārzū's oeuvre, focusing in particular on Ārzū's historicization of the concept of 'linguistic purity'.

This paper's discussion will mainly draw on the passages I have translated and made available from Ārzū's *Musmir*, *'Attiyā-ye kubrā va muhibat-e 'uzmā*, *Khiyābān sharh-e gulistān-e sa'di* and *Dād-e sukhan*. In addition, it will include readings of passages that I have also translated and made available from Shams-e Qays Rāzi's *Al-mu'jam fi ma'āyir ash'ār al-'ajam* (1220-21) and Lālā Tek Chand Bahār's *Bahār-e 'ajam* (circa 1752).

Prashant Keshavmurthy is currently Assistant Professor of Persian Studies at the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University. He completed his dissertation at the Department of Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures with an affiliation to the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University, New York, in 2010.

In his dissertation, Keshavmurthy first analyzed the conceptions of fiction and its authorship in Persian and Urdu literary cultures of the 13th and 18th centuries. Subsequently, he examined the paradigmatic shift in mimesis in the Urdu literary world after 1857 which resulted in the interpretative obscuration of this pre-colonial heritage.

During his Zukunftsphilologie-fellowship, Keshavmurthy will focus on one of the projects comprising the first part of his dissertation, arguing that in the pre-colonial Persianate world a poet's life was conceived as an effect of his poetry, of the meanings he made, rather than preceding it – as from the late 19th century onwards – as pre-poetic "experience". Simultaneously mundane and metaphysical, a poet's life replicated the logic of double meaning in his texts. Keshavmurthy will argue that the double meaning of the life of Kashmir's most famous Persian language poet, Ghani Kashmiri (d. 1669), as told over three centuries in biographical dictionaries, is ultimately modeled on the logic of double meaning in his own distiches.

Keshavmurthy's interests include literary translation, pre-colonial literary theory and culture, Mughal urban history and literary modernity in Urdu. Besides the book manuscript based on his doctoral thesis, he is also preparing a book of translations into English from 16th, 17th and 18th century Persian poets. Keshavmurthy's "Finitude and the Authorship of Fiction: Muhammad 'Awfi's Preface to his Chronicle Lubab alalbab (The Piths of Intellect)" was published in Arab Studies Journal (2011).

Lecture-cum-Seminar

The Lecture-cum-Seminar series is a central element of the scholarly program of the Zukunftsphilologie project. It is conceived as a working seminar of 3 to 5 hours. The lecture (ca. 45-60 minutes) is meant to introduce the audience to the research problem and provide the general analytical and theoretical framework for the topic. This is followed by a practical seminar, wherein the speaker demonstrates his or her case by reference to texts in the original language and in English translation. It is hoped that this Lecture-cum-Seminar series, a combination of theory and a direct engagement with texts, will enable scholars to examine the comparative aspect of the problematic without neglect of the local and singular nature of the texts examined.

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship

The project Zukunftsphilologie endeavours to promote and emphasize primary textual scholarship beyond the classical humanistic canon. In an age of advanced communication, intellectual specialization, and unprecedented migration of knowledge and people, the discipline of philology assumes new relevance. Zukunftsphilologie aspires to support research in neglected varieties of philology with the explicit aim to integrate texts and scholarly traditions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East as well as from Europe itself.

Zukunftsphilologie refers to the polemic between the classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz and Friedrich Nietzsche around the method and meaning of classical studies. As a project it sees itself as part of a growing trend towards a more global intellectual history. It is inspired in particular by the work of Edward Said and Sheldon Pollock.

In order to promote historically-conscious philology, Zukunftsphilologie will foster research in the following areas: genealogies and transformations of philological practice, philology's place in the system of knowledge (e.g. its relation to science, theology and jurisprudence), and philology and the university. Furthermore, Zukunftsphilologie aims to support critical reviews of historical and philological practice. In revisiting important „philological wars“, the goal is not to merely evaluate the argumentative worth of these debates, but to reflect on the wider cultural and political context in which these „philological wars“ emerged and how they have shaped our knowledge of the past.

The project Zukunftsphilologie is co-directed by Angelika Neuwirth, Manan Ahmed and Islam Dayeh (all Freie Universität Berlin) and is associated with and located at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School for Literary Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Zukunftsphilologie is a project at the Forum Transregionale Studien.

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