Chapter 2

SĪN

THE LANGUAGE OF THE BANŪ SĀSĀN AND THE *GHURABĀ*

The language of the Banū Sāsān has been mischaracterized as a secret language or a thieves' cant. It is a mixed language that takes the form of embedding a substitutive vocabulary into the grammatical structure of other languages and it has historically been spoken within communities of peripatetics and commercial nomads. In general, these lexicons do not have independent grammars, as is also the case with Para-Romani languages such as Calò and Angloromani, which have Romani-derived lexicons embedded in Andalusian Spanish and English grammars, respectively.[1] In the Middle East this phenomenon is observable in Loterā'i, a mixed language that consists of special substitutive vocabulary inserted into local Iranian languages. This language is attested as early as the tenth century in Astarabad (known today as Gorgan, Iran) whose speakers were not identified by ethnicity or religious affiliation and today is mostly spoken by Iranian Jews.[2] The Sīn lexicon survives today in the languages of peripatetics, dervishes, and entertainers in the Maghreb, Egypt, Sudan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In northern Africa, some Ghawṣ dialects have Sīn vocabulary; in northeast Africa the ancient mixed language is still known as Sīn and sometimes as Sīm; in Central Asia, the dialect of *Abdal dili* or *Abdoltili* incorporates some Sīn words. These particular dialects take the form of communicating in the dominant surrounding language with insertions of Sīn vocabulary.

Buyid Iraq and Iran: Two Qaṣīdas

The earliest mention of the Banū Sāsān occurs in a work by the Persian author Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 756), so the *terminus ante quem* for tribal formation was 756. Two hundred years after this mention the Banū Sāsān rose to quick prominence in the literary circles of Buyid Iran. The Buyids, who themselves claimed descent from the Sasanian emperor Bahrām Gōr, controlled most of Iraq, Iran, Jordan, and Syria from 934 to 1062. They professed Shiʿism and presented themselves as the inheritors of the pre-Islamic Sasanian dynasty, which had been overthrown by the Muslims in 651. The Buyid ruler bore the Persian title Shahanshah (king of

kings) and did not seek to usurp the caliphal title. Buyid metalworkers consciously reproduced figural and animal Sasanian motifs in their works, and it is in this milieu that the Banū Sāsān, a peripatetic tribal group, found welcome court patrons.

Tenth-century Buyid and Abbasid authors described them as speakers of a particular language, of which some vocabulary has been preserved in poetry by members and associates of the Banū Sāsān. While based in Rayy, the Buyid grand vizier Ibn ʿAbbād kept a circle of these poets close to him and befriended a member of the Banū Sāsān—a man named al-Aqṭaʿ whose hand had been amputated as punishment for stealing—and also "learned from him the language of the beggars and the parlance of the persistent mendicants."[3] Ibn ʿAbbād learned enough of the Sāsāni language to include Sāsāni words in his own poetry. A sample verse, with Sāsāni words in parentheses, reads:

> Don't hold yourself back from pleasures, if they present themselves; persist in them to the utmost, and don't bother about being blamed!
> Don't spit them out again when you have attained them, but spend the night with a beardless youth (shawzar), a wide-buttocked lad, a loved one,
> For wine (ṣamī) and copulation (matr), after indulgence with him—these are the really good things of life, so don't turn away from what is good!
> Set about indulgence in eating to the full, and in wine from a flowing bowl, for fortune mingles indifferently the good (taksīḥ) with the bad (tahzīb).[4]

We know the meanings of these words because of the interlineal glosses in poems that al-Ṣāḥib had commissioned from two other Sāsānis, al-Aḥnaf al-ʿUkbarī, whom he described as "the incomparable one of the Banū Sāsān in Baghdad at this present time,"[5] and Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī. He specifically asked them to write poems about the Banū Sāsān. Both al-ʿUkbarī and Abū Dulaf produced *qaṣīda*s (polythematic poems with a single meter and rhyme-letter) describing their traditional professions and introducing vocabulary from the tribal language. Al-ʿUkbarī's *qaṣīda* was apparently written first. In it, he mentioned various trades practiced by members of the Banū Sāsān, including the beggar who feigns blindness (*isṭīl*), the peddler of amulets (*man yanfidhu sirmāṭ[an]*), the astrologers, bloodletters, sellers of unguents and medicines, Sufis who rambled about their asceticism, and the beggar leaders of the "tribe of exile" (*bahālīlu banī l-ghurba*).[6] Sometime after this, "Abū Dulaf presented the Ṣāḥib with a *qaṣīda* in which he imitated al-Aḥnaf al-ʿUkbarī's poem rhyming in *dāl* concerning this slang. In it, Abū Dulaf mentioned the beggars, and made people aware of their different subdivisions and their various practices."[7] The narrator of Abū Dulaf's 196-verse *qaṣīda* is the author himself, who claimed membership in the Banū Sāsān (vv. 9–10) and proceeded to recount every deceptive practice employed by these people. The poem contains 238 words from the Sāsāni lexicon, many of which are also found in al-ʿUkbarī's poem, and they are all given explanatory glosses.

Bosworth's investigations of the Banū Sāsān lexicon show that much of this lexicon derived from several languages that suggest Persianate, Hellenistic, and Semitic influences and a late antique origin for the lexicon:

Greek

- *isṭabl / iṣṭabl* "mosque" < Greek *stávlon* "resting-place, stable"
- *qalaftūriyya* "the form of a talisman not made from a matrix" < Greek *phylaktērion* "amulet"[8]

Syriac

- *qamṭar / qimṭar* "case for books and records" < Syriac *qamṭriyā* < Greek *kamtra* "case for books or papers"

Persian

- *tukhandiju* "you laugh" < Persian *khandagī* "laughter"
- *jarrakha* "to dance" < Persian *charkh* "wheel; circle of dancing dervishes"

Hebrew

- *ṣammā* "to give wine to drink" < Hebrew *ṣāmē'* "to be thirsty"
- *kūsh* "black slave" < Hebrew *kush* "Nubia"

Arabic

- *bahlūl* "beggar leader" < early Arabic *bahlūl* "generous, noble"
- *ās* "physician" < Arabic *asā* "to treat, cure"

Akkadian

- *shallafa* "to destroy" < Akkadian *šulputum* "to ravage"
- *shann* "two" < Akkadian *šenā* "two"
- *sikr* "weir" < Akkadian *sekēru* "to block up, dam"[9]

Martin Schwartz has recently shown the Jewish Aramaic roots of several other terms.[10]

- *maysarānī* "beggar who pretends to have fought the infidel on the frontier" < Aramaic *mēyṣar* "border"
- *barkakk* "person who extracts molars" < Aramaic associate *bar* + *kakka* "(molar) tooth"
- *kidh* "penis" < Jewish Aramaic *gīd* "penis"[11]
- *dammakha* "to sleep in the cold" < Aramaic *dmkh* "to sleep"

In verse 83 Abū Dulaf explicitly counted Persian- and Aramaic-speaking members among the Banū Sāsān. Aramaic was a late antique Middle Eastern lingua franca until the collapse of the Achaemenid Empire in 330 BCE, at which moment Greek gained ascendancy. The Islamic conquests of the Middle East in the seventh century spread the Arabic language into areas where Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, and

Persian had until then been chiefly spoken. As such, the Sāsāni words derived from Akkadian, Persian, Arabic, Aramaic, and Greek (and one or two terms from Syriac), signaling the local indigeneity of the Banū Sāsān and early language contact with Byzantines and Sasanians.

In Abū Dulaf's tenth-century poem, *lughat Banī Sāsān* strikingly shows no influence from Turkic languages, though as we will see, by the fourteenth century, Turkish, Sogdian and Indic words had entered the lexicon. If this mixed language is an ancient one, one may speculate that the significant number of terms of obscure etymology, such as *samqūn* (boy), *zaghmara* (to be certain, convinced), and *muljam* (cat), ultimately derive from an extinct or unrecorded parent language.

Buyid Iran and Abbasid Iraq: Maqāmāt

The Banū Sāsān was a common literary trope in Arabic literature from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries. The theme of the eloquent, wily, peripatetic beggar inspired a new genre of Arabic literature, the *maqāma*. Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 1008), a poor peripatetic whose name literally means "the innovator of the age from Hamadhān," is credited with founding this literary genre. He met Abū Dulaf in Rayy, most likely at al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād's literary salons, and seems to have derived inspiration from the work being produced there. In his personal letters, al-Hamadhānī referred to his fifty-two-episode work as *Maqāmāt al-kudya* (Episodes of Begging) or *Maqāmāt al-Iskandarī*, but in all likelihood, al-Hamadhānī never compiled his own *maqāmāt* in a definitive written collection.[12] In any case, his title *Maqāmāt al-Iskandarī* refers to the antihero Abū l-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī, who is dressed as a beggar and moves from town to town tricking unsuspecting audiences out of their money. In only one episode, the nineteenth entitled *Al-Maqāma al-sāsāniyya*, is al-Iskandarī depicted as a member of the Banū Sāsān. While in Damascus the narrator sees outside of his door "a troop (*katība*) from the Banī Sāsān. They had muffled up their faces, and besmeared their clothes with red ochre while each of them had tucked under his armpit a stone with which he beat his breast. Among them was their chief (*zaʿīm*), who was reciting, they alternating with him; he intoning and they answering him."[13] The leader of this Sāsāni troop is none other than al-Iskandarī.

Al-Hamadhānī's most famous imitator was the Abbasid Basran official al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122), whose fifty *maqāmāt* spawned countless commentaries, entered the canon of Arabic literature, and inspired some of the most treasured specimens of medieval Arabic book arts.[14] The window for medieval Arabic illustrated books was short, lasting principally from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, but the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century illustrated manuscripts of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* assume an outsized importance in scholarly literature on medieval Arabic book arts and are frequently used as typical scenes of everyday life in medieval Islamdom. The fifty *maqāmāt* are structured as brief encounters between the narrator al-Ḥārith b. Hammām and the hero Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, who identifies as a member of the Sāsāni family (*āl Sāsān*) and earns a living through swindles and begging, sometimes employing his son in his tricks.[15] Al-Ḥarīrī played with his audience's expectations for a story about a Sāsāni. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī practices astrology

(*maqāma* 29) and cupping (47). He may also have emphasized to a knowledgeable audience that father and son belonged to the Banū Sāsān by referring to the son as a *jawdhar ʿalayhi shawdhar*, or a young gazelle wearing a short cloak. *Shawdhar* is a Persian term for "a short woman's cloak," and the Sāsāni term for "beardless youth (Arabic, *amrad*)."[16] The occurrence in Arabic literature of the word *shawdhar* is so rare that it would have registered doubly for an audience. As far as I know, it is only elsewhere attested in the poems of al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād and Abū Dulaf, where the *shawdhar/shawzar* serves as an object of sexual desire for an adult male.[17]

Our hero Abū Zayd is introduced in the first *maqāma* as "the light of *al-ghurabāʾ*, the crown of the littérateurs," where *al-ghurabāʾ* is synonymous with Banū Sāsān.[18] A thirteenth-century commentary on the forty-ninth *maqāma* explains that

> Sāsān is the shaykh of the beggars and of the *ghurabāʾ*, who are Banū l-Ghabrāʾ. *Al-ghabrāʾ* is the Earth, and they are called Banū al-Ghabrāʾ because some of them belong to the Earth and the air, roaming through lands. They have no ancestry; their only ties are to the Earth. It is said that they are called that because of their ties to the dust of the Earth.[19]

Their uprootedness made them suitable characters who embark on journeys and through their adventures discover something about themselves.

The *maqāma* frame narrative of the pious Arab narrator and the Sāsāni hero was faithfully reproduced into the modern era, some of them even incorporating Sāsāni language into the works. Maurice Pomerantz has identified two Sāsāni words—*khushnī* (outsider) and *ghurash* (trick)—in one of al-Ṣafadī al-Barīdī's fourteenth-century *maqāmāt*.[20] In this same period Ibn Abī Ḥajalah (d. 1375) composed a *maqāma* cycle about a trickster character named Abū l-Riyāsh, who is an Egyptian member of the Banū Sāsān and speaks in the Sāsāni tongue (*bi-lisān min banī sāsān*). The final *maqāma*, entitled "The Book *Maqāma*, Called the Return of the *Gharīb*" (*Al-Maqāma al-kutubiyya al-mawsūma bi-ʿawd al-gharīb*), is so named because Abū Riyāsh, the Sāsāni *gharīb*, reappears in the life of the narrator Al-Sājiʿ b. Ḥamām.[21] Similarly, the titles of later Ottoman *maqāmāt*, such as al-ʿĀmilī al-Ḥānīnī's (d. 1626) *Farqad al-ghurabāʾ wa-sirāj al-udabāʾ* and al-Khafājī's (d. 1659) *Maqāma sāsāniyya*, suggest this genre may be useful for investigating representations of the Banū Sāsān/*ghurabā*' and also for recovering samples of their dialect.[22]

Artuqid Mosul: Didactic Prose

A true breakthrough for our understanding of the language of the Banū Sāsān and in the naming of this group comes in a book composed between 1232 and 1248 called *Kitāb al-mukhtār fī kashf al-asrār* (The Book of the Selected Disclosure of Secrets). It is a thirty-chapter work purporting to expose the secrets of the Banū Sāsān. The author ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Jawbarī (d. fl. 646/1248) was himself a member of the Banū Sāsān, and he composed the work at the behest of Masʿūd Rukn al-Dīn Mawdūd, the Turkmen Artuqid leader of Mosul (r. 1222–32). In Chapter Six of this work, al-Jawbarī enumerated the various types: confidence

men (*aṣḥāb al-nawāmīs*), Sufis (*fuqarāʾ*), beggars at gates or makers of fans and talismans (*al-madrūzīn*?), Zuṭṭī lepers (*aṣḥāb al-balāʾ min al-zuṭṭ*), those who travel with bears and monkeys, those who train cats and mice to play peaceably together, those who claim to have physical disabilities, and those who make beards for women.[23] In Chapter Twelve, al-Jawbarī claimed that the astrologers in the Banū Sāsān referred to themselves as *al-ghurabāʾ* and were known among the various clans (*ṭawāʾif*) by this name. Furthermore, they communicated in poems or messages in Sīn (*wa-lahum ishʿār bi'l-sīn*).[24] Later in the book al-Jawbarī elaborated on the nature of Sīn.

> As for revealing the secrets of the astrologers, they have a form of communication that they call Sīn. It is a manner of verbal expression (*wa-huwa l-balāgh alladhī yatakallamūna bihi*) that only they and their ilk can understand. I understand it, and in it, one can say: سمقوني كسحاب ببهت ما ابهله في سيني فرحات ومطي شن . . . ودمخ في الطلموت يرتد في صهوتي سعّا للبركوش فيه كدى. They express many things—countless and unlimited things—in Sīn! They hold royal literary salons that are not for kings, as well as amazing large gatherings (*awqāt ʿajība*). And if there were no fear of making this book too long, I would recount innumerable anecdotes. They are known among the various subtribes (*bayn al-ṭawāʾif*) as *al-ghurabāʾ*. This is an amazing language (*hiya lugha ʿajība*). I know that they call themselves *ghurabāʾ* because they produce wonders (*gharāʾib*) of all sorts that amaze others.[25]

In al-Jawbarī's account only the astrologers of the Banū Sāsān and their friends speak Sīn, and these astrologers are known as *ghurabāʾ*. While I can only speculate as to why al-Jawbarī limits the language and the name *ghurabā* to the astrologers, it is clear that his Sīn sample is the same as the *lughat Banī Sāsān* preserved in the *qaṣīda*s of both al-ʿUkbarī and Abū Dulaf. Using the two earliest of the thirty-three known Arabic manuscripts of *Kashf al-asrār*, I will attempt to transliterate and translate a sample of Sīn.[26] In Leiden Or 191 (dated 715/1315), folios 91b and 92a read: *saqmūnī kasiḥāb bi-baht mā abhalahu fī nisbī f.r.ḥāt wa-maṭṭī shandalī wa-dammakha fī al-ṭ.l.mūt y.r.t.d. fī ṣaḥūtī saʿʿā li'l-barkūsh fīhi kaddā*. The later manuscript, Istanbul Karaçelebizade 253, dated 717/1317–18, reads: *samqūnī kasiḥāb h.b.t.r.sh bi-baht mā abhalahu*.[27]

samqūn-ī	*kasiḥ-āb*	*bi-baht*	*mā*	*abhalu-hu*[28]
My boy	handsome	with a face	not	more beautiful than it

"My handsome boy has a face more beautiful than any other."

Though the sentiment is generic, it may not be a coincidence that Ibn Dāniyāl gave similar lines, only in Arabic, to the young male accomplice to the amulet maker, one of the few nonprofessionals to speak in his play. The boy recites: "The beauty of my face surpasses the beauty of anyone of any race."[29]

The grammar and syntax are Arabic, as are the prepositions (*bi*, *fī*) and the negative particle (*mā*). The pronominal suffix *-hu* is also Arabic. The morphology

of comparative adjectives also follows the Arabic *aXXaX* model. The suffix *-ī* indicates personal possession, as it does in Arabic.

fī nisb-ī	*f.r.khāt*	*wa-maṭṭ-ī*	*shandal*	*wa-dammakha*	*fī*	*al-ṭ.l.mūt*[30]
in my house	?	and my belongings	piled up	and he slept	in	the darkness(?)

"*F.r.khāt* and my belongings are piled up in my house. He slept in the darkness."

y.r.t.d.	*fī ṣahūt-ī*	*saʿā*	*li-l-barkūsh*	*fīhi*	*kaddā*[31]
?	in my desires	he went out	to the beggar feigning deafness	in which	he begged

These translations are tentative, and I am unable to translate the final line of the Leiden manuscript. But even without full translations, one sees that in al-Jawbarī's thirteenth-century sample, Sīn consisted of interspersing Sāsāni vocabulary into an Arabic syntactic and grammatical structure.

Mamluk Cairo: Shadow Theater

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Dāniyāl al-Mawṣilī al-Khuzāʿī (646/1248–710/1311) was born around 646/1248 in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. His Khuzāʿa tribe originated in the Yemen but had long ago settled in Mosul. Li Guo has described Mosul in this period as an interconfessional, polyglot city, where "various tongues—Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Kurdish, ancient Semitic (Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew)—were heard all over the town."[32] In 660/1262, shortly after the Mongols destroyed Mosul, Ibn Dāniyāl fled to Cairo. In this same year, 1,000–2,000 Mongol/Tatar refugees from Hülegü's army sought shelter at the court of Mamluk Sultan Baybars (r. 1260–77), who warmly welcomed them with a public banquet near Bāb al-Lūq. He also constructed homes for them in Bāb al-Lūq and in the Ḥusayniyya neighborhood north of Cairo. Both areas subsequently became marked by high crime, neglect, and poverty. (This reputation remained for centuries. In the seventeenth-century Evliya Çelebi described the male and female sex workers and the beggars of Bāb al-Lūq.) In Rajab 660/June 1262, the Tatar or Mongol Sayf al-Dīn Salār al-Manṣūrī arrived in Cairo with a group of mamluks, then was promptly given a prestigious appointment in the Mamluk army.[33] During the second reign of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn, which lasted from 1299 to 1309, Salār was appointed the sovereign's viceroy and while in this position served as Ibn Dāniyāl's patron. Ibn Dāniyāl had established a close rapport with the predecessor to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's first reign, Sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 1290–3), and expressed his loyalty to the Qalāwūnid dynasty by writing nearly twenty praise poems for members of the royal family and for the viziers who served them. Ibn Dāniyāl, in turn, received a stipend from the court and enjoyed the prestige of being part of the royal entourage.[34] This represents a spectacular rise for someone who after arriving in Cairo as a sixteen-year-old refugee, practiced eye medicine at the Bāb al-Futūḥ, the portal between the rough extramural Ḥusayniyya neighborhood and

the walled city. A medical career did not automatically confer prestige. "Physicians (*ṭabīb*) and oculists (*kaḥḥāl*) . . . could belong either to the common people or the elite. Their social status depended on their clientele: those treating members of the elite had a higher status than those whose patients represented a more modest segment of the population."[35] Judging by the placement of Ibn Dāniyāl's booth, his clientele would have consisted largely of poor residents of Ḥusayniyya. The Iraqi physician ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231) offered intriguing details about medical workers with poor clientele.

> I say that *ghurabāʾ* who sell potions on the highways are superior to those [physicians]. Firstly, because most people, and especially the elite, beware of them and do not hand themselves over to them. Secondly, they give [the milky latex of] spurges [*yattūʿāt*] and [the juice of] *bashbūsh*, that is colocynth leaves, to healthy people whose temperament can bear mistakes more than sick patients. They mostly administer their drugs to peasants and [other] hard-working people, whose temperament can bear strong drugs. Moreover, the *ghurabāʾ* have tried and tested drugs and tried herbs which they gather and test themselves; and they tell each other what they know about them.[36]

Al-Baghdādī portrayed the *ghurabāʾ* medical remedies as harsh on the body and their methods as haphazard and experimental. The *ghurabāʾ* of thirteenth-century Iraq derived their medical knowledge experimentally on nonelite laborers, who may have had few other affordable options for medical care. When ingested, the spurge and colocynth plants that the *ghurabāʾ* administered to patients would have induced a laxative effect, which Jawbarī confirmed was a common strategy of the *ghurabāʾ*.

> If they [highway physicians] want to make a spectacle showing that they administer a drug which expels worms, they take the sinews of camels and give them the shape of the worm. Then they take some laxative plant and put these sinews into it without the idiot noticing it. When he eats it, his bowels are moved and nature secretes something which is like water, and in which these sinews similar to worms are present.[37]

Al-Baghdādī claimed that the *ghurabāʾ* shared such medical knowledge among themselves, perhaps because elite physicians did not train with the *ghurabāʾ* or treat them as legitimate colleagues. Aside from anecdotes about highway physicians, there is little trace of these roadway practitioners in premodern sources. Ibn Dāniyāl himself composed an *urjūza* (a poem in *rajaz* meter) on medicine that may add new perspectives on the practice of nonelite physicians.[38]

Beyond his work as an oculist, we know that during his early years of isolation and poverty in Cairo, Ibn Dāniyāl had frequent occasions to observe and interact with the *ḥarāfīsh* (sing. *ḥarfūsh*), a group that led a lifestyle similar to that of the *ghurabāʾ* and also communicated in Sīn. In 1837 Étienne-Marc Quatremère traced the word *ḥarfūsh* and its variants in various thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Arabic chronicles and manuals. The *ḥarāfīsh* elude precise definitions

but Quatremère concluded that the most apt definition of *ḥarfūsh* was "a man of the lowest class."[39] More than a century later, William Brinner published an important article in which he posed a series of in-depth, exploratory questions to define the *ḥarāfīsh*, understand their internal leadership structures, and ask how the term *sultan al-ḥarāfīsh* became synonymous with *shaykh mashāyikh al-ḥiraf*. Ultimately, Brinner found that the sources did not allow him to draw firm conclusions, but he could claim with reasonable certainty that the *ḥarāfīsh* lived in abject poverty, worked as beggars, and recognized one of their own as a leader (sultan). As early as the fifteenth century, the term *ḥarāfīsh* was being gradually replaced by *juʿaydiyya*.[40]

Neither Quatremère nor Brinner had easy access to Ibn Dāniyāl's poetry collection which includes a thirty-four-verse *qaṣīda* about "the order of the *ḥarāfīsh*." The narrator describes antisocial behaviors of the *ḥarāfīsh* that recall those of the Banū Sāsān. Ibn Dāniyāl's narrator claims, "you see me when I sleep— furnace ashes are my mat, my bowl is under my cheek. / I warm up by the fire, until you see my skin spotted from it [the heat] like a cheetah."[41] A Sāsāni figure in Abū Dulaf's poem "makes himself a pitiable object through covering himself with the ashes of a furnace. . . . He then comes out [of the furnace] covered in dusty ashes, and leads people to think that he has been obliged to seek refuge there because of the intense cold and his lack of clothing."[42] However, the most explicit connection the poem makes between the *ḥarāfīsh* and the Banū Sāsān comes with the insertion of a verse in Sīn.

> 25: [A list of 12 nicknames] form a community united by ill fortune. Among their company is Iblīs / With his companions. And they all are my companions.
> 26 Whoever among you calls himself *ḥarāfīsh* is, / like myself, all alone.
> 27 [in Sīn] I see the man and the boys begging, but I give them not a single silver coin.

With slight variations, verse 27 is reproduced in his shadow play on the Banū Sāsān called *ʿAjīb wa-Gharīb*. The manuscripts of Ibn Dāniyāl's shadow plays are the earliest texts we have of this genre, but from these we see "that the shadow theatre, as seen in Ibn Dāniyāl's work, was a gradual development from the Arabic *maqāma* form."[43] The prologue of the second play, *ʿAjīb wa-Gharīb*, reads in part:

> In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Nothing occurs without Allah. This is the second shadow play of *Ṭayf al-khayāl*, and it is the shadow play of *ʿAjīb wa-Gharīb*. It includes the ways of the fraudulent *ghurabāʾ*. I have already answered your questions about whether the master is charming and the coarse speak sweetly, so that you do not think that I am concerned with uninteresting literature. . . . This shadow play includes the ways of the fraudulent *ghurabāʾ* who are well versed in the language and methods of Shaykh Sāsān.[44]

The narrator himself is named Gharīb and, as his name suggests, he represents the archetypal member of the "fraudulent *ghurabāʾ*," who will introduce the audience

to these speakers of *lughat al-shaykh Sāsān*. In the midst of his opening monologue, he recites four verses in Sīn.[45]

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1. في زقاقيهم قطّوا العطامي والعتل الزكادجي الزرندي
2. الكويكات والخندج وقرداح وبزباز والكبان المكدي
3. وشريميط والمفكك والقنب وبركان والمحنّ القمندي
4. هطل الكُدّ والسماقين والفيس وما إن يكيفهم شطر مردي[46]

</div>

1.

fī zaqāqayhim	q.ṭ.ṭū	al-ʿ.ṭāmī	waʾl-ʿatal	al-r.r.d.kājī	al-z.r.n.dī
In their speech	?	the ?	And the indigent	the ?	the ?

2.

al-k.w.y.kāt	al-kh.f.n.j	wa-q.r.d.āḥ	wa-m.r.tān	waʾl-kayyān	al-mukaddī
the ?	the ?	and ?	and ?	and the ?	the male beggar

3.

wa-shirāmīṭ	waʾl-mufakkak	waʾl-q.n.b	wa-b.r.kān	waʾl-m.ḥ.nn	al-q.m.n.dī
and an amulet maker	and the escapologist	and the ?	and ?	and the captivating storyteller	the ?

4.

Haṭala	al-kuddu	waʾl-samāqīn	biʾl-fays	wa-mā	in	yakīfuhum	sh.ṭ.r	mardī
He saw	the male beggar	and the boys	while begging	and-NEGATION		he gives them	clever thief	two silver coins

I am unable to reconstruct most of the Sīn words in the first three verses, but I would provisionally translate the last verse as: "The man saw the boys begging, but the clever thief did not even give them coins." Even without a full clarification of the text, one can make some syntactical observations. As in al-Jawbarī's text, Sīn prose consists of Arabic syntax (verb-subject-prepositional phrase), the definite article *al-*, and the use of the Arabic particles *wa-* and *bi-*. A verb is even conjugated in the masculine third-person present-tense form, in the manner of Arabic. This poem again demonstrates that Sīn is a para-language, a lexicon embedded in the grammar of another language.

Previous editors and translators have tackled this poem, the difficulties of which stem from the manuscript variants. One must imagine that Arabic scribes were not familiar with Sīn, so approximated some of the words. Georg Jacob acknowledged that this poem was written in the language of al-Shaykh Sāsān, so instead of attempting a translation, he edited the Sāsānī portions, indicating all of the manuscript variants.[47] Later translators have not been so circumspect. René Khawam produced a French translation of these verses that, like his translation

of al-Jawbarī's Sīn text, must be completely contrived.[48] Francesca Corrao claims that Jacob's edition "non ha senso," not realizing that he had identified it as a non-Arabic passage. She proceeds to recombine the manuscript variants to arrive at Persian or Arabic words that would fit the context. So, for instance, in the second hemistich, she reads *al-zakādajī* as *al-razkādiḥ*, which is the Persian word for "wrangler," a dramatic move that requires the insertion of a consonant and the removal of the final letter. Her final translation produced a list of professional types.[49] Similarly, Safi Mahfouz and Marvin Carlson considered the language a form of corrupted Arabic, so they altered words to make them classical Arabic. Ultimately, they produced a list of mostly obscene nicknames.[50] The following is my translation with the Sīn terms in italics:

> When there was no one left who would ask the heavens for its rain, and no one who would seek his gain, we considered using tricks against them, so that we wouldn't need them. We abandoned our work but grew bored with leisure and laziness. Now we stand unrivaled in contriving tricks, and we have separated into these groups. Fear has not deterred us and there is no panic! We have fallen upon governors (*kuzak*) and penises (*kiyādh*)! We have shot arrows at *marākim* and *mihkād*! It is we who have undertaken the description of the woodblock printer (*waṣf al-ṭ-rāsh*) and who regard commoners as *aḥshāsh*. We have seen the boy (*samqūn*) and the man (*kudd*) together, and we have plundered (ʿ*abaynā*) the *ḥirmī* and the *sukrī*. To whoever goes off and begs, we have given bread as charity. And we hid silver dirhams (*murūd*), gold dinars (*marāqīn*) and copper coins (*tubūk*). Out of modesty we dressed shabbily (*aṭṭaraḥnā*). We gathered (*hankamnā*) in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria.[51]

After Gharīb's opening monologue, a series of carnivalesque characters—entertainers, a sex worker, medical quacks, and laborers—present their work. Several scholars have noted the similarity of professions showcased in ʿ*Ajīb wa-Gharīb* to those commonly held by European Roma and similar groups. Mahfouz and Carlson referred outright to "the gypsies of the clan Banū Sāsān," and Li Guo designated the Banū Sāsān "the 'Gypsies' of Cairo."[52]

Romani cultures are central not only to shadow theater in Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Turkestan, and Greece but also to its forerunner, the *maqāma*.[53] In Iran, the main figure is named Kaçal Pahlavān (Bald Athlete), and in Turkestan it is Palvan Kaçal. The Persian word *pahlavān* means "athlete" or "gymnast," referring perhaps to the traditional itinerant trade of acrobatism and rope dancing. The Bahlawān tribe in Egypt still bears this name. In the Turkish shadow play tradition known as Karagöz, each play has two main characters: Karagöz, the Çingane (Romani) blacksmith, and Hacivat, the principled Turk. The Greek shadow theater tradition derives from the Turkish one. The similarities between Ibn Dāniyāl's Gharīb and the figure of Karagöz are unmistakable, both strangers far from their homelands, performing work on the margins of society.[54] Notice must equally be made of the consistent use of a narrator and a protagonist, who act as moral foils to each other, not only in ʿ*Ajīb wa-Gharīb* but in nearly all of the Banū Sāsān-related *maqāmāt*. Furthermore, the

hero-protagonist in Arabic works always has a connection to *ghurabāʾ* or *gharīb*. Recall that al-Ḥarīrī's Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is "the light of the *ghurabāʾ*."[55] Al-Ḥarīrī's work inspired the Andalusian Ibn al-Ashtarkūwī (d. 1143) to write his own *maqāma* featuring the narrator Abū Ghamr al-Sāʾib b. Tammām and the hero Abū Ḥabīb al-Sadūsī, who has two sons, Ḥabīb (Beloved) and Gharīb (Stranger). Ibn Dāniyāl abandoned innuendo and outright named his protagonist Gharīb, who delivers the opening monologue and epilogue, closing the play by repeating the words: *gharībun gharībun gharībun gharīb* ("a stranger, a stranger, a stranger, strange").

A Qaṣīda in Artuqid Mardin

The third known *qaṣīda* about the Banū Sāsān, following those by ʿUkbarī and Abū Dulaf, came from an itinerant Shiʿi Iraqi peddler named Ṣafī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Saraya al-Ḥillī (d. 750/1349), who found literary patronage at the Artuqid court of Mardin in southern Anatolia. While not a *gharīb* himself, Ḥillī, in the prologue to his poem, claimed that "one of his friends asked him to compile for him the language of the *ghurabāʾ* (*lughat al-ghurabāʾ*), their professional arts and wiles."[56] He pledged to elucidate in his seventy-five-verse poem, for the benefit of outsiders, their "esoteric knowledge, their activities, their special practices and their stratagems," while also explaining the meaning of 277 words in their language (*ajʿalu alfāẓahā bi-lughatihim*).[57] Like the earlier works examined in this paper, it is a poetic ethnography and didactic exercise, intended to teach the uninitiated about *ghurabāʾ* vocabulary and lifestyle.

Certain linguistic developments become apparent in this later work, most significantly the inclusion of Turkic, Sogdian, and Indic lexemes. In verses 6 and 65, Ḥillī introduced the term *kazākī*, which was glossed as "governors and princes." Bosworth related this term to the Turkish *gezek*, which means "guard or watchman."[58] At the time of Ḥillī's writing, most of West Asia was ruled by Turkic-speaking peoples, like the Mamluks, the Artuqids, and the Seljuks. The Sīn term for village *qantah* probably derived from the Sogdian word for village *kanθ*.[59]

At least one Indic term appears in this fourteenth-century poem: *habatrā* "cold wind" (v. 9), from Hindi *havadar* "windy." Another new development in this *qaṣīda* is the inclusion of prepositions and conjunctions, such as *hafī* "in," *t.r.thā* "until," *s.d.l* "upon, by," and *l.b.y.ṣām* "up to, up to where."

Additional Sīn Sources

Samples of medieval and early modern *lisān al-ghurabāʾ* must be preserved in other documents, but certain literary genres will probably yield more information than others. Shadow theater has already been proposed and discussed, but literary *mujūn*, that is, literature on obscene, profane subjects, was often inspired by "the living oral culture of the urban lower classes."[60] The *mujūn* poet Abū Nuwās wrote

a series of poems about *al-shuṭṭār*, or clever thieves. Of this group we know little, but they did have a distinctive form of speech, though it may not classify as a separate language. For example, *aḥnadha* is a *shuṭṭāri* verb that means "to pour increasingly less water and more wine to accelerate intoxication."[61]

Other writers used lower-class persons as informants or directly transcribed their vernacular speech into their literary works. The Iraqi judge al-Tanūkhī (d. 994) recorded anecdotes allegedly obtained from clever thieves (*al-shuṭṭār*), conjurers (*al-mushaʿbadhūn*), dancers, singers, and young sex workers (*kāghān*).[62] The writings of the Baghdadi *mujūn* poet Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 391/1001) "expressed obscenity and were intertwined with the languages of the *khuldiyīn*, the beggars and the clever thieves."[63] According to al-Thaʿālibī, the *khuldiyya* were a group of beggars and members of the Banū Sāsān (*mukaddūn* and *sāsāniyyūn*),[64] and the name may also relate to the prisoners of the Khuld palace in Baghdad or residents of the Khuld quarter of the city. Al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363), writing three centuries later, cited Ibn al-Ḥajjāj's description of his method for learning these languages.

> What aided me in my style is that my father had sold plots [of land] connected to his houses. The people who bought them divided them and built lodges in which they housed beggars, the lowly *ghurabāʾ*, handicapped beggars (*askanūhā al-shaḥḥādhīn wa'l-ghurabāʾ al-sufl wa-dhawī al-ʿāhāt al-mukaddīn*), every rascal and homeless from the Khuld [a district of Baghdad] and loud and foulmouthed ones. I used to hear their men and women, especially in summer nights, cursing back and forth on the roofs. I had a blank paper and a box with writing utensils and I used to write down what I heard. When I encountered what I did not understand, I wrote it down the way I heard it and the next day would summon the person from which I heard it. I could recognize their languages (*anā ʿārif bi-lughātihim*), because they were my neighbors. So I used to ask him about the explanation and would write it. I remained [like] the Aṣmaʿī of that area for a time.[65]

Ibn al-Ḥajjāj's interest in his neighbors' speech left a demonstrable mark on his poetry. In at least one poem he included two lines of obscene Aramaic, presumably overheard one evening.[66] But what else do we know about these neighbors? Al-Ṣafadī described a portion of them as *ghurabāʾ*, essentially employing fourteenth-century language to capture a tenth-century phenomenon. As we have seen, the term *ghurabāʾ* referred to the Banū Sāsān at the time of al-Ṣafadī's writing, and this group and their modes of begging were major themes in popular literature. Moreover, the *ghurabā'* certainly would have figured among groups of disenfranchised people who spoke different dialects or languages. Ibn al-Ḥajjāj's reception may have been an outlier. In his poem Abū Dulaf flagged *ṣallāj* (masturbator) as a Sāsāni word. His seventeenth-century commentator al-Khafājī, however, denounced this term and its cognate *ṣalj* (masturbation) as deriving from "an inferior colloquial language" that he explained elsewhere was the language of the Banū Sāsān.[67]

Sīm and Sīn in the Modern Era

The Sīn preserved in the poetry of al-ʿUkbarī, Abū Dulaf, and al-Ḥillī and in al-Jawbarī's *Kashf al-asrār* has survived as an Arabic-Sāsāni dialect among the Ḥalab and Ghajar Nile tribes and entertainers in Egypt and Sudan and as Sāsāni-inflected Uzbek or Tajik among *ghurabāʾ* and entertainers in Central Asia. Some Sāsāni lexemes also appear in Algerian and Moroccan Arabic dialects.

In 1856, Captain Newbold published vocabulary samples from three *gharīb* tribes in Egypt: the Ḥalab, the Ghajar, and Nawar. All of them spoke Egyptian Arabic, but they also spoke tribal languages. The Ḥalab spoke a mixed language that they called Sīm, and it is Arabic with much Sīn vocabulary. The Ghajar include Sīn and western Romani in their dialect, and the Nawar insert many Persian words into their Arabic dialect.[68] In Egypt and Sudan, the Ḥalab speak a blend of Sīn with Arabic modified by distinct morphological patterns. It shows significant South Arabian contact and a smattering of Indo-Aryan vocabulary words.

Some years later, the ethnographer Alfred von Kremer erroneously observed that "[a]ll these subdivisions of the Egyptian gipsies speak the same thievish slang language, which they call *Sīm*. Nothing certain is known concerning the origin of this word. According to the opinion of the natives *Sīm* means something secret or mysterious."[69] The *sīm* word list he produced has since been shown to represent not a single pan-Egyptian Gypsy dialect but only the dialect of the Ḥalab.[70] The list is a mixture of words derived from Arabic and words directly from Sīn. Von Kremer was unaware of the medieval Sīn, but in 1903, the Dutch orientalist Michael Jan de Goeje made the connection between the two, calling attention to "le nom mystérieux que les Tsiganes, du moins ceux de l'Orient, donnent à leur langue. Kremer . . . le prononce *sîm*, mais Djaubari, auteur du 13ᵉ siècle, écrit plus d'une fois *sîn*."[71] The discrepancy between the two names—Sīm and Sīn—was inadvertently solved eighty years later when Everett Rowson interviewed nearly 100 Cairenes, mostly entertainers and homosexuals, who had some knowledge of Sīm. "More educated speakers," he reported, "say siim and are puzzled by siin, while the reverse is the case for the less educated, and particularly those of the latter who live east of Port Said Street. I recognized only one speaker who recognized both variants—a well-educated silversmith who works in the heart of the Khan al-Khalili."[72] In a later publication Rowson acknowledged de Goeje's citation of al-Jawbarī but cautioned that an isolated thirteenth-century usage of the term Sīn "require[d] further investigation."[73]

In the decades between de Goeje's and Rowson's publications, much research was carried out on Sīm. Enno Littmann in his book *Zigeuner-arabisch* established links between the lexica of the Ḥalab and the Banū Sāsān in Abū Dulaf's poem, noting that they shared terms for bread (*mashmūl*), father (*qarūb*), woman/wife/mother (*kudda,*), sister/girl (*samqūna*), brother/boy (*samqūn*), eye (*ḥazzāra*), and to sleep (*dammakha*).[74] At the time of his writing, few other Banū Sāsān-themed texts, such as Ḥillī's and ʿUkbarī's poems, had been edited, so based on his restricted evidence, he ultimately qualified the Ḥalabi dialect as an Arabic thieves'

cant. However, with the recent edition of even more Sāsāni texts, we see additional cognates: outsider (*khushnī*), horse (*ṣuhlī*), donkey (*zuwill*), meat (*maḥzūza*), region (*qawnti*), knife (*khūsa*), garment (*sarme/sarmel*), Christian (*qannāwī*), ugly (*shalaf*), beautiful (*bahīl*), to say (*qajama*), and to steal (*kanasha*). The high correlation of medieval and modern terms suggests that Ḥalabī Sīm/Sīn is the modern counterpart of medieval Sīn.

The dissemination of the modern Sīm beyond nomadic Nile tribes only became clear to researchers through a 1926 article published by Littman's colleague Paul Kahle, who between 1908 and 1914 had investigated a dialect called Sīm that was understood by Cairo's shadow play artists, storytellers, singers, actors, and other entertainers. He produced a list of ninety-five terms and their variants and indicated which words had cognates with Ḥalabī Sīm. To show how Sīm functioned syntactically and grammatically, he recorded two samples of the shadow play artists' conversational prose, alongside translations into colloquial Egyptian Arabic and German.[75] In these selections of spoken Sīm, one sees that this para-language functions in the same way that it did in thirteenth-century literary prose. The Sīm/Sīn lexicon is embedded in an Arabic grammatical structure, as one sees in the following sentence.

> Sīm: **badah**tu qabalan li-**rashfat** al-**sūg sawwag**tu bi-arbiʿ **ibārīm** wa-**rakhkhay**tu **maʾaḥlī** bi-**ibrīm**ayn.
>
> Egyptian Arabic: **raḥ**tu qabalan li-**qahwat** al-**ḥashīsh ḥashish**tu bi-arbiʿat **qurūsh** wa-**akal**tu **ḥilw** bi-**qurush**ayn.
>
> English: Before that, I went to the coffeehouse, where I smoked marijuana that cost four coins and ate a sweet that cost two.

The Sīm and Egyptian Arabic samples share adverbs, prepositions, numbers, and verbal forms, whereas they diverge in the vocabulary.

In spite of Kahle's work with medieval shadow plays, including an edition of Ibn Dāniyāl's trilogy, he made no strong arguments about the connectedness of the Banū Sāsān to the early twentieth-century shadow play artists' speech. Still, in some of his later works, he showed further occurrences of this language in shadow theater. In the seventeenth-century shadow play *Liʿb al-manār* (The Lighthouse Play) by Dāʾūd al-Manāwī, one of the characters cries out, "*elmeḥázz rabaṣ!*," which one of the editors' informants identified as Sīm.[76] If Sīm existed among shadow play artists of the thirteenth, seventeenth, and twentieth centuries, it also existed in the intervening centuries for which we lack direct evidence. Hopefully, future studies of shadow plays will offer more historical data on this mixed language.

When Rowson compared his own word lists with that of Kahle, he found a significant enough convergence to conclude that the older "shadow play Sīm" was simply the Sīm of entertainers.[77] In the late 1980s Dwight Reynolds lived among oral poets in the lower Delta village of al-Bakātūsh. These poets identified themselves as Ḥalab, but their fellow villagers referred to them as Ghajar. Reynolds identified three main components of their language: Arabic, onomatopoetic vocabulary, and Ḥalabi words like *lamgūn* (boy) and *konta* (village). However, the

lone onomatopoetic word he cited—*taftūfa* (cigarette)—may be related to *taftafa* (Ar., "to spit out") or may even derive from the Domari term for tobacco, *dīf*.[78]

ʿAlī ʿĪsā devoted a chapter in his 1988 book on "secret languages" to *lughat al-ʿawālim*, or the language of entertainers. Many of the vocabulary words cited are Sīn. Female dancers are known as *kūdyānah*, which likely derive from *kudda* (pl. *kidād*), defined in Abū Dulaf's poem as "woman" or "wife."[79] *Rāqiṣah bahīlah* means "a skillful female dancer." *Bahīl* signifies "beautiful" in the medieval and modern Sīn.[80] ʿĪsā translates *kūdyānah shalaf* as "tired female dancer," but we know that *shalaf* in medieval and modern Sīn means "ugly."[81]

Between 1988 and 1990 Karin van Nieuwkerk conducted anthropological fieldwork among entertainers in Egypt, noting specifically that the regional Sīms of entertainers in Alexandria, Tanta, and Cairo were mutually intelligible.[82] In her book she acknowledged that the entertainers' Sīm had ten words in common with the Ḥalabī words that Littmann recorded, but she does not investigate this convergence.[83] Van Nieuwkerk, for instance, noted that Cairene female performers considered it a bad omen to eat sunflower seeds (*libb* in Egyptian Arabic) on stage, and one woman who broke protocol was teased as "Sayyida the *libb*-eater." Van Nieuwkerk tied this behavior to a food taboo among entertainers. However, the embarrassment is probably related to one of the Ḥalabi words for "penis"—*lib*, and thus the suggestion of fellating penises before an audience.[84]

The Sāsāni vocabulary has not only survived among the Ḥalab and urban Egyptian entertainers but also among Central Asian performers and beggars. Along the margins of an anonymous Persian manuscript titled *Ketāb-e sāsāniyān ba-kamāl* (The Complete Book of Sāsānis) and dated 745/1344, a scribe provided Persian glosses to a number of words in what the manuscript calls *zabān-e āsīān*, or the language of the Āsīān.[85] Based on a series of verses in *zabān-e āsīān* in the fourth part of the manuscript, this language appears to have functioned as a mixed language with a largely Jewish Aramaic vocabulary inserted into a Persian grammatical structure.[86]

Anna Troitskaya argued for historical links between the Persianate Sāsānī terms in the *Ketāb-e sāsāniyān ba-kamāl* and two Central Asian dialects spoken by itinerants, beggars, and entertainers. The first dialect was called Abdoltili (literally, "language of itinerants") spoken by Central Asian artists, musicians, *qalandar*s, and dervishes, and the second was Arabcha, the language of the Lyuli peripatetics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Troitskaya found that nearly half of the Arabcha vocabulary derived from Abdoltili, which in turn has links with the language of the Banū Sāsān.[87] She found that Abū Dulaf's lexicon matched the words in the *Ketāb-e sāsīān* for buttocks (*hurra*), warrior for the faith (*maysar*), work (*hādūr*), lazy (*tanbal*), and deaf (*barkūsh*).

Bosworth, inspired by the connections Troitskaya drew, explored the semantic history of the Sīn words for "bread" or "loaves" in Abū Dulaf and al-Ḥillī's Sāsāni poems. This fundamental word had resonated through so many other minority languages over the centuries, signaling a deep linguistic history. In the tenth century Abū Dulaf used the word *mashmūl* (pl., *mashāmīl*) to mean "loaf of bread," and in the Persian manuscript and in modern Abdoltili and Arabcha, *mashmūl* is

a "pilaf," all words designating staple grains.[88] In the language of the fourteenth-century *ghurabāʾ*, the word for bread was *shumūl*.[89] Among the nineteenth-century Egyptian Ḥalabi Sīn-speakers, *shamalna* meant "we ate," and *esh-shimleh* meant "eating."[90] That a staple word was preserved among Sīn-speakers for centuries is not surprising, and I have documented more holdovers between medieval and modern Sīn in an earlier publication.[91] But ethnographers and sociologists in the twentieth century have also recorded variations of these words in languages in northern Africa, Central Asia, and western China. The anthropologist Olaf Günther has recorded *shamul* as the word for rice among the Mugati tribe of Central Asia.[92] The semi-nomadic Äynu in China's Xinjiang province today uses *shamul* to mean "food." It therefore comes as no surprise that in the nineteenth century two explorers recorded the following: "Choumoul—aliment, nourriture (*chamoul* en tsigane)."[93] All in all, Troitskaya argued for a "relationship between the argot of the 14th century Central Asian and Khurasanian Sāsānīs and the modern jargons, Abdoltili and Arabcha in Central Asia, those of the dervishes and gypsies of eastern Persia, and that of the Abdāls of eastern Turkestan."[94] The diffusion among culturally similar groups of this basic food term implies a long shared history or perhaps that Sīn, Mugati, Abdoltili, and Arabcha derive from an unidentified ancestral language.

In Persian, too, *sāsī* and *sāsānī* mean "beggar" and has since at least the eleventh century, when the word derived from the Banū Sāsān.[95] In contemporary Maghrebi Arabic, the term *sāsī* means "beggar."[96] The westward movement of the term *sāsī* was definitely accompanied by migrations of Sīn-speakers, seeing as some contemporary northern African dialects also feature Sīn vocabulary. Among the papers of the French philologist Georges S. Colin (1893–1977) is a 238-page dossier of field notes and drafts of unpublished articles on northern African "Gypsy argots." In one Maghribi community he recorded phrases and sample sentences about eating that use *shamala*. For instance, "ouach brit techmel?" means "what is there to eat?"[97] In the mid-twentieth century the French ethnographer Jean Lapanne-Joinville recorded key terms of a Moroccan dialect called Ghawṣ that, unrecognized by him, included the Sāsāni words for woman (*lkudda*), man (*lḥedd* or *lkudi*), foot/leg (*medrāžāt*), bread (*šmūl*), money (*meṭṭūṭ*), and to speak (*iqžem*).[98] This last term is particularly suggestive, because the triliteral root *q-j-m* does not appear in classical Arabic lexicons, and the Sāsāni term *qajmānī* means "my sayings."[99] In a nineteenth-century Algerian dictionary the infinitive *qajama* is defined as "dire, parler, causer,"[100] and in Tunisia today *qajmi* signifies "notional and structured codes."[101]

Further studies of the dialects of northern African peripatetics will shed more light on the depth and scope of language contact between Sāsāni and other nomadic groups. So far, I have only found mention that among the peripatetic Beni Addes tribe of Algeria, *techmel* means "you eat," though this absence of data may be due to lack of available language documentation.[102] Still, one can reasonably assume that the Ghawṣ-speaking population in Morocco and the Banū Sāsān were drawn together through similar lifestyles. From Marrakech to Casablanca, Lapanne-Joinville found that Ghawṣ was spoken by itinerant male and female singers, sex workers, and vagrants, but in ʿAbda and Safi no one understood this language. His main

informants were residents of Casablanca and members of the Awlād Bū ʿAzīz tribe, who lived approximately twenty kilometers south of the coastal city of El Jadida.[103]

Is it sheer coincidence that this para-language—alternatively called Sīm, Sīn, or *lughat Banī Sāsān*—and its vocabulary have historically been reproduced in communities of peripatetics and entertainers? Or is it possible that we can begin to trace the formation and migrations of a distinct community through this ancient language?

Conclusion: Literary and Historical Implications

In this chapter I have carefully laid out arguments related to a language the surviving traces of which span the tenth century to the present day. First, Sīn vocabulary is of mixed etymology, notably Arabic, Persian, Aramaic, Syriac, and Greek lexical elements. There are also many words of as yet unknown etymology. Second, the *ghurabāʾ* encompassed tribes from at least two language groups: Indo-European (Romani and Persian) and Semitic (Arabic and Sīn). Even today, Strangers divide themselves along these linguistic lines. In Egypt, for instance, they speak three main languages: the Ghajar speak Arabic with a strong Indo-Aryan (Romani or Domari) vocabulary, the Nawar speak a mixed language of Arabic with a significant Persian substrate, and the Ḥalab speak a specially morphologized Arabic with Sīn vocabulary. Last, the Sīn para-language of the medieval *ghurabāʾ* has survived today in the dialects of peripatetics and entertainers in Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Studies of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic dialectology, both historical and contemporary, will shed more light on the history and patterns of this *ghurabāʾ* language and its community of speakers. Methodologically, researchers may be on firmer ground with historical linguistic analyses, rather than through investigations of social categories, as the naming of ethnic groups was unstable across time and space or was too vague (e.g., *aswad*, *turk*, *ʿajam*, *kurd*). Poets and grammarians, who had vested personal and professional interests in language, may have transcribed additional samples of these minority languages in their works. Last, more extensive documentation of the contemporary languages of peripatetic groups will allow firmer conclusions about the historical migrations of the *ghurabāʾ*.