



Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance: Hymns of the Satpanth Isma'ili Muslim Saint, Pir Shams (Mcgill Studies in the History of Religions) (Sunny Series, McGill Studies in the History of Religions)

By Tazim R. Kassam

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Coursing through cultures and time, tuneful verse has given moving expression to the human longing for the divine. As poetry strung on sweet melodies, hymns bear testimony to the religious life of the devout, and to the inspiring teachings of minstrels and saints. Such is the ginan tradition of the Satpanth Isma'ilis, Indian successors of the Fatimid Nizari Isma'ili sect of the Shi'ah Muslims. Traditionally recited during daily ritual prayers, ginans have been revered for generations among the Satpanth Isma'ilis as sacred compositions. This work offers for the first time an extensive translation of hymns attributed to the Isma'ili saint-composer, Pir Shams (ca. 13th century), who is at once one of the most pivotal and yet most enigmatic figures of this literary tradition. It also presents a cogent historical reconstruction of the beginnings of Satpanth Isma'ilism—a phase of Isma'ili history that has spanned over eight centuries.

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It is rare to find South Asian poetry translated into English in a fashion that gives an impression of the poetic power of the original. I think the author is particularly gifted in her ability to translate in this manner. Sheila McDonough

Absolutely wonderful hymns! They reveal something of the quality of the traditions as nothing else can. Their power as community memory and boundary markers through sacred sound is lovingly and expertly communicated in this book. Frederick M. Denny"

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About the Author

Tazim R. Kassam is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies and Religion at Middlebury College.

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