Chapter 2

SīN

THE LANGUAGE OF THE BANŪ SĀSĀN AND THE GHURABĀʾ

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. In the Middle East this phenomenon is observable in Loterāʾ, 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. 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 Ghaus dialects have Sīn vocabulary; in northeast Africa the ancient mixed language is still known as Sīn and sometimes as Sim; 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-Muqaffaʾ (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 Bahram 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.” 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 qaṣidas (polythematic poems with a single meter and rhymel etter) describing their traditional professions and introducing vocabulary from the tribal language. Al-ʿUkbarī’s qaṣida was apparently written first. In it, he mentioned various trades practiced by members of the Banū Sāsān, including the beggar who feigns blindness (istīl), the peddler of amulets (man yanfīdhu sirmār”), the astrologers, bloodletters, sellers of unguents and medicines, Sufis who rambled about their asceticism, and the beggar leaders of the “tribe of exile” (bahālīlu bani l-ghurba).6 Sometime after this, “Abū Dulaf presented the Ṣāḥib with a qaṣida 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 qaṣida 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

- *iṣṭabl / iṣṭabl* “mosque” < Greek *stávlon* “resting-place, stable”
- *qalaftūriyya* “the form of a talisman not made from a matrix” < Greek *phylaktērion* “amulet”

Syriac

- *qamṭar / qimṭar* “case for books and records” < Syriac *qamṭiyā < 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”

Aramaic

- *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 *šēnā* “two”
- *sikr* “weir” < Akkadian *sekēru* “to block up, dam”

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

- *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”
- *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 Sāsānī 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*. Badi‘ 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-Ṣāhib 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-Iskandari*, but in all likelihood, al-Hamadhānī never compiled his own *maqāmāt* in a definitive written collection. In any case, his title *Maqāmāt al-Iskandari* refers to the antihero Abū l-Fatḥ al-Iskandari, 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-Iskandari 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 (*zaʾīm*), who was reciting, they alternating with him; he intoning and they answering him.” The leader of this Sāsāni troop is none other than al-Iskandari.

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. 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-Ḥarīth b. Ḥammām 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. 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 ‘alayhi shawdhar, or a young gazelle wearing a short cloak. Shawdhar is a Persian term for “a short woman’s cloak,” and the Sāsānī term for “beardless youth (Arabic, amrad).” 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-Ṣāhib Ibn ‘Abbād and Abū Dulaf, where the shawdhar/shawzar serves as an object of sexual desire for an adult male.

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. 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.

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 Sāsānī hero was faithfully reproduced into the modern era, some of them even incorporating Sāsānī language into the works. Maurice Pomerantz has identified two Sāsānī words—khushnī (outsider) and ghurash (trick)—in one of al-Ṣafadī al-Barīdī’s fourteenth-century maqāmāt. 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 Sāsānī 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-gharib), is so named because Abū Riyāsh, the Sāsānī gharīb, reappears in the life of the narrator Al-Sāji b. Ḥamām. 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/ghurabāʾ and also for recovering samples of their dialect.

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 (ašḥāb al-nawāmīs), Sufis (fuqarāʾ), beggars at gates or makers of fans and talismans (al-madrūzīn?), Zuṭṭī lepers (ašḥāb al-balāʾ min al-zuṭṭī), 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. 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 (tawāʾ if) by this name. Furthermore, they communicated in poems or messages in Sin (wa-lahum ishʿ ār biʾl-sīn).

Later in the book al-Jawbarī elaborated on the nature of Sin. As for revealing the secrets of the astrologers, they have a form of communication that they call Sin. 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 كسباب بBehet ما ابيليه في سبني فراحات ومطلي شن... ودخ في الظلمت يرتد في صهوني سعا للبكروس فيه كدي. They express many things—countless and unlimited things—in Sin! They hold royal literary salons that are not for kings, as well as amazing large gatherings (awqāṭ ’ajība). 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-ṭawāʾ if) as al-ghurabāʾ. This is an amazing language (hiya lugha ’ajība). I know that they call themselves ghurabāʾ because they produce wonders (gharāʾib) of all sorts that amaze others. In al-Jawbarī’s account only the astrologers of the Banū Sāsān and their friends speak Sin, 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 Sin sample is the same as the lughat Banī Sāsān preserved in the qaṣidas 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 Sin. 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 ṣahūtī saʿʿ ā l’l-barkūsh fihi kaddā. The later manuscript, Istanbul Karaçelebizade 253, dated 717/1317–18, reads: samqūnī kasiḥāb h.b.t.r.sh bi-baht mā abhalahu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>samqūn-ī</th>
<th>kasiḥ-āb</th>
<th>bi-baht</th>
<th>mā</th>
<th>abhalu-hu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My boy</td>
<td>handsome</td>
<td>with a face</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>more beautiful than it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“My handsome boy has a face more beautiful than it.”

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.”

The grammar and syntax are Arabic, as are the prepositions (bi, fi) and the negative particle (mā). The pronominal suffix -hu is also Arabic. The morphology
of comparative adjectives also follows the Arabic \textit{aXXaX} model. The suffix \textit{-i} indicates personal possession, as it does in Arabic.

\begin{tabular}{llllll}
\text{fi nisb-} & \text{f.r.khāt} & \text{wa-matt-} & \text{shandal} & \text{wa-dammakha} & \text{fi} \\
\text{in my house} & \text{and my belongings} & \text{piled up} & \text{and he slept} & \text{in} & \text{the darkness(?)}
\end{tabular}

“\textit{F.r.khāt} and my belongings are piled up in my house. He slept in the darkness.”

\begin{tabular}{llllll}
\text{y.r.t.d.} & \text{fi ṣahūt-} & \text{sa} & \text{li-l-barkāsh} & \text{fihi} & \text{kaddā}\textsuperscript{31} \\
? & \text{in my desires} & \text{he went out} & \text{to the beggar feigning} & \text{in which} & \text{he begged}
\end{tabular}

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, \textit{Sin} consisted of interspersing \textit{Sāsāni} vocabulary into an Arabic syntactic and grammatical structure.

\textit{Mamluk Cairo: Shadow Theater}

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Dāniyāl al-Mawṣīlī al-Khuẓā’ī (646/1248–710/1311) was born around 646/1248 in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. His Khuẓā’a 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.”\textsuperscript{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 Hūlegū’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.\textsuperscript{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 Khalil (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.\textsuperscript{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 (kaḥhāl) . . . 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.” Judging by the placement of Ibn Dāniyāl’s booth, his clientele would have consisted largely of poor residents of Ḥusaynīyya. 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] spurses [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.

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.

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.

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 ḥarfūsh elude precise definitions
but Quatremère concluded that the most apt definition of ḥarfūṣh was “a man of the lowest class.” 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-hirāf. 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 ḥarafīsh was being gradually replaced by juʿaydīyya.

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 ḥarafīsh.” The narrator describes antisocial behaviors of the ḥarafīsh 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.” 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.” However, the most explicit connection the poem makes between the ḥarafīsh and the Banū Sāsān comes with the insertion of a verse in Sin.

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 ḥarafīsh is, / like myself, all alone.

27 [in Sin] 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.” 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.

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 *Sin*.\(^{45}\)

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1. *fī zaqāqayhim q.ṭṭū al-.tāmī wa'l-.ʿatal al-r.r.d.kājī al-z.r.n.di*

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 wa-l-.kayyān al-mukaddī*

the? the? and? and? and? the male beggar

3. *wa-shirāmīṭ wa-l-mufakkak wa-l-q.n.b wa-b.r.kān wa-l-m.ḥ.nn al-q.m.n.di*

and an amulet maker and the escapologist and the? and the? and the capturing storyteller

4. *Haṭaḷa al-kuddū wa-l-samāqīn bīl-fays wa-mā in yakīfuhum sh.ṭ.r mardī mārdi*

He saw the male beggar and the boys while he gives them clever two silver coins

I am unable to reconstruct most of the *Sin* 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, *Sin* 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 *Sin* 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 *Sin*, 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 Sāsāni 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-Jawbari’s Sin text, must be completely contrived. Francesco 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. 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. The following is my translation with the Sin 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 (*wasf al-t-rāsh*) and who regard commoners as *aḥshāsh*. We have seen the boy (*samqūn*) and the man (*kudd*) together, and we have plundered (*ʿabaynā*) the *hirmī* 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.

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 ‘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.”

Romani cultures are central not only to shadow theater in Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Turkestan, and Greece but also to its forerunner, the *maqāma*. In Iran, the main figure is named Kačal Pahlavān (Bald Athlete), and in Turkestan it is Palvan Kačal. The Persian word *pahlavān* means “athlete” or “gymnast,” referring perhaps to the traditional itinerant trade of acrobatism and rope dancing. The Bahalwān 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. 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 ‘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 gharib. Recall that al-Ḥarīrī’s Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is “the light of the ghurabāʾ.” 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 Gharib (Stranger). Ibn Dāniyāl abandoned innuendo and outright named his protagonist Gharib, who delivers the opening monologue and epilogue, closing the play by repeating the words: gharibun gharibun gharibun gharib (“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 gharib 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.” 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 (aj’alu alfāẓah bi-lughatihim). 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.” At the time of Hillī’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 kand. 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.I “upon, by,” and l.b.y.sām “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.” 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, *ahnadha* is a *shuṭṭāri* verb that means “to pour increasingly less water and more wine to accelerate intoxication.”

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*). The writings of the Baghdadi *muṭṭun* poet Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 391/1001) “expressed obscenity and were intertwined with the languages of the *khuldiyīn*, the beggars and the clever thieves.” According to al-Thaʿālibī, the *khuldiyya* were a group of beggars and members of the Banū Sāsān (*mukaddūn* and *sāsāniyyūn*), 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-Ṣafādī (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 (*anāʿ ārif bi-lughātihim*), because they were my neighbors. So I used to ask him about the explanation and would write it. I remained [like] the Ašmaʾī of that area for a time.

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. But what else do we know about these neighbors? Al-Ṣafādī 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-Ṣafādī’s writing, and this group and their modes of begging were major themes in popular literature. Moreover, the *ghurabāʾ* 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 Sāsānī 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.
Sim and Sin in the Modern Era

The Sin 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 ghuraba’ 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 Sim, and it is Arabic with much Sin vocabulary. The Ghajar include Sin and western Romani in their dialect, and the Nawar insert many Persian words into their Arabic dialect. In Egypt and Sudan, the Ḥalab speak a blend of Sin 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 Sim. Nothing certain is known concerning the origin of this word. According to the opinion of the natives Sim means something secret or mysterious.” The sim word list he produced has since been shown to represent not a single pan-Egyptian Gypsy dialect but only the dialect of the Ḥalab. The list is a mixture of words derived from Arabic and words directly from Sin. Von Kremer was unaware of the medieval Sin, 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 sim, mais Djaubari, auteur du 13e siècle, écrit plus d’une fois sin.” The discrepancy between the two names—Sim and Sin—was inadvertently solved eighty years later when Everett Rowson interviewed nearly 100 Cairenes, mostly entertainers and homosexuals, who had some knowledge of Sim. “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.” In a later publication Rowson acknowledged de Goeje’s citation of al-Jawbarī but cautioned that an isolated thirteenth-century usage of the term Sin “require[d] further investigation.”

In the decades between de Goeje’s and Rowson’s publications, much research was carried out on Sim. 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). 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 Ḥalabī dialect as an Arabic thieves’
cant. However, with the recent edition of even more Sāsānî texts, we see additional cognates: outsider (khushnī), horse (suhlī), donkey (zuwill), meat (maḥzūza), region (qawnti), knife (khūsa), garment (sarme/sarmel), Christian (qannāwī), ugly (shalaq), beautiful (bahīl), to say (qajama), and to steal (kanasha). The high correlation of medieval and modern terms suggests that Ḥalabī Sim/Sīn is the modern counterpart of medieval Sin.

The dissemination of the modern Sim 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 Sim 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 Sim. To show how Sim functioned syntactically and grammatically, he recorded two samples of the shadow play artists’ conversational prose, alongside translations into colloquial Egyptian Arabic and German. In these selections of spoken Sim, one sees that this para-language functions in the same way that it did in thirteenth-century literary prose. The Sim/Sīn lexicon is embedded in an Arabic grammatical structure, as one sees in the following sentence.

Sim: **badẖtu qabalan li-rashfat al-sūg sawagṯu bi-arbi‘ ibārim wa-rakhkhaytu ma‘aḻī bi-ibrimayn.**

Egyptian Arabic: **raḥtu qabalan li-qahwat al-ḥashish ḥashishtu bi-arbi‘ at qurūsh wa-akaltu ḥilw bi-qurushayn.**

English: Before that, I went to the coffeehouse, where I smoked marijuana that cost four coins and ate a sweet that cost two.

The Sim 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 *Li‘b al-manār* (The Lighthouse Play) by Dā‘ūd al-Manāwī, one of the characters cries out, “**elmehāzz rabaṣl!**,” which one of the editors’ informants identified as Sim. If Sim 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 Sim” was simply the Sim of entertainers. In the late 1980s Dwight Reynolds lived among oral poets in the lower Delta village of al-Bakāṭūsh. 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, *dij*.

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 *küdyānah*, which likely derive from *kudda* (pl. *kidād*), defined in Abū Dulaf’s poem as “woman” or “wife.” Raqīṣah bahīlah means “a skillful female dancer.” Bahīl signifies “beautiful” in the medieval and modern Sīn. ʿĪsā translates *küdyānah shalaf* as “tired female dancer,” but we know that *shalaf* in medieval and modern Sīn means “ugly.”

Between 1988 and 1990 Karin van Nieuwkerk conducted anthropological fieldwork among entertainers in Egypt, noting specifically that the regional Sims of entertainers in Alexandria, Tanta, and Cairo were mutually intelligible. In her book she acknowledged that the entertainers’ Sim had ten words in common with the Ḥalabī words that Littmann recorded, but she does not investigate this convergence. 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.

The Sāsānī 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. 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.

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, *qalandars*, 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. She found that Abū Dulaf’s lexicon matched the words in the *Ketāb-e sāsān* 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 Sin words for “bread” or “loaves” in Abū Dulaf and al-Ḥilli’s Sāsānī 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.\(^{68}\) In the language of the fourteenth-century ghurabā’, the word for bread was shumūl.\(^{89}\) Among the nineteenth-century Egyptian Ḥalabi Sin-speakers, shamalna meant “we ate,” and esh-shimleh meant “eating.”\(^{90}\) That a staple word was preserved among Sin-speakers for centuries is not surprising, and I have documented more holdovers between medieval and modern Sin 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 Āyū 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 14\(^{th}\) 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 Sin, 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 Sin-speakers, seeing as some contemporary northern African dialects also feature Sin 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 Sāsānī words for woman (lkudda), man (lhedd or lkudi), foot/leg (medrāżāt), 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 Sāsānī 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 Sāsānī 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 ʿAziz 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 Sim, Sin, 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, Sin 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 Sin). 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 Halab speak a specially morphologized Arabic with Sin vocabulary. Last, the Sin 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.