


An integral part of the book consists of fourteen biographies of Afghan and Iranian intellectuals whose names appear throughout its pages. This is a clever technique that allows the main narrative thread to be maintained in the primary sections while simultaneously providing a broader context for the discussions within. *Reading across Borders* is a must-read for anyone interested in the intellectual life of 20th-century Iran and Afghanistan.

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## Persianate Verse and the Poetics of Eastern Internationalism

**Samuel Hodgkin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2024).  
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Iranian poet Abu al-Qasim Lahuti writing panegyrics to Stalin in the classical Perso-Arabic form of qasida; Russian poet Anna Akhmatova composing a spontaneous *nazīra* (imitation) of a *rubāʿī* (quatrain) by medieval Persian poet Khayyam; French author André Gide receiving a Tajik robe of honor as a *šilat* (prize given to a poet) at a Soviet congress of writers; Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet and Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz at a *mushāʿira* (poetry recitation gathering) in Tashkent; Iranian film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf making visual *talmīh* (allusion) to the work of his Armenian peer, Sergei Parajanov, in his films. These are snapshots of the Persianate communist internationalism that Samuel Hodgkin delineates in his formidable book, *Persianate Verse and the Poetics of Eastern Internationalism*.

The book gives a groundbreaking account of the intertwinement of Persianate poetics and Soviet politics from the transregional revolutionary days of early 20th-century Russia, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire to the fragmentation of the Persianate zone through the Soviet state-building projects in Transcaucasia and Central Asia, the collapse of the USSR, and the post-Soviet era in Eurasia. Hodgkin explores the vast transnational, multinational, and international solidarities that leftist internationalists forged across West, Central, and South Asia and the Caucasus by incorporating classical Persianate forms and rituals that transcended national boundaries. He offers great insight into the dialectical entanglement of politics and poetics on a vast transregional scale in which Persianate poetics was used as a means of cultural diplomacy between the Soviet Union and the Third World. Hodgkin also meticulously demonstrates how the poetry published in the communist press across Iran and the Ottoman and Russian empires contributed to the modernization of Persianate poetics, which was further institutionalized through Soviet-inspired writers' unions. The book contains fascinating stories of poets who turned into bureaucrats and politicians who turned to poets to advance Soviet propaganda.

*Persianate Verse* is one of the first in a series of new monographs published by Cambridge University Press that proposes to “offer insights into new cartographies of literary production” on wider and more dynamic scales than monolingual and national literary histories. This focus

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is articulated through the use of the word “Persianate” in the title of the book. A new spirit of scholarship in Iranian studies over the past two decades has seen a rise in the use of the term Persianate. The scholarly definition of the term varies from context to context, but it broadly aims to designate the transregional reach of Persian literary production. Hodgkin uses the notion effectively with reference to the literary communism that emerged from shared revolutionary impulses, cross-cultural canon-making projects, multinational institutions, multilingual cocreations, and international cross-fertilizations that extend beyond the borders of the Persian-speaking world.

The book’s organization into five simultaneously thematic and chronological chapters draws our attention away from the simplistic historical periodization of what Hodgkin calls “Eastern Internationalism”: a communist model of world literature, with an extensive network of writers and readers in Persian, Turkish, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, and Urdu, unified around a shared commitment to revolutionary social movements in their regions and catalyzed by forms and rituals originating in Persian *adab* (the Classical Arabic and Persian Ethico-Aesthetic Literary Tradition). Historical periodization is less important to the organization of *Persianate Verse* than the different roles assigned to Persianate poetic forms and norms within the framework of Eastern internationalism. These different roles are brilliantly reflected by the epigraphs Hodgkin provides at the beginning of each chapter: quotations from Bidil (in Persian from 18th-century India), Füzuli (in Oghuz Turkic, from 16th-century Iraq), Nava’i (in Chaghatay Turkic, from 15th-century Transoxiana), Nizami (in Persian, from 12th-century Transcaucasia), and Sayat Nova (in Turkic—but in Armenian script—from 18th-century Transcaucasia). Most of the epigraphs are rendered in beautiful nastaliq script. This is a welcome divergence from the Westernized typefaces that are typically seen in Anglo-American academic books on Persianate literature due to issues with technical compatibility—a marker of Eurocentrism in its turn, which the book rejects. The selected quotations reflect the temporal, spatial, and linguistic breadth of the territory that Hodgkin studies in his book. Meanwhile the author’s detailed analysis and close reading of these quoted poems in both each respective chapter and the conclusion exemplify his scholarly methodology and approach throughout the book.

The index that the author provides at the end of *Persianate Verse* further reflects the book’s engagement with Persianate forms. Self-identifying as a *tadhkira* (commemorative compendium), the index highlights the constellation of ancient and modern poets, scholars, bureaucrats, and saints who constitute Eastern internationalism across times and spaces. The companionship of poets and politicians in this constellation highlights the bureaucratization of poetry characteristic of communist literary internationalism in its Soviet phase. The post-Soviet phase of Eastern internationalism, however, sees the return of the repressed. Those potentials of the Persianate canon that were traditionally marginalized or censored by the Soviet cultural bureaucracy—such as queer love—emerge in the form of a politically subversive poetics that unites artists and writers across the borders of the fragmented Persianate zone in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse.

For this reviewer, coming from a scholarly background in Persian studies, the book’s major contribution lies in the light it sheds on the expressive possibilities of classical Persianate genres within new transnational reception contexts. At the same time, *Persianate Verse* makes a valuable contribution to the fields of comparative literature and world literature. It challenges readers to move beyond Eurocentric perspectives by offering a compelling case for the role of non-Western literary traditions in shaping political movements and fostering international solidarity.

The book’s exploration of a non-Eurocentric model of literary world-making steers clear of simplistic binary ideological and methodological categorizations. Hodgkin contrasts the Western-oriented emphasis on written high Persianate forms, such as the *ghazal* (lyric), *qasida*, *rubā’i*, and *masnavi* (a series of couplets in rhymed pairs), specific to elite circles and


the centers of literary production, with the communist focus on oral low Persianate forms such as folktales, ballads, lullabies, and devotional poetry sung in marketplaces and tea-houses. However, he meticulously deconstructs these binaries through extensive examples, detailed analysis, and strikingly close readings, such as when in Chapter 2 he elucidates the tensions in the Persianate canon-making projects of the Stalinist period. On one hand, great classical poets were excluded from the Persianate canon, and attention was paid to folkloristics and oral literature; on the other hand, the classics (like Firdawsi, Nizami, and Nava'i) were celebrated in Soviet-led international jubilees. Whereas the first strategy was adopted by Soviet proletarian critics to distinguish themselves from Western classical-oriented proponents of world literature, the latter was placed in the service of the Stalinist cult of personality and aimed at consolidating the role of the poet in giving voice to a folk-oriented authoritarian politics.

By the same token, in Chapter 4, which is dedicated to the translational dynamics of communist Persianate world literature mainly during the Khrushchev thaw and after, Hodgkin provides fascinating examples of Russians translating writers of Eastern internationalism, in which the translation process was conceptualized through metaphors of love, friendship, and intimacy, rather than the more commonly used metaphors of invasion and conquest in translation modeling. The book opens new vistas on the ideological implications of the domesticating, foreignizing, and non-translation strategies adopted by Russian translators while providing examples of the occasional violation of this friendship by their overdomesticating approaches to the “minor” poets and writers whom they translated. The author’s analysis of the Eastern internationalist translation methodologies will undoubtedly be widely cited in scholarship on world literature and translation studies. Hodgkin further complicates the antinomy between Western Orientalist and Eastern internationalist projects by elaborating on instances of complicity between the two despite conflicting political interests. *Persianate Verse* addresses a long-standing need in world literature studies for alternative models of “worlding” literature and is a timely reminder of the enduring power of poetry to bridge divides and create a sense of shared humanity across borders and ideologies.

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## Writing in Red: Literature and Revolution across Turkey and the Soviet Union

**Nergis Ertürk (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024). Pp. 341. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780231214858**

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Nergis Ertürk’s *Writing in Red: Literature and Revolution across Turkey and the Soviet Union* is a compelling exploration of Turkish Marxist-communist literary production and its transnational entanglements with Soviet literary networks. The book is divided into two main parts, “Genres of Entangled Revolutions” and “Marxian Form in the Periphery: Modernist Socialist Realisms.” Within this structure, it delves into the lives and selected works of both lesser-