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JONATHAN TRAPMAN PRESENTATION PAPER – ANKARA, TURKEY  
THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS ASSOCIATED WITH TRANSLATING A DEAD LANGUAGE INTO LIVING ENGLISH AND THE GIFTS OFFERED

*When the world ends, madness sets in,  
The descendants of Adam will fight and eat each other,  
Faith, religion and belief will all be sold for profit,  
To the thinkers among you I direct these words.  
Hikmet 74*

Divine Madness and Divine Wisdom are a mere razor's edge apart!

My paper's title is:

"The Challenges and Rewards associated with translating a dead language into living English and the gifts offered"

One gift received is to be present at this symposium, alongside some of the sharpest minds, astute and knowledgeable scholars and lovers of Hoja Ahmed Yassawi's work and life. I say we, as I wish to recognize the translation of Diwani Hikmet is the result of the joint effort of my wife, Virve and myself.

I am grateful, to stand on the shoulders of all scholars and experts of the great saint, recognizing the honour and privilege it bestows.

So, is it a sort of madness to attempt translation of a dead language into a living one, in this case, English?

I am sure all of us here would say No!

Otherwise how could we cherish, embrace the riches, poetry and divine wisdom as Yassawi offers us?

My wife and I were crazy enough to take on such a challenge, when in 2011, our Kazakh friend Anuarbek Bokebay asked if we would attempt an English translation of Diwani Hikmet. My wife, of course said yes. A short time later Anuarbek passed, yet his brother Samatbek supported our effort in realizing the translation.

When asked how long it might take, we gaily answered "Oh, 6 to 8 weeks!" Although accomplished translators, we had no idea what plans Yassawi had ahead for us!

We discovered our crazy time projection was woefully short, yet the saint's divine wisdom was powerful medicine, countering our less than divine madness.

My professional life has been spent travelling the world, meeting and working with all sorts – Royals, aristocracy, corporate heads down to the common worker and gut wrenchingly poor. Context, listening to their stories; who they were, was essential to understanding each and every one, no matter at what level they lived.

So visiting Southern Kazakhstan, Turkestan, the landscape and environment Yassawi lived and breathed, getting a feel for this great saint, experiencing the hilvet he chose

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to spend half his life in, where he created the majority of his 99,000-Hikmet, became essential.

We visited mausoleums of family members, his own, the magnificent one in Turkestan and other sacred centres. It allowed us to feel connected on a far deeper level. One happenstance, when visiting Hoja Ahmed Yassawi University, in search of a certain professor, we were offered a translator, Suriaya Yuldasheva, whose family, Yuldeshev, it transpired were direct descendants of the great man.

From her father we were able to gain a facsimile of the original work, held for generations in their family, in the original Chagatai.

On top of this fortuitous meeting, we met an elder scholar, Mirahmet Mirhaldarov. This wonderful man has spent his life devoted to studying Yassawi, as well as learning Chagatai. Once back in the UK, the Internet provided us a constant reference to the original through the knowledge of our wonderful friend and scholar.

Standing at the other end of this mammoth task, I can state honestly I would not have missed one single moment of the journey. Getting to know this great saint, his voice, glimpsing his beautiful mind, his insights, guidance and overwhelming message of hope from within scenes superficially, places of darkness incarnate.

The more we immersed ourselves, the more we began to comprehend the wisdom and transcendent viewpoint, perceived across centuries, yet through a lens of awareness that recognized follies and hollow ambition as much alive today as his day.

Perhaps it is that feeling of similarity that inspired us to go deeper, learn more about a man who, able to virtually 'see into the future', offers gifts and tools for us today to cope with, benefit from and ultimately transcend the pile of human mockeries across time and space.

My former life as photojournalist had me remark to my wife how modern and familiar his verses felt. How some events described could as easily have come from the pen of a reporter embedded in present day wars and troubles.

Perhaps it is just that humanity continues to revolve around basic desires to do battle through divide, conquer and confuse.

It was this, Yassawi's extraordinary ability to capture our attention that became the hook drawing us deeper and further. I confess my own on matters of conflict, bait and switch and power, made it an attractive magnet. He certainly knew how to get our attention and also reinforced a feeling maybe we had not merely been chosen randomly.

Our pathetically slim timescale woefully inadequate, we realized we were in this for the long haul. We comprehended the depths our saint was pulling us into and THAT required meditative focus, fortunately, familiar territory for us both. By that I mean,

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his intense, yet loving prose demanded a state of mind, as clear as possible released from our translators' egos. Ignoring this, all we would accomplish would be hitting a brick wall of incomprehension. Weeks turned into months. Months of devotion eagerly exploring the closest possible meaning we could translate his beautiful and insightful prose.

The deeper we went, the more tears we shed - tears of joy, appreciation and insight. It was his transparent honesty, fallibility and descriptions of personal desperation openly expressed that moved us. Initially I struggled, embarrassed at conveying so many 'weepings' and 'crying copiously'. Western perception of tears and crying afforded my English-speaking ego get in the way. Recognizing deeper spiritual comprehension allowed me to move forward.

As we went over, again and again, it became apparent repetition of words and their precise placement became the very meditation, awakening surrender in the reader.

As we see in **Hikmet 20**:

*"Weep a lot," says the Lord,  
Comprehending its meaning, the scholar wept copiously,  
So many tears were shed,  
Such a scholar becomes a maven, my friends.*

I spoke of Yassawi's transparency and honesty. The more we, translating him, mirrored these qualities, the greater comprehension there was, of the saint's work.

It also became clear Yassawi touches profound habitual human tendencies that have run through time, over centuries and this alone makes his work even more relevant today, than ever.

In fact his constant message throughout the Hikmet is urging us to find our humanity, our peace with others. Only if we develop the spiritual tendencies within us will be able to then become more human.

Right from the start he writes in

**Hikmet 1**

*Shelter for the destitute, poor and orphans,  
Avoiding those whose arrogance is great, Yes, I.*

In a world today where empathy seems to have lost its currency amongst our leaders and those in charge, through all strata of life, Yassawi's prescient message constantly reminds us.

As we came across this reiterated theme, it made us realise how little progress there has been within the human condition.

Yassawi's output was huge. He tells us he wrote more than 99,000. Since we know most of his Hikmet were compiled while underground, a simple calculation made us

wonder how he managed this.

It was when our good friend Mirahmet Mirhaldarov, himself a Professor of Academia from Turan University surprised us with his research, now more accepted by scholars in Kazakhstan, on the years Yassawi spent in his cell. He spent 63 years hidden from sight.

In one of the more recently discovered Hikmet, he tells us:

*“Even after 125 years I have yet to find the meaning of the human soul”*

In translating his verse, it was apparent the free flow rather than precise stanza format and rhyming parameters, was his preferred style. Much like some of today’s poetic form.

We caught how repetition, in cases such as Yes, I emphasizes drawing our attention to his words:

*“At sixty-three, with years of carefree living,  
Not strongly following God’s will and ignorant,  
Had become sloppy in prayers and fasting,  
Seeking out the bad, avoiding the good, Yes, I”*

Personally this form of writing aided our translating, as I am sure many of you recognize, translating poetry can be the harshest challenge to retain original ‘feel’. Yet not only did it give us some license but it also showed us the intensely loving way Yassawi speaks to us and is conveyed.

Again in Hikmet 144 and 145 the repetition of a line such as:

“Taken by hand and placed on the path Anta-al-Hadi” burns the message into the readers mind. Yassawi plays with words, like a magician plays with his audience. It is truly magical. It is love personified in words.

It is this very love flowing through each and every Hikmet, transmuting pain to bliss, devotion to fulfilment and humanity to spiritual awareness that gave the impetus for our work.

Having completed the translation, we gifted a copy to Maulana Sheikh Nazim Al-Haqqani, head of the Naqshabandi order. He originally blessed our work. We sent copies to other spiritual leaders. The Archbishop of Canterbury responded personally, much appreciating and recognizing Yassawi’s tremendous importance in aiding global unity. It is our wish all Heads of State hold a copy of this great man’s work. Of course, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has his copy.

Apart from being blessed with scholastic help during translation, one particular form of assistance plainly presented itself, during hours pondering the meaning behind Yassawi’s words. More than anything this gave me the desire to be as true to the

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original as possible in veneration of this saint.

Wondering over a particular line or two, I found myself asking the great man himself what he really meant and wished conveyed. It was then I felt his presence. A literal touch on the shoulder or words entering my consciousness,

“That is correct” or

“More compassionately” or

“Make it even stronger in tone!”

When he wished to reprimand those lacking belief, holding too much ego or lacking conviction.

This brought both of us to “Weep copiously”!

One such example is well illustrated in **Hikmet 35**:

*The prediction of saints will soon come to pass,  
Judgment Day draws closer, my friends,  
They say smart people will lose their minds,  
As mercy and kindness desert people, my friends.*

*From the old and the young politeness flees,  
From tender girls and young women shame departs,  
Where has moral sense in faith disappeared, asked Rasul?  
Unusually, society lost its shame, my friends.*

*Muslims killing Muslims,  
Misrepresenting and violating the meaning of the Lord,  
Murid became impolite, neglecting their teacher,  
Remarkably, violent times descended, my friends.*

*All sorts of people lose their generosity,  
Kings, and viziers turn away from their Creator,  
Dervish prayers lack sincerity,  
All kinds of woes weigh people down, my friends.*

*Scholars at the End of Days became vicious and mean spirited,  
Scholars became sycophantic,  
Dervishes declaring Haqq were blamed and killed,  
Terrible times have befallen us, my friends.*

*Judgment Day is close, there is no turning back,  
Everything Servant Ahmed shares is true,  
Nothing here is written for his own sake,  
But purely for the enlightenment of all, my friends.*

The great philosopher **Plato** described the essential constituent parts to Divine Madness as being **prophecy, the artistic, healing and love**. Through his verses Yassawi shares all these in abundance guiding us towards spiritual life.

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To all of us he bequeaths his treasure – Diwani Hikmet – Divine Wisdom, an eternal treasure, more needed in our world today than ever.

It is fitting thus, to finish with Yassawi’s own voice from his Munajat:

*“Dive into the Hikmet of Yassawi,  
And such immersion reveals their quality.....  
Taste just one drop from the pitcher of Love,  
And merge into the Face of God forever. “*

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