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## "I am the Nightingale of the Merciful": Rumi's Use of the Qur'an and Hadith

Nargis Virani

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**"I am the Nightingale of the Merciful":**

Rumi's Use of the Qur'an and Hadith

The scriptural status of the Qur'an backed by the orthodox dogma concerning it being "the uncreated word of God" lends it a unique position within Islamic religious and literary traditions.<sup>1</sup> The genre of "*tafsir*" has long been the acknowledged domain for Qur'anic hermeneutics. The Qur'an commentators, the *mufasssirin*, carved out a niche for this genre very early on in Islamic literatures. They circumscribed what qualified as source materials for *tafsir* and what did not. Sound Prophetic traditions transmitted in unbroken link from the Prophet on the authority of individuals, preferably his immediate companions, with impeccable reputations, soon became the primary supplier of exegetical materials. In addition, philological analyses drawn from the "state of the art" grammatical discussions taking place in the very vibrant linguistic centers of Kufa and Basra proved fruitful.<sup>2</sup> Other literati, to some extent, Sufis, to a much greater extent, quickly countered authenticity claims rooted in "the weight of the tradition" in *tafsir* works by asserting legitimacy embedded in their "personal spiritual experiences." The various approaches adopted by important literary and mystic figures to claim such legitimacy remain obscure because this aspect of Islamic poetry remains largely unanalyzed. Allusions to, and quotations from, the Qur'an turn up in several expected and unexpected texts and contexts in myriad languages. Arabic quotations from the Qur'an in poetry composed by Muslims or non-Muslims do not technically qualify as *mulamma'at*, or multilingual poems.<sup>3</sup> Many of these quotations, on the one hand, seem thoroughly "naturalized" and, therefore, unidentifiable. On the other hand, they add a different texture to the poems linguistically and, as such, affect their reception. The varied reasons for embedding Qur'anic quotations in literary compositions range from invoking *barakah* (divine blessings) to seeking divine sanction and legitimacy for one's work and thought. In addition, the composer may simply wish to prove his prowess and mastery of the divine scriptures. However, individuals, particularly one as creative as Rumi, offer a different perspective when they include the Qur'an in their works. This article demonstrates how the great mystic-poet, Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi's (1207-1273 C.E.) unique use of distinct verses from the Qur'an contributes to a holistic understanding of fundamental Sufi principles as rooted in the Qur'an while emphasizing its multivalent applications. Based on analyses of some of Rumi's poems, I will argue that including literary materials from the vast body of poetry produced in a Muslim milieu will enhance our understandings about how the Qur'an resonated, and continues to resonate, among the vast majority of Muslim believers. Widening our scope of what traditionally constituted source materials that qualified as *tafsir* will open up further avenues for studying unexplored points of intersection between literary and religious traditions in Islam.

## Rumi's Poems

Rumi inserted innumerable references to the Qur'an throughout his poetry either by direct quotation or by allusion. This general trend is maintained in Rumi's *mulamma'at*. However, in accordance with the strictly technical definition of *mulamma'* offered by literary critics of the medieval Muslim world, poems incorporating Arabic for the sole purpose of quoting the Qur'an are not considered *mulamma'at*.<sup>4</sup> In this section, I discuss Rumi's use of the Qur'an and Prophetic sayings, *Hadith*, and analyze his manner of inserting these quotations, both metrically and thematically, in Arabic, Persian and the *mulamma'at* verses. I argue that the complete fusion, which occurs metrically and thematically in these poems, mirrors the fusion between the Divine word and the poet's. For this purpose, I have selected poems that range from quoting the Qur'an rather generously to single direct quotes from, or even allusions to, the Muslim...



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