

ISAS Public Lecture Series



TRAVELS THROUGH FOUR LANGUAGES: SHIBLI'S GREAT JOURNEY

a talk by

GREGORY MAXWELL BRUCE

Lecturer in Urdu, Dept. of South and
Southeast Asian Studies, UC Berkeley

TALK ABSTRACT: In 1892, Shibli Nomani, Professor of Persian and Arabic at the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in British India, took six months leave and traveled by steamship to the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. He conducted research in Arabic manuscript archives, visited colleges and academies, collected information on manuscript libraries, studied Turkish and familiarized himself with Ottoman literary journalism, visited museums, and socialized with scholars in Istanbul, Beirut, Jerusalem, and Cairo. In 1894, he discussed his experiences in painstaking detail in a travelogue, *Safarnāmah-i Rūm o Miṣr o Shām* (A Travelogue of Turkey, Egypt, and Syria), which went through two editions within Shibli's lifetime and has since become a classic of Urdu literature. Despite the significance of the travelogue, Urdu scholarship on the text has focused largely on its legacy in South Asian political history at the expense of a close study of its historical context. The forthcoming annotated English translation (Syracuse University Press, 2019) by the speaker resituates the text in its historical context and invites readers to reconsider its world and its legacy. "Travels through Four Languages" examines the travelogue through close study of its engagement with four literary traditions: Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu. Drawing on four years of extensive archival research to reconstruct the intellectual context of the travelogue, it will introduce readers to some of the authors whom Shibli met and whose works he read. In doing so, its aim is not merely to shine light on hitherto obscure aspects of the text, but also to rethink a number of ideas that have recently gained traction among scholars of the many traditions that the travelogue engages, from Muslim cosmopolitanism to the history of Urdu literature. To this end, "Travels through Four Languages" will suggest a handful of possibilities for students of comparative literature, Islam, travel, intellectual history, and the circulation of ideas in the 19th century across the porous borders of empire.

SPEAKER BIO: Gregory Maxwell Bruce lectures in Urdu language and literature in the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He holds a Ph.D. in Asian Cultures and Languages from the University of Texas at Austin, where he taught Urdu-medium courses on literature, Islamic mysticism, and South Asian culture in the Hindi-Urdu Flagship Program. His research interests lie at the intersection of literary aesthetics, intellectual history, and religious studies. His current projects include a book-length study of the historian Shibli Nomani, English translations of Urdu literature, an Urdu vocabulary acquisition textbook, and articles for the Encyclopaedia of Islam and Encyclopaedia Iranica. He writes ghazal poetry in Urdu and Persian, and has performed at mushairas and other literary events in the United States and India.

Thursday, March 22, 2018

5 - 7 pm

10 Stephens Hall

Event Cosponsor: Sarah Kailath Chair of India Studies, Urdu@Berkeley, Pakistan Studies at Berkeley
Event is free & open to public. Information at 510-642-3608 or southasia.berkeley.edu