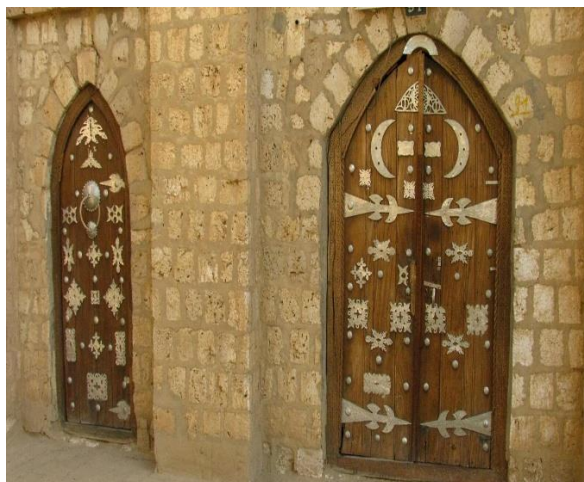




MONCEF OUHAIBI

A Dream in Tarshish, A Treasure in Timbuktu



For many years I have dreamt in Timbuktu the same dream:
(an old house in Tarshish, a door of sandalwood ... I knock and there's a sound like the rattling of water

A beggar from al-Jilani's shrine in Timbuktu

– Have you come for the treasure?

– Yes

The sandalwood door opens ... I enter, but the crow of the rooster on the dome of Sidi al-Jilani wakes me up)

Many years and the dream is the dream and my treasure is in Tarshish ... But for the cock's crow!

I said I'll set out for it at dawn

and roam through the desert :

Tarshish the Garden ... Tarshish the verdant and

the truncated dream

the house

 the sandal wood door

 and the hidden treasure

As if my horse is also dreaming while I
saddle him he neighs joyfully and we



roam the frightened streets We cross
 valleys and deserts
 filled with wolves' howling
 Until we reach Ifriqiya at the Takabas gate
 and we enter the city of Tarshish at night

And because I was a stranger in Tarshish
 they arrest me and bring me before the judge in the morning

The judge says: What is a Timbuktu doing in Tarshish? And
 I told the judge the story of my truncated dream:
 the house the sandalwood door the hidden treasure
 The judge laughed until his white beard was wet and said:
 You poor man, you Timbuktu, how could you believe a dream?
 I too have dreamt for many years of the treasure of mine, buried in the trunk of a palm tree In the
 shrine of
 al-Jilani in Timbuktu
 and when I wake up I laugh ... How could you believe a dream, Timbuktu?

I returned to Timbuktu ... my horse was careworn
 and I was laughing at myself ... how could I have deluded myself into believing the vision?
 ... So I sit under the palm tree in al-Jilani's shrine one evening
 scribbling in the sand and thinking of what the judge said

Then I set my teeth
 and dug my axe in the palm tree's trunk
 until my soul was quenched
 And suddenly my truncated dream,
 the judge's dream: a golden rooster, ready to spring out of a canvas of
 broken sandalwood.

Translated into English by Karen McNeil and Miled Faiza

Hadrumete Sousse



The Cemetery of Hilalis ... I stated

The sea ?

But I faced half of it
 Then I sloped down
 We end at the starting point
 It is a return trip
 And a sandy poem, a fluid one
 Am I the Hilali Oulis son of Yamen ?
 A tumultuous city set apart ... two light
 Strokes and two heavier ones
 On the drumskin
 That is the din of lights
 And this is the Tunisian Hadrumete, maybe another Carthage
 Merchants came to it from Sur as seagulls flock to it
 But we no longer know whether we came to it first or we reached it when we grew old
 Therefore, I must say :
 On their rubble cities are built as poems are wrought out
 And as rhymes are arranged as stones on their shores

Seamen are unfurling their green ropes



And the sea is a billow soaring up above the ship
 Then sails upon masts are steering its wind
 I used to know how to lure fish as prey
 When the sea is rough
 I have a dog's flair
 Ashy buckshots for hunting
 As we ascend the watery staircase
 (I still keep in mind the memory of a gazelle we were chasing.... And hounds tracking it down)
 Now, I've realized that we were the quarry... and that upon us it has shed tears
 Now, I've realized we were at sea... that is the bait on a hook sticking to my throat as our nets wriggle
 At night we sat in the light of a smouldering lantern
 I've jotted down « this is a fluid savannah »
 Nor are there any taverns where I can hunt down my chum, the slave's son.
 But, I can still hear my father while he was hewing a grapevine in our house
 Maybe we enable it to regain some of its vigor
 I used to be a youngster then, and I can still hear its sobs
 And there is a close moon within reach with no ripples around it
 It is approaching... and the sea is spreading its shade on the twilight of the gulfs.
 We can hear the rustling of the rope, the hissing of fire... there a fresh tender fish
 Boned fishmeat
 There a rice stock, and life smoothly elapses.
 My lot was a travellers silence in their songs
 While they borrow embers from a dying out fire
 And they beckon death till they die
 Water in this desert is not the only thing forsaken.
 My body, slipping down my fingers, is the
 Echoing for them, and the refrain of their songs in a colorless jar .
 I said letters bore fruit then, ad so did
 Its nice plants and palm-trees.
 In this standard language to which they brought
 all the light from Ghazwan per Zaghuan.

Who said the sea was the graveyard of the Hilalis ?
 Now they have turned out into fishermen in
 wharfs deflowering, O my Dad, the darkness of the placid fish... and we have followed suit .
 And Kairouan ?
 I have espied its letters... solar or lunar
 And its spring in Tunisian Hadrumete
 Sending forth its light to the running ships sailing aloft .
 And bodies on the sand are dotted fish
 And the sea is howling, at ships, sound
 North, and breaking its waves, are like lunar coffins.
 The refuge of the illusioned.
 I wrote
 As battle bags, and boards are afloat on the water surface
 Blue algae-like sand, get stuffed with decayed leaves
 A spider, sheltering in the web of its stars, told me :
 From the solitary sand grains the Sahara rises.



Translated from Arabic by Mohamed Khsiba

Moncef Ouhaibi was born in Kairouan in Tunisia and lives there. He is a Professor of Arabic and Arabic Literature at the University of Sousse in Tunisia. He also contributes to newspapers and journals. He has also done short films, documentaries and fiction: *Devant les portes de Kairouan ou Pays qui me ressemble (voyage de Paul Klee à Kairouan en 1914)* (Tunis, 1996), *En attendant Averroès* (Tunis, 1998). He is the author of many books of poems: *Tablettes* (Tunis, 1982), *De la mer viennent les montagnes* (Tunis 1991), *Manuscrit de Tombouctou* (Tunis 1998), *Métaphysique de la rose de sable* (Tunis 2000), *Livre du bâton et Index des animaux* (Beirut, 2007), *Que toute chose se taise*, Ed. Bruno Doucey, Paris 2012. He has won many prizes. His novel, *La maîtresse d'Adam, roman facebookien*, was awarded the Comar d'Or.

Karen Mac Neil has a master's degree in Arabic from Georgetown University. For the last two years she has been part of an international team working on the upcoming Oxford Arabic Dictionary, as well as working on other translation and consulting projects. Several of these projects have connected her with Brown University: she served as translator and guide for the great Syrian poet Adonis during his visit to campus and was guest speaker for a course on literary translation.

Miled Faiza published his first collection of poetry in 2004, *Remains of a House we Once Entered*. Selections from *Remains of a House* have been published in three anthologies, as well as numerous journals. Miled is currently writing a new poetry collection, selections of which have been published in print publications such as Al Ghaoon as well as in online literary journals like *Kikah* and *Jihat al-Shi'r*. English translations from the new collection were also published in *World Literature Today* and “Banipal; a Serbian translation” was published in *Bagdala*.

Mohamed Ksibah was born in Msaken, Tunisia, in 1953. He is a professor of English Literature at the University of Kairouan, in Tunisia.