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Archibald Lampman and Islamic Culture

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Modern life is vast and complex, and the poet often finds that such primary feelings as belong to all ages and places may be dealt with more freely and with a sharper accentuation, when they are wrought upon a background of ruder and simpler custom" (*Essays and Reviews* 63). So wrote Archibald Lampman in "The Modern School of Poetry in England," a largely negative lecture on the Pre-Raphaelites that he read at a meeting of the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society in March 1885. Lampman's remarks refer specifically to the "quaint and medieval" poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), but, as has been argued elsewhere (see Bentley "'Men of the North'"), they apply equally well to his own use of medieval "backgrounds" in such poems as "The King's Sabbath," "Ingvi and Alf," and "King Oswald's Feast" to deal with "such primary feelings as belong to all ages and places," specifically (and respectively) religious excess, sexual desire, and economic inequality. Lampman's remarks are also applicable to the small group of his works that use Islamic culture as a "background": an unfinished novel and a ballad ("A Spanish Taunt") set near the beginning of the re-conquest of Spain and three poems—"Abu Midjan," "Baki," and "The Vase of Ibn Mokbil"—set in earlier phases of Islamic culture. Of course, the suggestion that Lampman's perception of

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the European Middle Ages as a period of "ruder and simpler custom" than late Victorian Canada applies also to his perceptions of Moorish Spain and medieval Mesopotamia may wrinkle the noses and narrow the eyes of many Islamicists and call forth cries of appropriation and Orientalism.[1] Such cries are justified, but they will go unheeded here because the goal of this essay is not to belabour the obvious fact that Lampman was an heir and user of the Orientalist tradition but, rather, to examine the "feelings" and ideas that he "wrought upon a background" of Islamic culture and to ascertain, if possible, why and for what purposes he did so.

Lampman was writing after centuries of increasing interest in Islamic culture in Britain, Europe, and North America had produced a wealth of information in almost every sphere of human activity. As a student at Trinity College in Toronto from 1879 to 1881 and thereafter as a civil servant in Ottawa, Lampman would have had more access than most Canadians of his day to the plethora of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works that draw upon or treat of the religion, history, geography, language, and literature of countries that were or had once been Islamic. Even a scanty survey of such works and the scholarship that they have since generated is impossible and unnecessary here, but some sense of Lampman's response to works that he knew or was very likely to have known provides a useful context for his own writings, the specific sources of which will emerge in due course. While at university, his intense admiration for Thomas Carlyle would probably have taken him to "The Hero as Prophet. Mohammed. Islam" in *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), a lecture that may have been in his mind many years later when he wrote of "Mohammed" in his untitled essay on Socialism as a "man with a burning and inextinguishable idea" that led to the establishment of "law, religion, and order" in the countries conquered by his followers (*Essays and Reviews* 187–88). After leaving university, his near hero-worship of Matthew Arnold had certainly taken him to "Sohrab and Rustum: An Episode" (1853) (see *Essays and Reviews* 87 and 260), a poem aligned with the interest in Islamic warriors that is evident in his unfinished novel and in "Abu Midjan." By the early 1890s, his disapproval of Byron's work on account of the scandalous life of its author had probably not prevented

1 See Norman Daniel's *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* for a broad survey of the historical background of Lampman's work and Emily Haddad's *Orientalist Poetics: The Islamic Middle East in Nineteenth-century English and French Poetry* for a more specific and literary discussion of a selection of Romantic and Victorian texts in the wake of Edward Said's enormously influential *Orientalism*.

him from reading *Turkish Tales* (1813 to 1816), which he regarded as "verbiage," "written no doubt because they were just the sort of thing which, in conjunction with the poet's beauty of person and romantic bearing, would render him irresistibly attractive among the fairer portion of the sentimental, semi-cultured and decidedly frivolous society in which he was then moving" (*Essays and Reviews* 119). Clearly, the mature Lampman (he was in his thirties when he wrote these words) had no sympathy for Byron's brand of Romantic Orientalism.

Some twenty years earlier, however, he was sympathetic enough to a poem that has come to be regarded as one of the most egregious examples of Romantic Orientalism—P. B. Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*—to publish a short essay on it in *Rouge et Noir*, the magazine of Trinity College, Toronto, where he was then a student. Given that he was the son of an Anglican minister and that Trinity College was and is an Anglican institution whose mandate included the education of future Anglican clergymen, Lampman might have been expected to spend at least part of his essay discussing the religious aspects of Shelley's poem. In fact, the essay entirely ignores the Islamic context of *The Revolt of Islam*; more than that, it fails to mention the poem's geographical setting, the name and title of the tyrannical ruler (Othman) against whom the revolt is staged, and the race and religion of all but one of its characters, the despicable and surely Roman Catholic "Iberian priest" (*Essays and Reviews* 7). That Lampman chose to mention the "Iberian priest" is significant because earlier in the essay he uses Shelley's misguided "turn away from faith itself" as an excuse to list what would become, and perhaps already were, his own misgivings about Christianity: "persecutions and oppression sanctioned by the church in ages past, the coldness and falsehood which disgraced so many of the servants of Christianity … and the seeming harshness of some of the Christian doctrines" (5). For obvious reasons, Lampman could not favourably compare Islam with Christianity in the pages of *Rouge et Noir*, but that comparison would not be long in coming.

Although Lampman ignores the Islamic context of *The Revolt of Islam*, he must have retained memories of it when, early in 1884 (some two years after moving to Ottawa), he decided to write a novel set in Granada during the Reconquista. The project was soon abandoned, but enough of the novel was written to indicate that its primary sources were Washington Irving's *Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (1829) and William H. Prescott's *History of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic, of Spain* (1837), that its plot and protagonists owe much to Alexander Dumas père's *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1844 to 1845) (the novel's three Spanish protagonists

are united in serving a beautiful lady, in this instance Queen Isabella), and that the depiction of the Spanish and Moorish peoples and cultures by its various characters are saturated with Imperialist and Orientalist assumptions, some of which are debated and contested. With her "'blue eyes, white hands … pretty feet,'" "'silvery voice'" and her "pious desire of bringing … [the] rich and populous country [of Spain] into the communion of the true faith" (*Untitled Fragment* 39, 40), Isabella can readily be seen as an embodiment of both European womanhood and European Imperialism. Early in the fragment, a priest describes the Moors as "'strong … in the sacredness of their cause and in the practice and mastering of knightly exercises,'" to which one of the three protagonists replies that, in the face of "'the invincible Ponce de Leon and the Spanish army,'" "'the effeminate squadrons of the Moor melt away like chaff before the wind'" (2, 3). Later, an innkeeper observes that "'the Moors, though a luxurious and indolent race,'" are "'nevertheless a brave and patient one,'" and describes "'the Moorish … paradise'" as a realm of "'houris, charmed gardens, innumerable slaves, and endless ease and banqueting and music'" (40, 41). In response to the innkeeper, another of the protagonists offers a vivid description of the "'furious combat'" and night-long "'feast[s]'" of the "'unconquerable heroes'" in Valhalla, adding, "'[a]s for myself I know not but the Mohammedan idea pleases me best'" (41).

This last interjection comes from Antonio Frera, a lovelorn and somewhat ludicrous poet who is clearly the surrogate for Lampman's youthful self in the text.[2] As Antonio recalls them, his adventures read like a parody of Byron's *Turkish Tales.* When he sang to a "'silk-weaver's daughter,'" she "'showered a pitcher of wine over … [him]'"; when he courted a Jewish girl, he was accosted and nearly killed by "'two scoundrels armed like pirates'" and her father "'set a trap for … [him] by which … [he] nearly came to … [his] death'"; an Arab to whose daughter he wrote and sang a sonnet was "'desirous of cutting … [his] ears off'"; and the "'servants'" of "'an old Italian ship merchant and ship owner'" whose "'grand child'" he had married "'by stealth'" "'cudgelled … [him] within an inch of his life'" (6,8). As for his wife, shortly after their marriage, "'she ran off with the captain of a ship trading in the Levant'" and was later "'captured by an African and carried off to Algiers'" (8). As if all this were not enough, his poems are repeatedly the subject of parodies that drive him from one city to another, only to suffer the ignominy of being judged an "'idle wandering vagabond'" in each, and, in one, "'tossed in a blanket'" for writing a

2 For that youthful self on display, see Lampman *Scribe.*

"'satire on a young nobleman'" (6). Despite his ludic qualities, Antonio is given some of the most positive assessments of Islamic culture in the fragment. In contrast to his treatment in Spanish cities, he recalls being well treated in Granada, "'for in the courts and banqueting halls of the Moors the poet is ever acceptable'"; indeed, his "'sojourn in Granada'" stands out in his mind because he "'was not driven hence by a parody'" (7, 8). To an accusation by his closest companion Alonzo Abarca[3] that he '"would as soon side with the Moors as the Christians,'" he replies "'impatiently'" (and quoting Hernando de Talavera, who would be the first Archbishop of Granada and Confessor to the Queen):

> "As far as that goes … I have ever found the people of Granada more kindly and liberal to me than the Spaniards. These narrow hatreds are distasteful to me. I love to look into the eyes of leal and honest men, and I have found many such among our enemies. Has not one of our own bishops said that Moorish works and Spanish faith were all that was necessary to make a perfect Christian?" (9–10)

Antonio assures Alonzo that he will "'wield … [his] sword beneath the Cross,'" but that after victory has been achieved his "'abode shall be among the cities of the Moors'" (10). It is telling that the engagement toward which the group is moving when the fragment breaks off was a bloody and humiliating defeat for the Spaniards. Saturated with Imperialist and Orientalist assumptions as it is, Lampman's fragment leaves no doubt of his respect and sympathy for the Moors and their culture.

Lampman probably encountered the subject of "Abu Midjan," the earliest of his four poems while doing research for his proposed novel. "I got the little story from a note in Simon Ockley's History of the Sarasins [*sic*]," he told a friend in a letter of May 1885 enclosing it and two other poems;[4] "Abu Midjan was a fine soldier, also a creditable poet though somewhat of a wine bibber, and when he died was buried under a vineyard at his own request" (Letter). In *The History of the Saracens*, which was first published in two volumes in 1708 and 1718, the note to which Lampman refers appears in

3 As suggested elsewhere, one of the "primary feelings … dealt with more freely and with a sharper accentuation" in the novel fragment than might otherwise have been possible is homoeroticism (see Bentley, "Introduction" xx–xxi).

4 *The History of the Saracens* (1757), which combines an earlier (1718) volume of the same title and *The Conquest of Syria* (1708), by the English orientalist Simon Ockley (1679 to 1720) was later published in numerous editions, including a "Revised, Improved, and Enlarged" edition in 1847 in the Bohn's Standard Library series.

Ockley's discussion of the battle of Cadesia (al-Qadisiyyah) in 636/15, a decisive victory for the Arab Muslim army over the Sasanian Empire that paved the way for the conquest of what is now Iraq. It reads in part:

> Amongst the Mussulmans that distinguished themselves at the battle of Cadesia, Abu Midjan is particularly mentioned. While his associates were engaged in the conflict, this chieftain was imprisoned in the house of [Emir] Saad for singing a wine song; and as he was seated on a terrace, with fetters on his legs, he could view the battle from the distance, but of course without being able to participate in the achievements of his fellow soldiers. At length his ardour could be restrained no longer, and he succeeded in persuading the wife of Saad to procure him the horse and armour of her husband, he promising at the same time to resume his fetters if he lived till the evening. He was soon engaged on the field, where his singular valour, and impetuous and irresistible career, excited the admiration and astonishment of all parties. Saad … was soon attracted by his extraordinary prowess, and began to think it must be the immortal Enoch, or St. John the Evangelist himself, whilst his astonishment was not a little increased by noticing that the unknown warrior was arrayed in his armour, and riding his horse. At the end of the conflict Abu Midjan went back to his prison, and resumed his fetters; whilst Saad, returning to his wife, told her how the battle would have been lost if an intrepid stranger, either a man or angel, had not been sent by the Almighty to their assistance, who had changed the fortune of the day. The wife of Saad then ventured to disclose to him the whole of the mystery, and the general rushing to the fettered chieftain, immediately released him, and presenting him with his horse and armour, promised never more to punish him for enjoying wine; whereupon Abu Midjan replied thus, "I drank as long as I knew that the scourge of an earthly magistrate could cleanse me of my sin, but now that I am consigned to the tribunal of God, I drink no more." (149 n)[5]

Oakley adds as a backstory the episode that prompted Lampman to describe "Abu Midjan and 'a bibber'": "[i]t seems that a short time previ-

5 To the modernist eyes of Desmond Pacey, "Abu Midjan" is Lampman's attempt "to turn an exotic Eastern tale into a Victorian temperance tract" (139). This seems highly unlikely, given the fondness for the products of John Labatt that Lampman expresses in letters and elsewhere. In his recent book on Lampman, Eric Ball does not mention any of the poems with Islamic settings.

ously Omar [I] had ordered Abu Midjan to be scourged for drinking wine, and banished him to an island, but he escaped from them, and fled to the army in Irak."

"Abu Midjan" adapts several elements of Ockley's narrative to good effect, for example, by condensing the speculations of the emir regarding the identity of the formidable warrior into "they deemed him more than mortal, / An angel sent from God" and by using Abu Midjan's final words to create a satisfyingly spondaic sense of closure: "Abu Midjan drinks no more" (*Poems* 56, 57). More notable, however, are some elements of the poem that are *not* in Ockley: the emir's wife is a "gentle lady" who is "overweary / Of the sound of hoof and sword" and "Anxious for her fighting lord" (55), and, more important, Abu Midjan is not merely eager to join the fray: he twice mentions the "Persian spoil" that he may win, he "Hang[s] down his head for shame" at his plight, he is more emphatic in his repentance ("Three times to the ground in silence / Abu Midjan bent his head"), and in his pleadings with the emir's wife he is deferential, modest, and wily enough to appeal to her feelings for her husband: "'Surely Saad would be safer / For the strength of even me,'" he says; "'Give me then his armour, Lady, / And his horse, and set me free'" (55). Perhaps most important of all is the fact that more is made in the poem than in the note of Abu Midjan's promise and to his suffering: "'if he is living,'" after the battle is over, "'Abu Midjan will return,'" he tells the emir's wife, and she in turn tells the emir the she "had taken / Abu Midjan's word for bail" (56). Abu Midjan displays many of the qualities associated with medieval Christian knights, not least honouring a promise. When the emir rushes to the "garden" to free Abu Midjan, he finds him beneath a "tree" "Torn with many wounds and bleeding, / … meek and bound," a vignette that L.R. Early sees as a "crucifixion image" and, as such, "a Christian symbol employed to universalize the theme of the individual's relation to the community" (*Archibald Lampman* 95). Early's point is well taken and consonant with what seems to be Lampman's overall goal of demonstrating the complexity of his Moslem characters, especially Abu Midjan, who has qualities, most of them admirable and some less so, to be expected in any human being of whatever religion or ethnicity.

More notable, however, are some elements of the poem that are *not* in Ockley.

More than a dozen years after he abandoned his novel, Lampman revisited Irving's *Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* for the incident that provides the basis for "A Spanish Taunt," which, according to L. R. Early's invaluable "Chronology of Lampman's Poems," he wrote or completed on 18 December 1896 (85). What prompted Lampman's return to the Reconquista for subject matter in 1896 is unknown, but it may have

had something to do with the Filipino Rebellion against Spain that began in that year and resulted two years later in the Spanish-American War. In Irving's account, the incident, which took place during the siege of Granada, was provoked by a "Moorish cavalier … named Tarfe [who was] renowned for his great strength and daring spirit, but whose courage partook of fierce audacity rather than chivalric heroism" (1164). Displaying these characteristics, Tarfe rode into the encampment where King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella were quartered and "launched his lance so far within, that it remained quivering in the earth, close by the pavilions of the sovereigns." When the lance was "wrest[ed] … from the earth, a label was found upon it, importing that it was intended for the queen." So indignant were the "Christian warriors" at the "insolence of the bravado" and at the target of "the discourteous insult" that one of them, Fernando Perez del Pulgar, "surnamed 'he of the exploits,'" "resolved not to be out-braved by th[e] daring infidel' and lead an "'enterprise of desperate peril'" into the heart of Granada (1165). Irving's chapter is entitled "Of the Insolent Defiance of Tarfe, the Moor, and the Daring Exploit of Fernando del Pulgar" (1164). In short, Tarfe is tarred with negative qualities in the chapter and the "Christian warrior" is represented as boldly adventurous.

As its title suggests, "A Spanish Taunt" focuses entirely on the "Daring Exploit" of the "Christian warriors," which, in Irving's telling again, consists of breaching and securing a gate of the city to allow Fernando del Pulgar to ride to its "principal mosque," "take possession of … [it] as a Christian Chapel," "dedicating it to the Blessed Virgin," and, as testimonial to that effect, leaving a "tablet … inscribed in large letters, 'AVE MARIA'" pinned to the mosque door (1165). "The mosque, thus boldly sanctified by Fernando del Pulgar," concludes Irving, "was eventually, after the capture of Granada, converted into a cathedral." The result of Lampman's omission of the "Insolent Defiance of Tarfe" is threefold. First, "A Spanish Taunt" is devoid of disparaging references to the insolence, discourteousness, and unchivalrous behaviour of the Moor; second, the behaviour of the "Christian warriors" is an unprovoked act with no purpose other than to taunt the Moors; and, third, its instigator, Fernando del Pulgar, appears to be impetuous and egotistical—in a word, the braggart who emerges full blown in the last stanza of the poem:

> "I have ridden," he shouted, "Mahomet's town,
> As free as light or wind,
> And high to the door of Mahomet's mosque
> The name of the Virgin pinned." (*Poems* 345)

Especially in the context of the Filipino Rebellion, Fernando del Pulgar's exploit seems as much the act of a conquistador as of a re-conquistador: an act of appropriation reminiscent in small of Ferdinand Magellan's planting of a cross on the highest peak on the Philippine island of Limasawa in March 1521, thus initiating over three hundred years of Spanish rule.

Lampman's two final poems based on Islamic culture were both written a little more than a year before his untimely death in February 1899: "Baki" in or around October 1897 and "The Vase of Ibn Mokbil" on 1 October of that month (Early, "Chronology" 85). The year 1897 was a gloomy one for Lampman both creatively and spiritually. "I … have written nothing since Xmas, and don't expect to write anything more," he told Edward William Thomson in a letter of 18 August, not long before learning that Copeland and Day, the publisher of his *Lyrics of Earth* collection of 1895/96, had "backed out of publishing" another collection (quoted in Lynn 189, 195). "It always depresses me to go to church," he told the same correspondent on 2 November:

> In those prayers and terrible hymns of our service we are in the presence of all the suffering of the world since the beginning of time. We have entered the temple of sorrow and are prostrate at the feet of the very God of affliction. "Lead kindly light / Amid the encircling gloom." Newman hit it exactly. It is the secret of the success of Christianity. As long as there is sorrow on earth, the pathetic figure of Christ will stand. In the old days when men were children there were worshipers of light & joy, Apollo and Aphrodite and Dionysus were enough for them; but the world has grown old now … It is sad, and moody and full of despair and it cleaves to Christ, its natural refuge … Sunday is a day that drives me almost to madness. The prim black clothes, the artificial dress of the women, the slow trooping to church, the bells, the silence, the dreariness, the occasional knots of sallow and unhealthy zealots whom one may meet at a street corner whining over some awful point in theology—all that gradually presses me down till by Sunday night I am in despair. (quoted in Lynn 194)

Perhaps it was "sorrow," "despair," and a search for "light & joy" that took Lampman once again and for the last time to Islamic culture, specifically to stories about two distinguished Muslims of the medieval period—the Andalusian scholar Baqī b. Makhlad (Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Baqī b. Makhlad b. Yazīd) (201 to 276/817 to 889) and the Bedouin poet Ibn Muqbil (Tamīm b. Ubayy Ibn Muqbil) (d. circa 35/656 or 70/90)—both

of whom Lampman describes as "Faquir[s]" (*Poems* 339, 340), which is to say, "Mahommedan religious mendicants" (*OED*).[6]

Almost certainly Lampman found the story on which he based "Baki" in *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain* (1840, 1843), Pascual de Gayangos's abridged translation of a magisterial work by the seventeenth-century Arab historian Al-Makkari (Abu-l-'Abbas Ahmad ibn Mohammed al-Maqqari). Al-Makkari characterizes Baki as "one of the most eminent traditionalists of his time" and "exceedingly austere in his living, and exemplary in his conduct" (2:129), which explains Lampman's depiction of him at different points in the poem as "Poring over old traditions, / In a dim and ancient book," as having "the heart of wisdom, / He the holiest of men," and as "Long and lean with thinking" and "'fasting'" (*Poems* 340, 341, 343). Al-Makkari attributes the "anecdote" told of Baki to the fourth-century theologian al-Kushayrī:

> A woman came once to Baki to say how her son had been taken prisoner by the Franks, and that she could not sleep at night for love of him. "I possess a small house," said she, "which it is my intention to sell, and with its produce to proceed to the country where he is kept a prisoner, to obtain, if possible his liberation; for my rest is disturbed, and my joy is embittered for the love of him. I want thy advice on this emergency." "Willingly," said Baki; "leave me for a moment, and I will reflect upon what is to be done." The woman retired, and Baki began to pray fervently for the accomplishment of the mother's wish and the speedy liberation of her son. Sometime after this the woman made her appearance together with her son, and spoke thus to Baki: "May God have mercy on thee! thy pious interference has been the means of liberating my son." She then bade her

6 Al-Makkari observes that most of the "great numbers" of faquirs in Moslem Spain were poseurs "well acquainted with the arts and tricks of their profession" (1:113–14). "However," he adds,

> the judgment that we have passed on the faquirs of Andalus must be applied to the generality, not to all, for there were among them men who, moved by sentiments of piety and devotion, left the world and its vanities and either retired to convents to pass the remainder of their lives among brethren of the same community, or, putting on the darwdsah and grasping the staff of the faquir went through the country begging a scanty pittance and moving the faithful to compassion by their wretched and revolting appearance. (1:114)

Lampman's description of Baki and Ibn Mokbil as "Faquir[s]" is more honorific than accurate.

> son tell him how he had obtained his liberty, upon which the youth said, "I was the king's slave, and used to go out daily with my brother slaves to certain works on which we were employed. One day as we were proceeding all together to that spot, I felt all of a sudden as if my fetters were being knocked off; I looked down to my feet, when lo! I saw the heavy irons fall down broken on each side. Seeing this, the inspector who was with us came up to me, and charged me with knocking off my irons, and trying to escape; but I assured him upon that I had entertained no such design, and that my fetters had fallen off suddenly without my being aware of it or knowing how it could be accomplished. He then sent for the smith, and commanded him again to rivet the irons on my feet, and to strengthen them with additional nails, which was done; but no sooner did I rise on my feet than the fetters fell again. The Christians then consulted their priests on the miraculous occurrence, and one of them came to me and inquired whether I had a father. I said, "I have no father, but I have a mother."—"Well, then," said the priest to the Christians, "God, no doubt, has listened to her prayers; set him at liberty:" which they immediately did. (2:129–30)

In C.H. Haines's Gibbonesque *Christianity and Islam in Spain: A.D. 756–1031* (1889), this anecdote is quoted as an example of the "monkish extravagancies" to which Muslims, like "Christian priests in the Middle Ages" were given (141), but there is no indication that Lampman saw it in a negative light.

As was the case with "Abu Midjan," Lampman's omissions from and additions to his source are more interesting and telling than the fact of his adherence to its narrative. Only one substantial omission is significant in "Baki," and its purpose seems clear enough: by making the woman's son a prisoner, not of "the Franks" but of a "'Christian king'" in an unspecified "'Christian land,'" Lampman generalizes the practice of slavery to Christianity as a whole, and then—in one of his most notable additions—emphasizes the violence of the king's "'guards and keepers'": "'Every day I journeyed fieldward, / Hurried by the lash's sting,'" recalls the boy, and, when "'my fetters split and fell,'" "'Round me there were hands and voices, / Rough with anger'" (341–42). "'When again the fetters fell,'" continues the boy, the "'keepers'" "'crossed themselves … / Half in rage and half in fear'" (343), religion, rage, and fear being, of course, the three ingredients of the gunpowder of sectarian violence and murder. Neither the "anecdote" nor the poem is entirely negative in its treatment of Christians, however,

for in both a priest—in the poem given the "'white-hair'" of age and wisdom—intervenes to save the boy by ascertaining that he has a mother—in the poem in his "'Moslem land'"—and orders his release, observing, in doing so, that God must have heeded her prayers. The poem announces its imminent closure when Baki, again "With a rapt and absent look," "roll[s] the leaves together / Of his dim and ancient book" (that is, scroll) and in the knowledge that the return of her son has not only made the woman "'blest and happy,'" but also served as a "'token … / That … [his] sands are nearly run'" and that he is "'counted pure of heart.'"

Verbal repetitions are by no means the only or the most important symmetry in "Baki." In the boy's telling of his tale he uses a phrase, "'God is great,'" that echoes the Islamic Takbīr, *Allāhu akbar*, and later he quotes the priest as using a phrase, "'Blessed is she,'" that echoes Luke 1:42: "Blessed art thou among women." Both Baki and the priest share a belief in the efficacy of prayer: when Baki thinks about how he may be able to help the distraught woman, he "pray[s] and struggle[s], / Lifting up his heart to God," and when the priest intervenes on behalf of the boy he is "'Like a voice from God'" (341, 343). Arguably such interreligious parallels are meant as a reminder that Islam and Christianity are both Abrahamic religions that share many ideas and beliefs. But the strongest and most significant symmetry between Baki and the priest lies in their concern for others: after Baki has listened to the story of the boy's captivity and his mother's "'sleepless woe,'" his eyes are "Brimming with the light of pity," and when the priest recognizes the boy's plight he takes him "'gently by the hand'" (341, 343). It is compassion that makes Baki and the priest act on the side of freedom against cruelty and tyranny: "'he bade them set me free,'" says the boy, and, in presenting him to Baki, his mother identifies Baki's "potent care" as "'Better than a mint of treasure … Better than a sheaf of lances, / Better than a coat of mail'" (343, 341). At the heart of "Baki" is a transcendent ethic of "'potent care'"—an ethic of powerful and active compassion.

Of all Lampman's poems with an Islamic setting, "The Vase of Ibn Mokbil" is the most unusual in form and inspiration. Cast in seven-line stanzas rhyming *abcddecb* in which the second, fifth, and seventh lines consist of two stressed syllables in varying positions, the poem is in this last regard somewhat reminiscent of Robert Browning's "Love Among the Ruins" (1855), the final line of which, "Love is best," raises an echo in the final line of Lampman's second stanza, "Faith is best" (336).[7] Whereas

7 The irregular lengths of the lines in the stanza and the use of an unusual number of dashes (including five in the second stanza) convey an apposite sense of free-

all of Lampman's previous poems in Islamic settings were inspired by anecdotes, "The Vase of Ibn Mokbil" is an imaginative elaboration of two components in a note in which Al-Makkari explains a comparison in the body of the text between the "excellence" of a literary work and "the vase of Ibn Mokbil" (1:446).[8] The first component is the identification of the comparison as a "proverbial expression" indicating "a work whose merits and utility cannot be sufficiently extolled" and "the height of virtue and excellence." The second is the first part of a poem by Ibn Mokbil "describing his vase": "'It is always full and overflowing in the morn; in the evening it is made pregnant with the touching and passing from hand to hand.'" On the basis of these two elements Lampman constructed an anecdote of a vase whose effect on its surroundings is as dramatic in its way as Wallace Stevens's "jar in Tennessee" (76).

On the basis of these two elements Lampman constructed an anecdote of a vase.

Before the mysterious arrival of the magical vase, the house of the "old" and "lonely" Ibn Mokbil contains "nothing" except "his prayer-mat worn with kneeling" and "His few books and herbs for healing" (336–37).[9] Because he is a religious ascetic who "Love[s] the light" and ministers to the ailing, Ibn Mokbil is "Full of woe" from witnessing people's terrible and daily worsening "want and sorrow":

> Brothers overtaken
> By misfortune—sitting restless
> In his house forlorn and guestless,
> With a larder
> Empty, and a purse forsaken
> Of its gold. (337)

"Bent and aged" by "weighing" the increasing poverty and misery around him, Ibn Mokbil has "sleepless eyes" and "knees … sore with praying, / Day and night" until "somehow … / Came the vase" of "gleaming gold and crystal." "No man—even Ibn Mokbil— / Ever guessed / Whence it

dom from convention, and may well reflect the influence of Emily Dickinson, whose *Poems* Lampman owned and, according to the inscription in his copy in the National Library and Archives, admired.

8 The note elaborates briefly on the debate as to whether the word translated as "vase" actually means "sword," a dispute now resolved in favour of the latter. For a discussion of the poem, see Ali Ahmed Hussein 111–21 and following. Of course, Lampman had no reason to question Al-Makkari's translation of the word and reading of the poem. I am grateful to Dr Hussein for clarifying this matter for me.

9 The fact that Ibn Mokbil is a Bedouin and lives in a house is not an anomaly: contrary to popular opinion, some Bedouin tribes were farmers.

That the "magic" vase is a response to Ibn Mokbil's prayers is strongly implied rather than explicitly stated.

came—who brought it," declare the poem's third-person plural speakers, "But it stood there one fair morning, / All the simple place adorning / With its beauty— / People said the Jinn[10] had wrought it" (356). As for the contents of the vase, the speakers twice assert that it contains "All the riches of Damascus, / Cairo or Shiraz," adding that "the tale would task us, / Half to tell what meat and treasure, / Things of help and things of pleasure / Overbrimmed it" (336, 337).

True to Ibn Mokbil's poem, the vase is "always full and overflowing in the morn" and "made pregnant in the evening" or, in the words of Lampman's collective speaker, "charg[ed]" "By unseen / Hands at midnight … / 'Jinn,' they say" (338).[11] That the "magic" vase is a response to Ibn Mokbil's prayers is strongly implied rather than explicitly stated, but, either way, it immediately remedies the "want and sorrow" that have caused him so much "woe":

> Now the door of Ibn Mokbil
> Open wide—
> Moan is heard no longer—
> Now the gifts are overflowing;
> Coming round the vase and going,
> Crowd the people:
> None that ail, and none that hunger
> Are denied. (338)

The vase will continue to provide for the needs of the people so long as Ibn Mokbil obeys the "one law" that is inscribed in "letters, / Woven like a wreath of fetters" around its sides: "Not one tittle / Must the Faquir for his pleasure / Touch or take." Not only does the "poor and needy" Ibn Mokbil abide by this law without "murmur" or "complain[t]," but he is also "untroubled" when "the fierce and greedy / Enter at his gate for plunder" and, without any divine intervention ("Scattered by no bolt of thunder"), carry off the vase; however, although "Nothing stays, / Of the gifts returning" and "the house of Ibn Mokbil" is again "empty" save for his "books and prayer-mat," he is now a changed man. In the numinous crepuscular light "when day is sinking" (at evening and figuratively in the evening of

10 Jinns are spirits that rank below angels in pre-Islamic and Islamic mythology that are capable of influencing humans for good or ill. Al-Makkari mentions them several times (see, for example, I:25 and 231 and II:118 and 432–33).

11 The vase has partial analogues in the magic purse of folklore, the cornucopia of Greek mythology, and the inexhaustible "barrel of meal" and "cruse of oil" in 1 Kings 17:8–16.

his life), he now sees "With … gleaming eyes and burning / Heart of praise," "the vase beyond the crystal,"[12] which

> Opens like a rift of heaven,
> And the things of Allah given—
> Dreams and visions—
> Pour upon his spirit drinking
> Paradise.

In the final stanza of the poem "Angels tell" Ibn Mokbil "Tales of how the bringer / Of the faith of old"—Mohammed—"still careth / For the foot that strictly fareth," and, "As he listens, / Falls a voice divine, the singer, / Israfel," the Islamic equivalent of Michael, the angel that blows the trumpet heralding the end of time. To venture beyond the message that the angels impart to Ibn Mokbil may be foolhardy, but when read in the light of Lampman's socialism "The Vase of Ibn Mokbil" acquires a socioeconomic dimension that aligns it with such poems as "Avarice," "King Oswald's Feast," and "The Land of Pallas." The beneficiaries of the magic vase are people stricken by "misfortune," poverty, hunger, ailments, and "sorrow," and with its arrival "Moan is heard no longer." Its contents are "Things of help and things of pleasure" that amount to the "riches" of a great city, but for them to be released the person to whom the vase is entrusted must be entirely free of avarice and hedonism. In due course, the extraordinary and seemingly limitless "riches" provided by the vase attract the "fierce and greedy" bent on "plunder," and the vase disappears, taking with it the beneficence that would otherwise have continued in perpetuity. Because "The Vase of Ibn Mokbil" resists the reductive identification of the magic vase with any abstraction such as socialism or the commonweal, it cannot be classified as an allegory; rather, it resembles the teaching tales of Islam, Christianity, and other religions that invite their hearers and readers to think about issues of considerable social and moral importance.

There can be little doubt that Lampman's interest in Islamic culture was fueled in part by the distaste for the aspects of Christianity that he goes out of his way to list in "The Revolt of Islam" and, almost twenty years later, in his letter to 2 November 1897 to Thomson. Nor can there be much doubt that his ideas about Islamic culture were coloured by the Orientalism of Shelley, Byron, Irving, and most, if not all, of the historians upon whom he relied for anecdotes, information, and inspiration. All that said, his interest

12 The implication is that he sees beyond the "crystal" surface of the vase to what lies within it, and, since "crystal" can refer to the sky beyond which lies paradise, that he is looking sky/heavenward.

in Islamic culture, although sporadic, appears to have been genuine and admiring rather than exploitative or condescending. The activities and beliefs of Abu Minjan, Baki, Ibn Mokbil, and the unseen Moslems of the novel fragment are regarded as morally and spiritually exemplary and, in the cases of Baki and Ibn Mokbil, as a means of focalizing values and ideas that Lampman held dear and undermining the selfish individualism that he detested. Archibald Lampman did see Islamic culture through eyes overlain by Orientalism and by his distaste for aspects of Christianity, but the result was a cluster of works of more interest and appeal than their almost complete neglect would suggest.

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