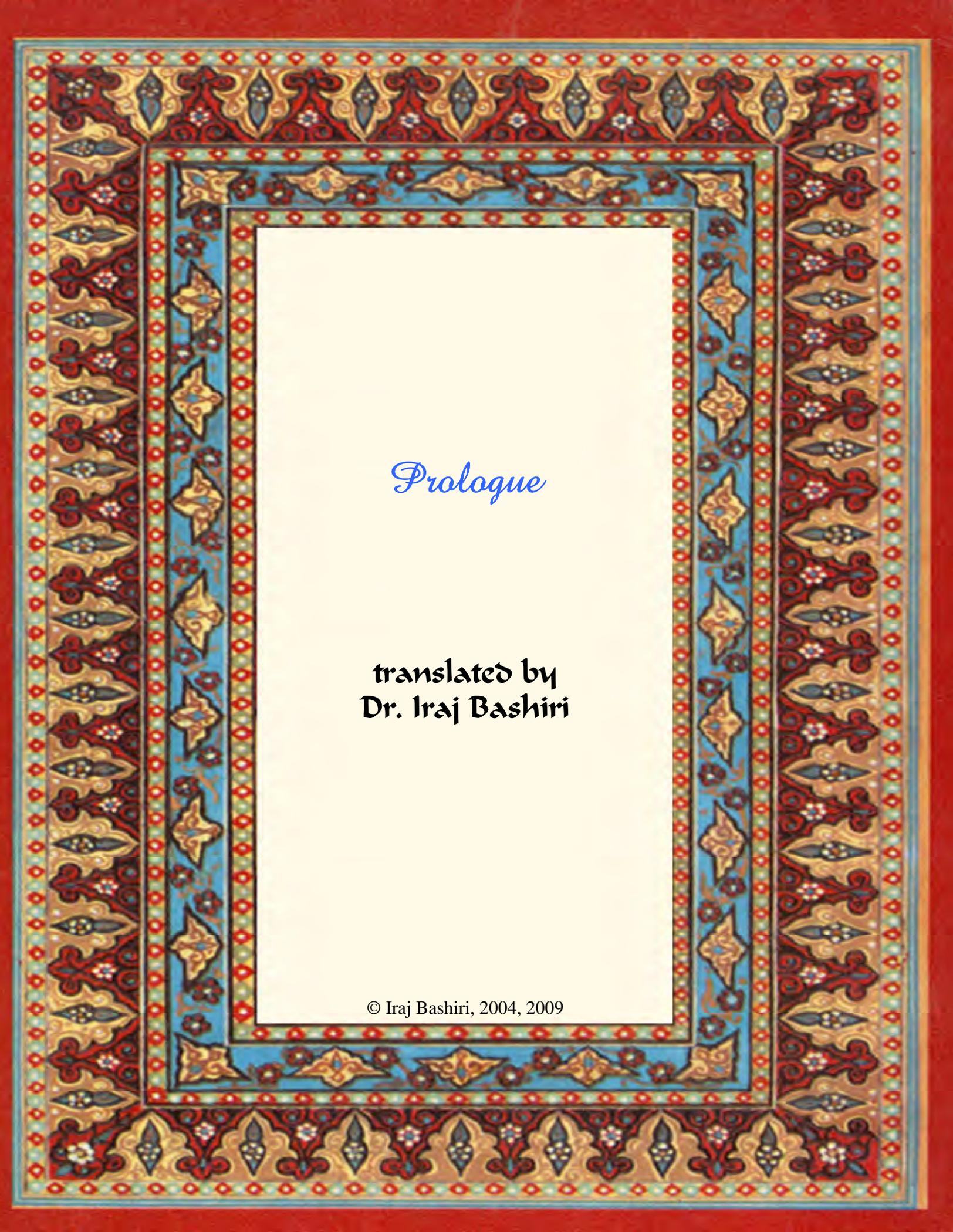


The Gulistan

Shaykh Muslih
al-Din Sa'di Shirazi



Prologue

translated by
Dr. Iraj Bashiri

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In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Laudation is due the most High, the most Glorious, Whose worship bridges the Gap and Whose recognition breeds beneficence. Each breath inhaled sustains life, exhaled imparts rejuvenation. Two blessings in every breath, each due a separate salutation.

Whose hand can properly offer and whose tongue,
The salutation due Him, and not be wrong?

Says He: "Ingratiate yourself, O family of David,
Unlike the unthankful, that I thee bid!"

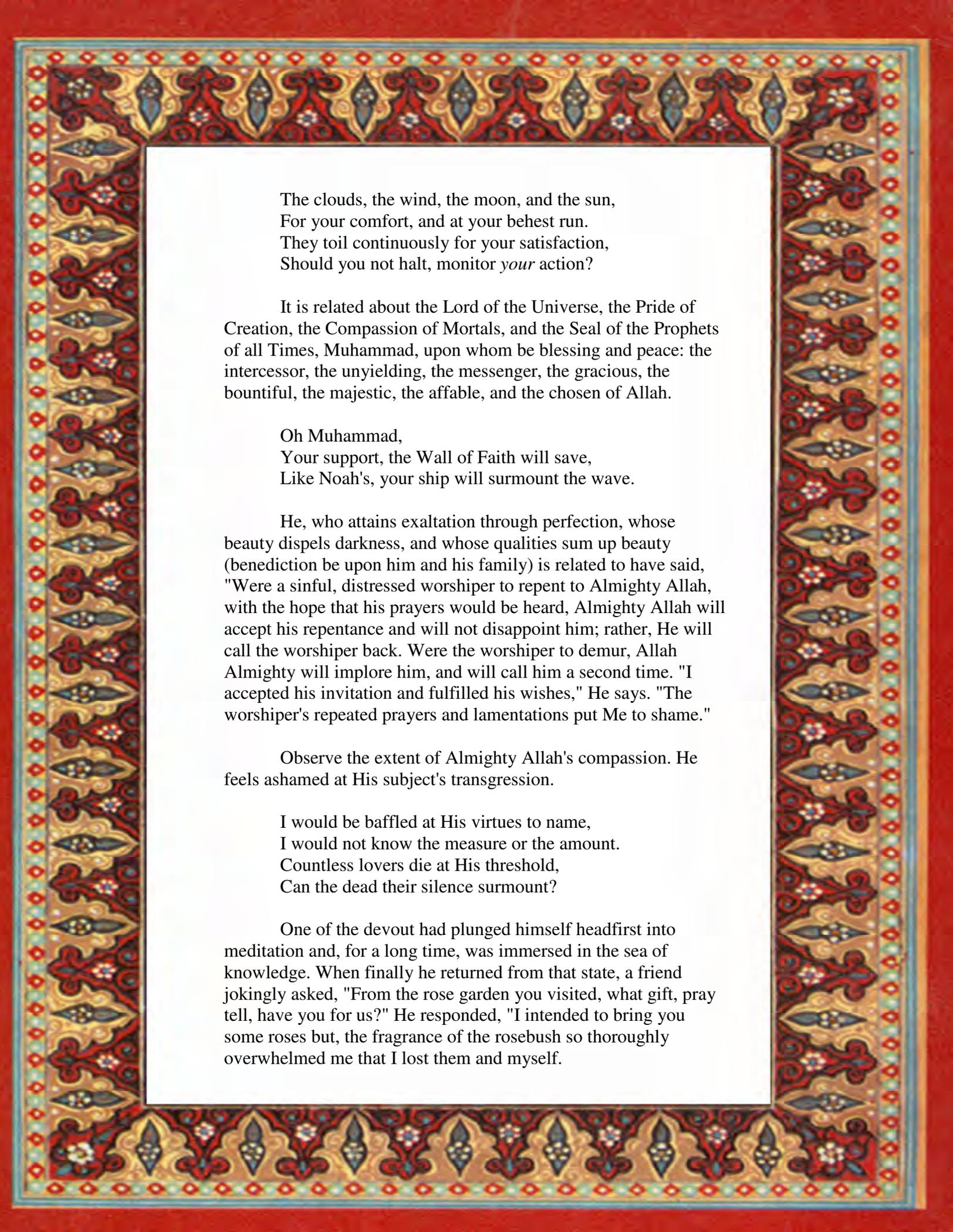
Subjects proper, best admit to all transgression,
At His threshold, with contrite expression;
How otherwise could mortal creatures ever,
Make themselves worthy of His discretion?

The shower of His merciful bounty gratifies all, and His banquet of limitless generosity recognizes no fall. The inner secrets of His subjects, He does not divulge, nor does He, for a rogue's slight frailty, in injustice indulge.

O generosity personified!
To the Christian and the Magi,
You bestow with pleasure,
From Your invisible treasure.

O ardent benefactor!
You will lift Your friends high,
There is solid proof of that,
Not abandoning enemies to die!

He has ordered the zephyr to cover, with the emerald carpet of spring, the earth; and He has instructed the maternal vernal clouds to nourish the seeds of autumn to birth. In foliage green, He has clothed the trees, and through beautiful blossoms of many hues, has perfumed the breeze. He has allowed the life-imparting sap to percolate and its delicious honey to circulate. His power is hidden in the tiny seed that sires the lofty palm.



The clouds, the wind, the moon, and the sun,
For your comfort, and at your behest run.
They toil continuously for your satisfaction,
Should you not halt, monitor *your* action?

It is related about the Lord of the Universe, the Pride of Creation, the Compassion of Mortals, and the Seal of the Prophets of all Times, Muhammad, upon whom be blessing and peace: the intercessor, the unyielding, the messenger, the gracious, the bountiful, the majestic, the affable, and the chosen of Allah.

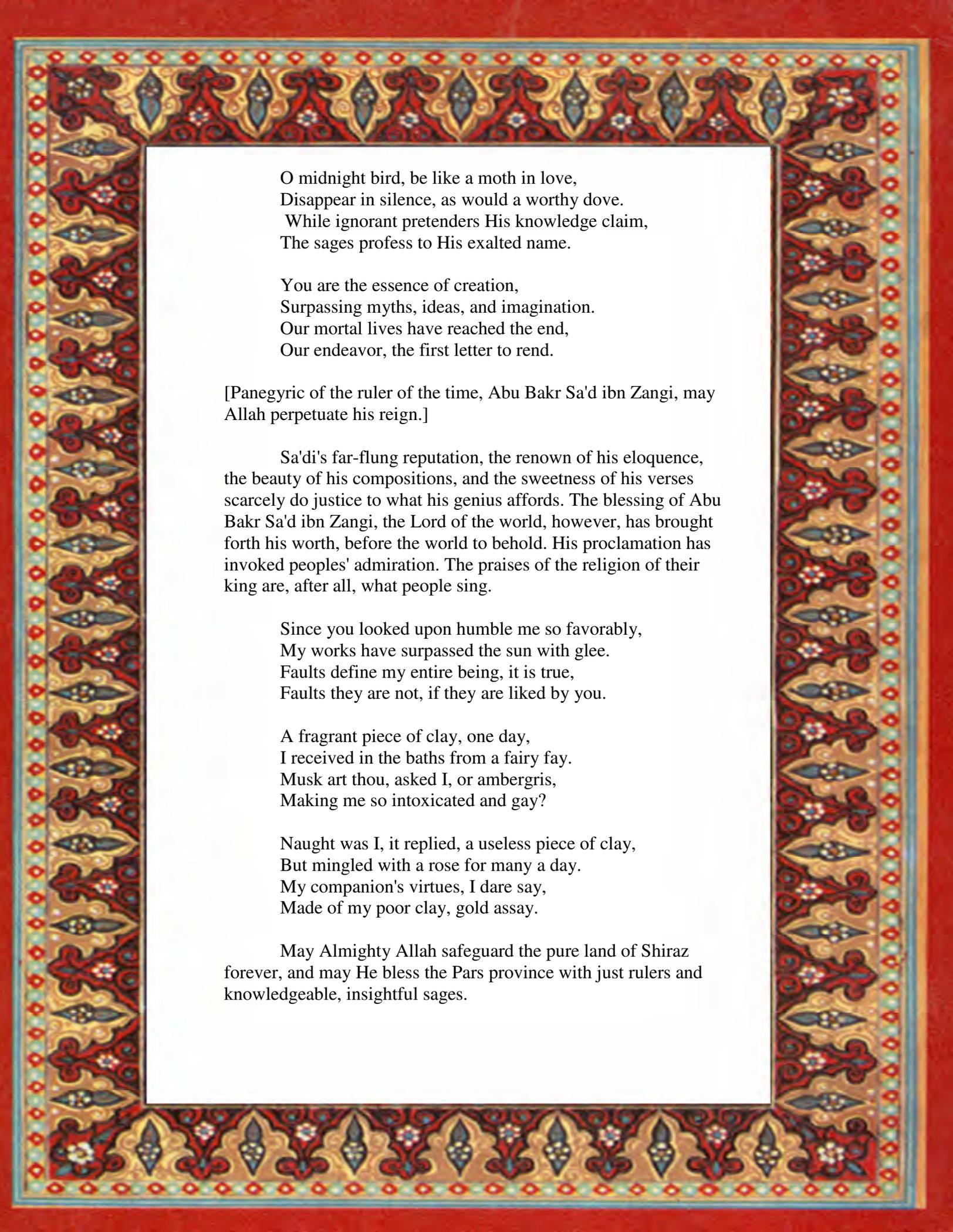
Oh Muhammad,
Your support, the Wall of Faith will save,
Like Noah's, your ship will surmount the wave.

He, who attains exaltation through perfection, whose beauty dispels darkness, and whose qualities sum up beauty (benediction be upon him and his family) is related to have said, "Were a sinful, distressed worshiper to repent to Almighty Allah, with the hope that his prayers would be heard, Almighty Allah will accept his repentance and will not disappoint him; rather, He will call the worshiper back. Were the worshiper to demur, Allah Almighty will implore him, and will call him a second time. "I accepted his invitation and fulfilled his wishes," He says. "The worshiper's repeated prayers and lamentations put Me to shame."

Observe the extent of Almighty Allah's compassion. He feels ashamed at His subject's transgression.

I would be baffled at His virtues to name,
I would not know the measure or the amount.
Countless lovers die at His threshold,
Can the dead their silence surmount?

One of the devout had plunged himself headfirst into meditation and, for a long time, was immersed in the sea of knowledge. When finally he returned from that state, a friend jokingly asked, "From the rose garden you visited, what gift, pray tell, have you for us?" He responded, "I intended to bring you some roses but, the fragrance of the rosebush so thoroughly overwhelmed me that I lost them and myself.



O midnight bird, be like a moth in love,
Disappear in silence, as would a worthy dove.
While ignorant pretenders His knowledge claim,
The sages profess to His exalted name.

You are the essence of creation,
Surpassing myths, ideas, and imagination.
Our mortal lives have reached the end,
Our endeavor, the first letter to rend.

[Panegyric of the ruler of the time, Abu Bakr Sa'd ibn Zangi, may Allah perpetuate his reign.]

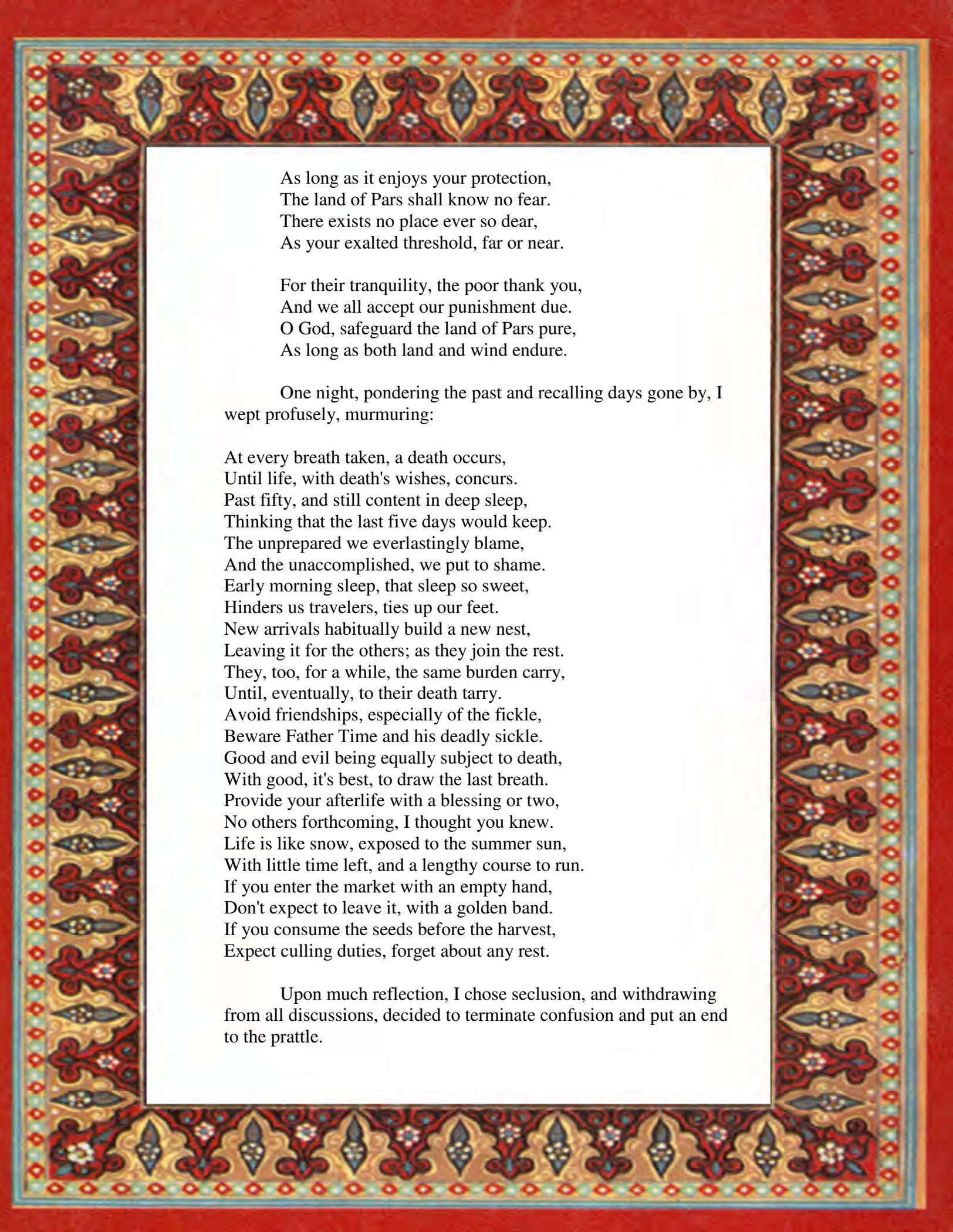
Sa'di's far-flung reputation, the renown of his eloquence, the beauty of his compositions, and the sweetness of his verses scarcely do justice to what his genius affords. The blessing of Abu Bakr Sa'd ibn Zangi, the Lord of the world, however, has brought forth his worth, before the world to behold. His proclamation has invoked peoples' admiration. The praises of the religion of their king are, after all, what people sing.

Since you looked upon humble me so favorably,
My works have surpassed the sun with glee.
Faults define my entire being, it is true,
Faults they are not, if they are liked by you.

A fragrant piece of clay, one day,
I received in the baths from a fairy fay.
Musk art thou, asked I, or ambergris,
Making me so intoxicated and gay?

Naught was I, it replied, a useless piece of clay,
But mingled with a rose for many a day.
My companion's virtues, I dare say,
Made of my poor clay, gold assay.

May Almighty Allah safeguard the pure land of Shiraz forever, and may He bless the Pars province with just rulers and knowledgeable, insightful sages.



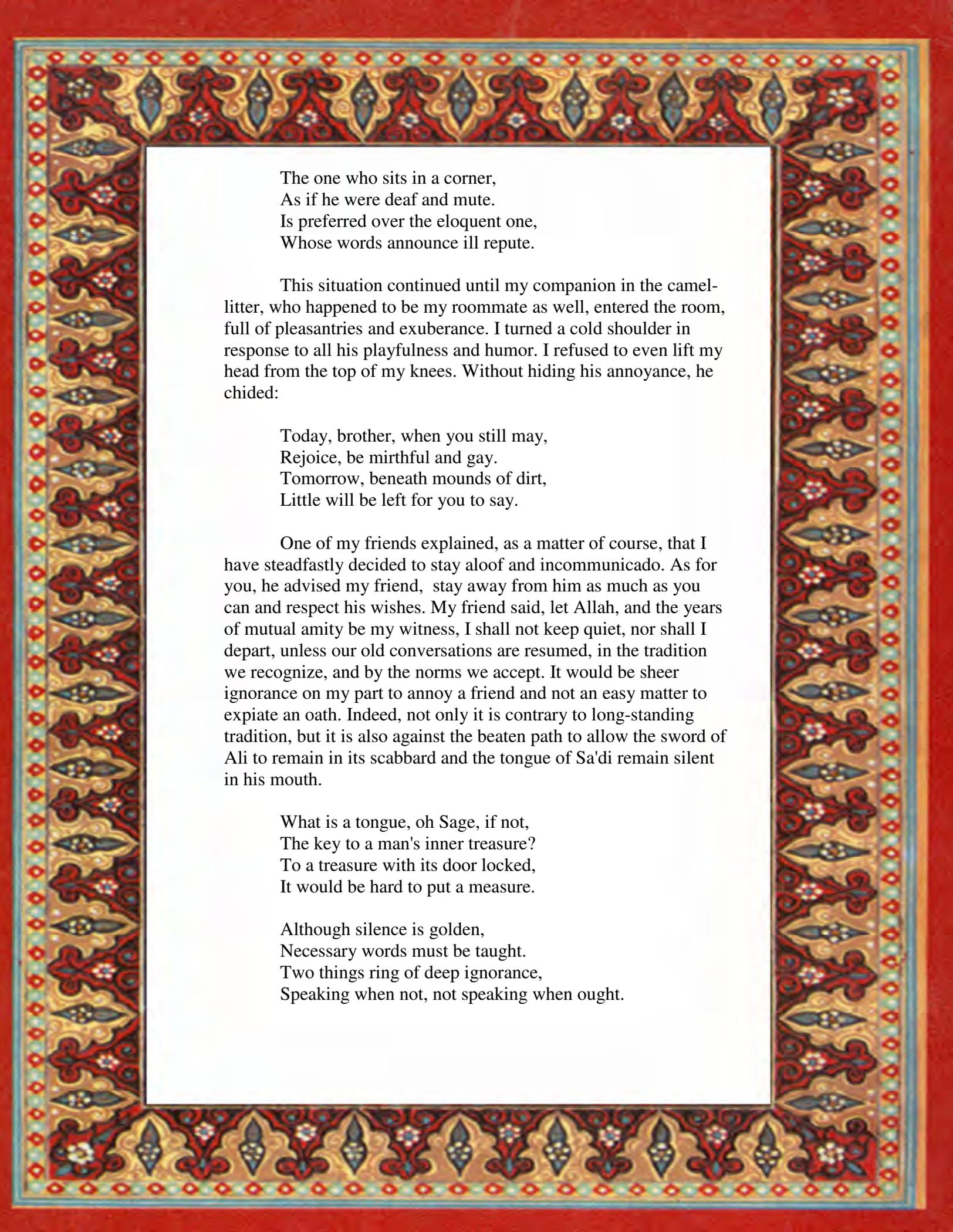
As long as it enjoys your protection,
The land of Pars shall know no fear.
There exists no place ever so dear,
As your exalted threshold, far or near.

For their tranquility, the poor thank you,
And we all accept our punishment due.
O God, safeguard the land of Pars pure,
As long as both land and wind endure.

One night, pondering the past and recalling days gone by, I
wept profusely, murmuring:

At every breath taken, a death occurs,
Until life, with death's wishes, concurs.
Past fifty, and still content in deep sleep,
Thinking that the last five days would keep.
The unprepared we everlastingly blame,
And the unaccomplished, we put to shame.
Early morning sleep, that sleep so sweet,
Hinders us travelers, ties up our feet.
New arrivals habitually build a new nest,
Leaving it for the others; as they join the rest.
They, too, for a while, the same burden carry,
Until, eventually, to their death tarry.
Avoid friendships, especially of the fickle,
Beware Father Time and his deadly sickle.
Good and evil being equally subject to death,
With good, it's best, to draw the last breath.
Provide your afterlife with a blessing or two,
No others forthcoming, I thought you knew.
Life is like snow, exposed to the summer sun,
With little time left, and a lengthy course to run.
If you enter the market with an empty hand,
Don't expect to leave it, with a golden band.
If you consume the seeds before the harvest,
Expect culling duties, forget about any rest.

Upon much reflection, I chose seclusion, and withdrawing
from all discussions, decided to terminate confusion and put an end
to the prattle.



The one who sits in a corner,
As if he were deaf and mute.
Is preferred over the eloquent one,
Whose words announce ill repute.

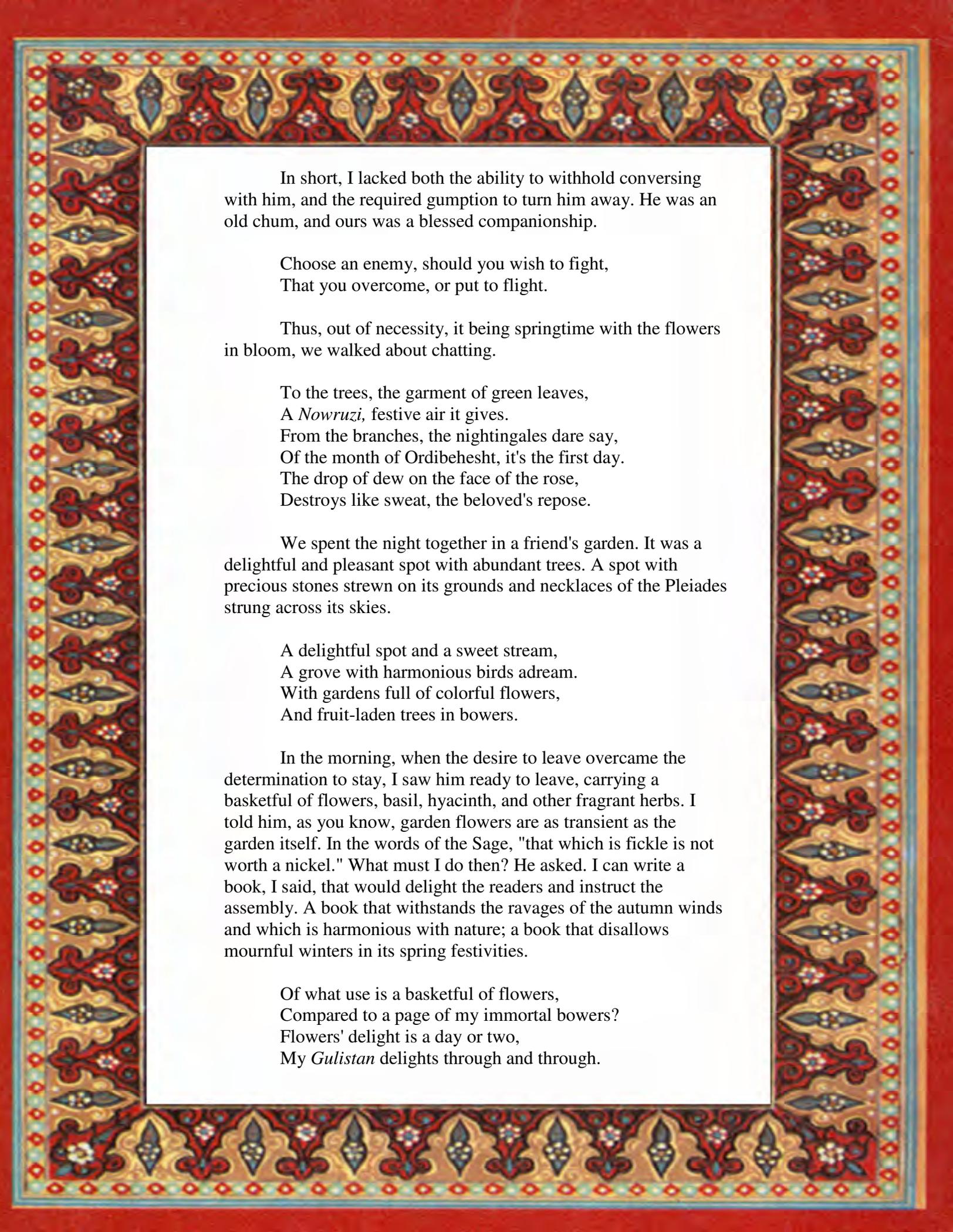
This situation continued until my companion in the camel-litter, who happened to be my roommate as well, entered the room, full of pleasantries and exuberance. I turned a cold shoulder in response to all his playfulness and humor. I refused to even lift my head from the top of my knees. Without hiding his annoyance, he chided:

Today, brother, when you still may,
Rejoice, be mirthful and gay.
Tomorrow, beneath mounds of dirt,
Little will be left for you to say.

One of my friends explained, as a matter of course, that I have steadfastly decided to stay aloof and incommunicado. As for you, he advised my friend, stay away from him as much as you can and respect his wishes. My friend said, let Allah, and the years of mutual amity be my witness, I shall not keep quiet, nor shall I depart, unless our old conversations are resumed, in the tradition we recognize, and by the norms we accept. It would be sheer ignorance on my part to annoy a friend and not an easy matter to expiate an oath. Indeed, not only it is contrary to long-standing tradition, but it is also against the beaten path to allow the sword of Ali to remain in its scabbard and the tongue of Sa'di remain silent in his mouth.

What is a tongue, oh Sage, if not,
The key to a man's inner treasure?
To a treasure with its door locked,
It would be hard to put a measure.

Although silence is golden,
Necessary words must be taught.
Two things ring of deep ignorance,
Speaking when not, not speaking when ought.



In short, I lacked both the ability to withhold conversing with him, and the required gumption to turn him away. He was an old chum, and ours was a blessed companionship.

Choose an enemy, should you wish to fight,
That you overcome, or put to flight.

Thus, out of necessity, it being springtime with the flowers in bloom, we walked about chatting.

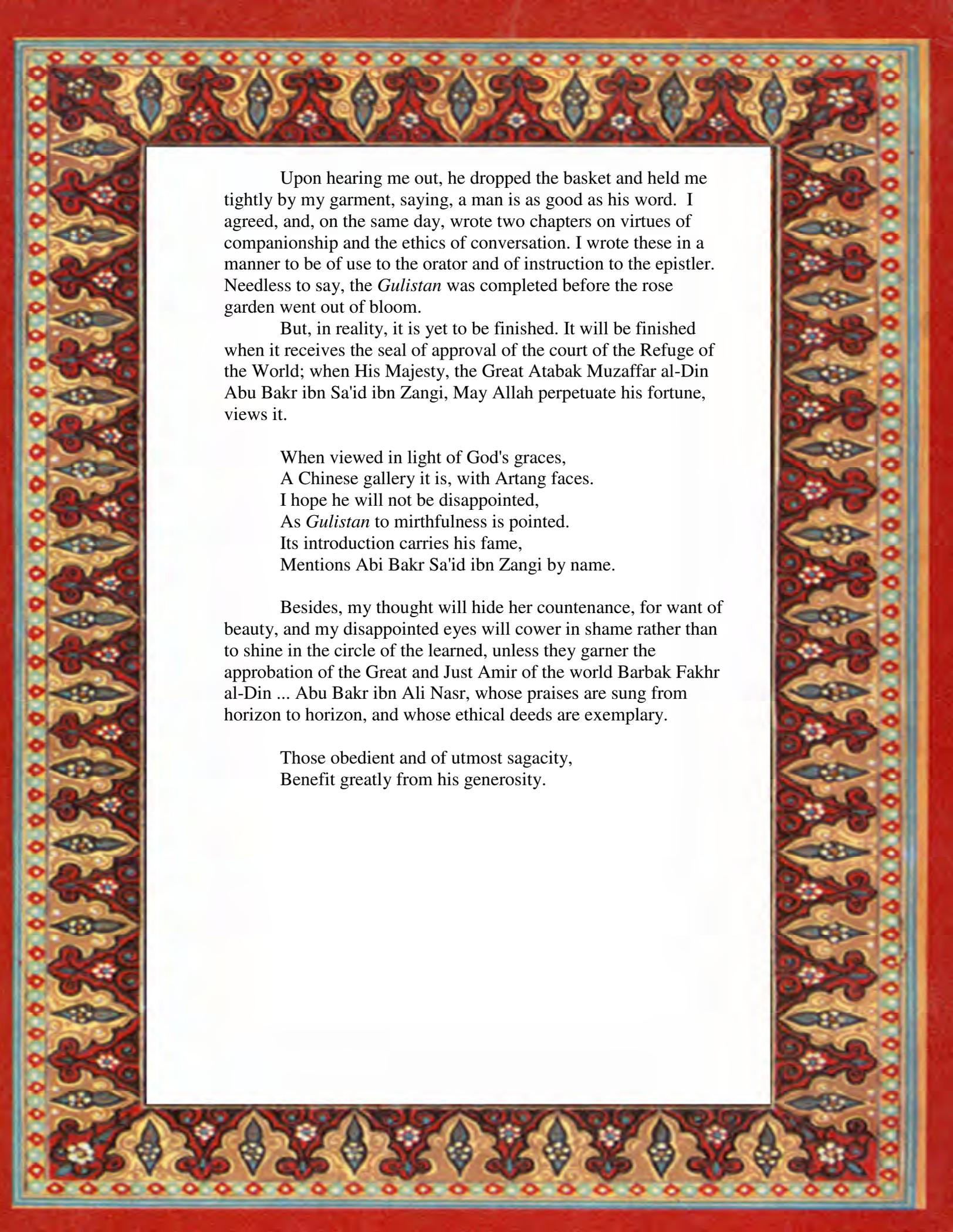
To the trees, the garment of green leaves,
A *Nowruzi*, festive air it gives.
From the branches, the nightingales dare say,
Of the month of Ordibehesht, it's the first day.
The drop of dew on the face of the rose,
Destroys like sweat, the beloved's repose.

We spent the night together in a friend's garden. It was a delightful and pleasant spot with abundant trees. A spot with precious stones strewn on its grounds and necklaces of the Pleiades strung across its skies.

A delightful spot and a sweet stream,
A grove with harmonious birds adream.
With gardens full of colorful flowers,
And fruit-laden trees in bowers.

In the morning, when the desire to leave overcame the determination to stay, I saw him ready to leave, carrying a basketful of flowers, basil, hyacinth, and other fragrant herbs. I told him, as you know, garden flowers are as transient as the garden itself. In the words of the Sage, "that which is fickle is not worth a nickel." What must I do then? He asked. I can write a book, I said, that would delight the readers and instruct the assembly. A book that withstands the ravages of the autumn winds and which is harmonious with nature; a book that disallows mournful winters in its spring festivities.

Of what use is a basketful of flowers,
Compared to a page of my immortal bowers?
Flowers' delight is a day or two,
My *Gulistan* delights through and through.



Upon hearing me out, he dropped the basket and held me tightly by my garment, saying, a man is as good as his word. I agreed, and, on the same day, wrote two chapters on virtues of companionship and the ethics of conversation. I wrote these in a manner to be of use to the orator and of instruction to the epistler. Needless to say, the *Gulistan* was completed before the rose garden went out of bloom.

But, in reality, it is yet to be finished. It will be finished when it receives the seal of approval of the court of the Refuge of the World; when His Majesty, the Great Atabak Muzaffar al-Din Abu Bakr ibn Sa'id ibn Zangi, May Allah perpetuate his fortune, views it.

When viewed in light of God's graces,
A Chinese gallery it is, with Artang faces.
I hope he will not be disappointed,
As *Gulistan* to mirthfulness is pointed.
Its introduction carries his fame,
Mentions Abi Bakr Sa'id ibn Zangi by name.

Besides, my thought will hide her countenance, for want of beauty, and my disappointed eyes will cower in shame rather than to shine in the circle of the learned, unless they garner the approbation of the Great and Just Amir of the world Barbak Fakhr al-Din ... Abu Bakr ibn Ali Nasr, whose praises are sung from horizon to horizon, and whose ethical deeds are exemplary.

Those obedient and of utmost sagacity,
Benefit greatly from his generosity.