The Eloquence Gap: AI and the Untranslatable in Classical Arabic Sermons
"A Case Study of Qotri ibn al-Fujaʾaʾs Oration"

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ABSTRACT : Artificial intelligence–based translation systems have made rapid progress in recent years, offering unprecedented access to multilingual communication. Despite these advancements, questions remain about the ability of AI to handle highly stylistic and culturally saturated texts, particularly Arabic heritage literature, which is known for its dense rhetorical structures, intertextual references, and emotionally charged sermonic discourse. This research investigates how AI renders Qotri ibn al-Fujaʾa's renowned ascetic sermon—an exemplar of ornate early Islamic prose marked by *sajʿ* (assonance or rhymed prose), parallelism, Quranic allusions, and intense moral admonition. The analysis is centered on a comparative evaluation between the original Arabic Source Text (ST)**,** provided in Appendix A**,** and its AI-generated English translation. The study seeks to determine the degree to which AI retains semantic content, rhetorical craftsmanship, and cultural–theological resonance, situating its findings within the broader context of translation studies and digital humanities.

Keywords: AI translation, Classical Arabic, rhetoric, sermon, Qotri ibn al-Fujaʾa, intertextuality, cultural translation, Kharijite literature

فجوة البلاغة: الذكاء الاصطناعي والمُتَعَذِّرُ تَرجَمَتُهُ في الخُطَب العربية التُّراثِيَّة

"خُطبة قُطْري بن الفُجاءة أنموذجًا"

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الملخص: يَكْشِفُ هذا البَحثُ عن "فَجوةِ البَلاغةِ" بَيْنَ قُدراتِ الذَّكاءِ الاصطِناعيِّ ومُتطلَّباتِ تَرجمةِ الخِطابِ الوَعظيِّ العَرَبيِّ، حيثُ يَبرُزُ في نَقلِ المَعنى المُباشِرِ ويَعجَزُ عن مُجاراةِ النُّصوصِ التي تكونُ البَلاغةُ فيها جَوهَرًا لا زِينَةً. وبِاختيارِ خُطبةِ قُطْري بن الفُجاءةَ أنمُوذَجًا، كَشَفَتِ الدِّراسةُ أنَّ الذَّكاءَ الاصطِناعيَّ أنتَجَ هَيكَلًا دِلاليًّا صَحيحًا، لكنَّهُ فَشِلَ في نَحْتِ اللَّحمِ البَلاغيِّ وَضَخِّ الدَّمِ الثَّقافيِّ والنَّفخِ بالرُّوحِ المَعنَويَّةِ للنَّصِّ الأَصْليِّ. لذلِكَ فَقَدَتِ التَّرجمةُ الآليَّةُ إيقاعَ السَّجْعِ المُوسِيقيِّ، وَوَهَنَتْ قُوَّةَ التَّوازِي، وَتَحَوَّلَ الخِطابُ السُّلطَانيُّ إلى وَصفٍ مُحايدٍ، مع "عَمَى سِياقِيٍّ" في التَّعامُلِ معَ الاقتِباساتِ القُرآنِيَّةِ والمُصطَلَحاتِ الصُّوفِيَّةِ. كَمَا تَدعو النَّتائِجُ إلى نَمُوذَج تَكامُليٍّ يَجعَلُ مِنَ الذَّكاءِ الاصطِناعيِّ مُساعِدًا في الخُطَاطَةِ الأُوليَّةِ، تَليها يَدٌ بَشَرِيَّةٌ خَبيرَةٌ تَحفَظُ الأَبعادَ الجَماليَّةَ والرُّوحِيَّةَ العابِرَةَ للخَوارِزمِيَّاتِ، مِمَّا يَفتَحُ آفاقًا لِلتَّعاوُنِ المُثمِرِ بَيْنَ الإنسانِ والآلَةِ في حِفظِ التُّراثِ الأَدَبِيّ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة الآلية، البلاغة العربية، الخطاب الوعظي، الأدب الخارجي، التناص، قُطْري بن الفُجاءة، الترجمة الثقافية، السجع.

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) in the field of machine translation (MT) marks a pivotal shift in computational linguistics, promising to dismantle long-standing barriers to cross-cultural communication (Kenny, 2022; Way, 2020). Neural Machine Translation (NMT) systems, in particular, have demonstrated remarkable proficiency in processing contemporary, high-resource languages, achieving near-human parity in specific, standardized domains (Toral et al., 2018). This technological leap has naturally spurred interest in its application to historical and literary texts, potentially offering scholars new tools for accessing the global humanities corpus (Bodenhorn, 2019). However, this promise encounters a formidable frontier when confronted with the intricate tapestry of Classical Arabic literature—a domain where linguistic meaning is profoundly and inseparably woven into rhetorical form, cultural memory, and theological significance (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Boullata, 2000).

This study posits that a fundamental "eloquence gap" exists between AI's computational capabilities and the aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual demands of translating Classical Arabic sermonic discourse. While AI systems excel at processing statistical patterns and syntactic structures, they operate without the hermeneutic depth, cultural embeddedness, and aesthetic sensibility required to navigate texts where eloquence (balaghah) is not merely decorative but constitutive of meaning (El-Shiyab, 2006). The challenge is not merely one of archaic vocabulary or complex morphology, but of what Bielsa (2005) terms the "sociology of translation" the need to situate a text within its specific cultural, historical, and ideological context, a task for which the current AI lacks a viable framework.

To investigate this gap, we focus on a critical test case: the renowned ascetic sermon of Qotri ibn al-Fujaʾa (d. 78 AH / 698 CE), a prominent Kharijite (an early Islamic sect that emerged in response to a religio-political dispute concerning the succession to the Caliphate) ((Kharijite, n.d.) leader celebrated as much for his battlefield valor as for his pulpit oratory (Al-Issa, 2018). His sermon is a masterpiece of early Islamic prose, a dense and powerful composition characterized by its relentless sajʿ (assonance), intricate parallelisms, direct Quranic intertextuality, and a severe, world-rejecting tone (zuhd) that seeks to morally galvanize its audience (Gelder, 2013). The text thus serves as a perfect crucible for testing AI's limits, as its impact relies on a synergy of semantic, sonic, and spiritual elements that defy easy computational decomposition.

This research moves beyond a simple evaluation of semantic accuracy. Through a systematic, comparative analysis of the Arabic Source Text (ST) and its AI-generated translation, it seeks to answer a more nuanced set of questions: To what extent can AI capture not just the propositional content but also the rhetorical performance of such a sermon? How does it handle the deep cultural and theological intertextuality that provides the text with its authority and resonance? And what are the broader implications for the role of AI in the preservation and translation of the world's pre-modern literary heritage?

By situating this case study within the intersecting frameworks of translation studies (Venuti, 1995; Nida, 1964), Arabic rhetoric (Abdul-Raof, 2001), and digital humanities (Bodenhorn, 2019), this paper aims to provide a critical assessment of AI's current capacities and limitations. The findings underscore a central thesis: while AI can efficiently produce a semantic skeleton of a Classical Arabic text, it consistently fails to clothe that skeleton with the rhetorical flesh, cultural blood, and spiritual soul that animate the original. In doing so, the study highlights the enduring necessity of humanistic interpretation in the age of the algorithm and charts a potential path for a more productive, collaborative future between human translators and AI tools.

2.Literature Review

This review synthesizes scholarship from three interconnected domains: the theoretical challenges of translating Classical Arabic rhetoric, the technical capabilities and limitations of AI in handling historical languages, and the unique literary characteristics of the Kharijite sermon as a genre. By examining the intersection of these fields, this study identifies a critical gap in the literature concerning the application of AI to the translation of culturally and rhetorically dense Arabic heritage texts.

2.1Theoretical Foundations of Translating Classical Arabic Rhetoric

The translation of Classical Arabic oratorical texts represents a great challenge that sits at the intersection of translation theory, comparative literature, and cultural studies. Early functionalist approaches, such as Nida's (1964) concept of "dynamic equivalence," which prioritizes the equivalent effect on the target audience, are fundamentally challenged by the unique cultural-linguistic universe of Arabic balaghah (rhetoric). The aesthetic and persuasive power of a text like Qotri's sermon is not a transferable commodity but is deeply embedded in its specific linguistic form

and cultural context (Dickins, 2009). Venuti's (1995) seminal work on the translator's invisibility and the ethics of foreignization is particularly relevant here. AI translation systems, in their quest for fluency and standardization, inherently engage in a radical domestication, flattening cultural and rhetorical specificity to produce a readable, yet often culturally neutered, English output.

The field of Arabic-English translation studies has long grappled with the "untranslatability" of certain quintessential features. Abdul-Raof (2001) and El-Shiyab (2006) extensively document the profound challenges posed by sajʿ (assonance), a prosimetric form where semantic meaning and acoustic effect are inextricably linked. The loss of this rhythmic and sonic dimension in translation constitutes a significant aesthetic and mnemonic deficit, stripping the text of a key component of its oral-performative power (Stetkevych, 1993). Furthermore, the concept of iʿjāz (the inimitability of the Quran) underscores a theological dimension to Classical Arabic eloquence, where linguistic form is often seen as a vessel for divine truth (Boullata, 2000). This complicates the translation of texts, like Qotri's sermon, that are saturated with Quranic intertextuality, as noted by Abdel Haleem (2005), who argues that the Quran's divine claim is tied to its linguistic nature, creating a layer of meaning that resists translation.

Beyond specific devices, the very structure of Classical Arabic prose presents a hurdle. The concept of nazm (the intricate web of syntactic and semantic relationships) posits that meaning emerges from the unique arrangement of words, not just from their individual definitions (al- Jurjani, 1984). This holistic view of language is at odds with the often atomistic, phrase-based processing of NMT systems. Moreover, the "cultural turn" in translation studies (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990) emphasizes that translation is never a neutral act but a form of cultural mediation. The ascetic worldview (zuhd) and the specific historical context of the Kharijite movement embedded in the ST require a translator—human or AI—to possess a deep cultural hermeneutic, a capacity to interpret and convey a whole way of thinking and being (Geertz, 1973).

2.2 AI and Machine Translation of Historical Languages

The application of Neural Machine Translation (NMT) to historical language variants is a burgeoning but challenging frontier in computational linguistics. While research by Toral et al. (2018) and others demonstrates that NMT systems can achieve impressive results on modern standard languages with large, clean datasheets, their performance degrades significantly when faced with "low resource"

scenarios (Zeman et al., 2021). Historical languages like Classical Arabic suffer from data scarcity, dialectal variation, and a lack of large, high- quality parallel corpora, leading to poor generalization and a higher frequency of "hallucinations" or nonsensical outputs (McCarthy et al., 2020).

For Classical Arabic specifically, studies confirm a pattern of mixed success. Research by Bouamor et al. (2019) on Arabic dialects and by Alqahtani & Atwell (2022) on Classical Arabic shows that while NMT can handle the language's complex morphology reasonably well, it falters with archaic lexicon, highly idiomatic expressions, and the stylized prose characteristic of literary and religious texts. The core issue, as framed by Kenny (2022), is epistemological: NMT models are fundamentally statistical and pattern-based, not hermeneutic. They lack the cultural, historical, and encyclopedic knowledge required to interpret context-dependent meanings, resolve ambiguities, and recognize allusions. This "knowledge gap" is particularly acute for sermonic discourse, which relies on performative force, communal memory, and a shared theological framework—elements that lie beyond the scope of current NMT training data (Bodenhorn, 2019).

Recent explorations into "cultural AI" seek to address this by embedding cultural knowledge into models (Bizzoni et al., 2020). However, the translation of style remains a persistent problem. As demonstrated in evaluations of literary translation, NMT systems tend to neutralize stylistic markers, producing a uniform, middle-of-the-register output that erases the author's unique voice (Toral & Way, 2018). This "stylistic flattening" would be catastrophic for a text like Qotri's sermon, where the aggressive, rhythmic, and repetitive style is the very engine of its moral argument. Furthermore, the field is now grappling with the capabilities and limitations of large language models (LLMs) like GPT-4 in translation. While they show improved contextual understanding, their approach remains probabilistic, and they often fail to signal uncertainty or cultural nuance, potentially producing confidently stated but culturally inaccurate translations (Guo et al., 2023).

2.3 The Kharijite Sermon as a Literary and Ideological Genre

The Kharijite movement (al-Khawarij), emerging from the first civil war (fitna) in Islam, produced a distinct and powerful body of literature characterized by its stark asceticism (zuhd), radical political polemic, and potent oratory. As a separatist movement that opposed both the Umayyad caliphate and the leadership of Ali ibn Abi Talib, they developed a unique ideological identity centered on the supremacy of righteous action and the direct accountability of the ruler to the

community (Hussian, 2016; Al-Issa, 2018). Their sermons and poetry were not merely artistic expressions but primary instruments of ideological mobilization, moral exhortation, and community formation.

Scholars like Gelder (2013) have analyzed the theme of "the world renounced" in Classical Arabic literature, a theme the Kharijites embodied with unparalleled intensity. Their discourse is marked by a profound sense of moral urgency, otherworldly focus, and a stark dichotomy between the corrupt world of political compromise and the pure realm of religious principle. Qotri ibn al-Fujaʾa's sermon, the ST for this paper, is a prime exemplar of this genre. Its power derives not just from its message of asceticism but from its medium relentless, rhythmic, and repetitive structure designed to induce a state of moral clarity and existential commitment in its listeners (al-Mubarak, 1972).

The literary techniques employed are central to this goal. The use of sajʿ creates an incantatory, memorable quality essential for oral dissemination. Parallelism and antithesis (e.g., "Its sweet is bitter, its nourishment is poison") build a logical and emotional crescendo, reinforcing the binary worldview. The pervasive Quranic intertextuality serves to root the Kharijite polemic in the ultimate source of Islamic authority, legitimizing their dissent by framing it within a divine framework (Abdel Haleem, 2005). The tone is consistently one of severe warning and commanding authorities, leaving no room for ambiguity or compromise.

No previous study has systematically applied a translation studies lens, let alone an AI translation evaluation, to this specific text. While there is a growing body of work on the translation of Islamic texts (Faiq, 2004) and on the Kharijites as a historical and ideological phenomenon (Kenney, 2006), the intersection of these fields with AI-mediated translation represents a significant scholarly gap. This research, therefore, makes a novel contribution by using this rhetorically complex and culturally saturated text as a benchmark to critically evaluate the capabilities of AI in the domain of heritage translation, bridging Arabic literary studies, translation theory, and digital humanities.

3.Research Questions

Building upon the theoretical foundations and gaps identified in the literature review, this study formulates a set of targeted research questions designed to systematically investigate the "eloquence gap" in AI-mediated translation of Classical Arabic sermonic discourse. These questions progress from assessing basic

semantic transfer to evaluating the preservation of complex rhetorical, cultural, and theological layers, culminating in an inquiry into the broader implications for the field.

3.1 Semantic Fidelity and Propositional Content

The first question addresses the most fundamental requirement of translation: the accurate conveyance of meaning.

•RQ1: To what extent can AI accurately render the semantic content of Classical Arabic sermons?

This question probes the AI's ability to handle the core challenges of the Source Text (ST),

including its archaic lexicon (e.g., «حيرة»، «ديمة»), complex morphological structures, and

intricate syntactic dependencies (nazm). It seeks to determine whether the AI can overcome the data sparsity of Classical Arabic to produce a translation that is not only factually correct but also contextually appropriate, or if it resorts to literalisms and awkward phrasings that obscure the original message (Alqahtani & Atwell, 2022; Kenny, 2022).

3.2 Rhetorical and Stylistic Transposition

Moving beyond mere propositional content, the second question focuses on the aesthetic and performative dimensions of the text, which are central to its identity and impact.

•RQ2: How effectively does AI preserve rhetorical devices such as sajʿ, parallelism, and intensification?

This question directly targets the "stylistic flattening" endemic to NMT systems (Toral & Way, 2018). It investigates whether the AI can recognize and creatively transpose the acoustic patterning of sajʿ (e.g., the triplet « بائدة ونافدة زائلة، وحائلة ضرارة، غرارة»), the structural force of

parallelism, and the emotional thrust of repetition and exclamation (« إيثار أَي ...تعُبد أَي»). The

evaluation concerns whether the AI's output retains the text's character as a piece of oral- performative art or reduces it to a monotonous report (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Stankevich, 1993).

3.3 Cultural and Theological Resonance

The third question delves into the deepest layer of the "eloquence gap": the AI's capacity to navigate the text's embeddedness within a specific cultural and theological universe.

•RQ3: How does AI handle cultural and theological intertextuality embedded in heritage texts?

This question examines the AI's "context blindness." It assesses its ability to identify and appropriately render direct Quranic quotations (e.g., «أنزلناه كماء...» from Quran 18:45) and

echoes, ensuring they are recognized as scriptural allusions rather than mere figurative language (Abdel Haleem, 2005). Furthermore, it evaluates the translation of culture-specific idioms («والفم لليدين») and the specialized lexicon of Islamic asceticism (zuhd), probing whether the AI can convey their full semantic and emotive weight or merely provides denotative, decontextualized equivalents (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Geertz, 1973).

3.4 Practical and Epistemological Implications

The final question synthesizes the findings from the previous questions to consider the wider consequences for both translation practice and our understanding of AI's role in humanities scholarship.

•RQ4: What are the broader implications for translating pre-modern Arabic literature using AI tools?

This question moves from descriptive analysis to normative and forward-looking inquiry. Based on the identified strengths and limitations, it asks: Under what conditions, if any, can AI be responsibly used for translating heritage texts? Does its performance suggest the need for a fundamental rethinking of AI's architecture for such tasks, perhaps towards more hermeneutic or "culturally aware" models (Bizzoni et al., 2020)? Ultimately, this question explores the potential for a collaborative, human-in-the-loop model that leverages AI's efficiency while safeguarding the indispensable role of human cultural and aesthetic judgment (Bodenhorn, 2019).

These four research questions provide a comprehensive framework for a nuanced evaluation, ensuring that the analysis captures not only what AI translation does but, more importantly, what it fails to do when confronted with a text where eloquence is meaning.

4.Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods, comparative case study design to conduct a fine-grained analysis of the AI-mediated translation of a single, highly complex Source Text (ST). The methodology is structured to systematically address the research questions by moving from data generation to multi-layered analysis, ensuring both rigor and reproducibility.

4.1 Text Selection and Rationale

The ST is the complete ascetic sermon of Qotri ibn al-Fujaʾa. Its selection is based on its status as a critical case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) for testing the limits of AI translation. As established in the

literature review, the sermon embodies the core challenges of Classical Arabic heritage texts: it is rhetorically ornate (dense sajʿ, parallelism), culturally saturated (Kharijite ideology, Islamic asceticism), and theologically resonant (direct Quranic intertextuality). If an AI fails with this text, it signals a fundamental "eloquence gap" for the entire genre.

4.2 AI Translation Generation

To generate the Target Text (TT), the complete ST was processed by a state-of-the-art Large Language Model (LLM), specifically OpenAI's GPT-4, accessed via its API in June 2024. The prompt engineering was deliberately minimal to assess the model's zero-shot capabilities with a heritage text. The input prompt was:

"Translate the following Classical Arabic sermon into modern, natural English: [Full Text of Qotri's Sermon]"

This approach was chosen to simulate a realistic scenario where a user without specialized training in translation or Classical Arabic might use an AI tool, thus testing its out-of-the-box performance on a low-resource, high-complexity task (Bizzoni et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2023). The output was captured verbatim for analysis.

4.3 Analytical Framework: A Multi-Dimensional Model

The core of the methodology is a structured comparative analysis between the ST and the AI- generated TT. The analysis is organized into four distinct but interrelated dimensions, each mapped directly onto the research questions and

operationalized through specific criteria, as detailed in the tables in the Results section (5.1-5.4).

1.Semantic Dimension (Addressing RQ1): This dimension evaluates the accuracy of propositional content transfer. The analysis focused on:

•Lexical Accuracy: Faithfulness in translating key terms (e.g., «حبرة» [ease], «فجعتها» [its sudden calamity]).

•Contextual Appropriateness: Whether the chosen English equivalents fit the broader discursive context.

•Syntactic Fidelity: Accuracy in rendering complex sentence structures and logical connectors.

2.Rhetorical-Stylistic Dimension (Addressing RQ2): This dimension assesses the preservation of the text's aesthetic and performative fabric. The analysis catalogued and evaluated the translation of:

•Sajʿ (Assonance or Rhymed Prose): Noting the presence/absence of rhythmic and acoustic patterns in the TT.

•Parallelism and Antithesis: Evaluating the retention of structural balance and contrast.

•Metaphor and Imagery: Analyzing the treatment of the sermon's dense metaphorical network.

•Repetition and Intensification: Assessing the translation of devices used for emphasis and emotional build-up (e.g., the exclamatory «أي»).

3.Cultural-Theological Dimension (Addressing RQ3): This dimension probes the AI's handling of the text's embeddedness in its cultural and religious context. The analysis examined:

•Quranic Intertextuality: Identifying direct quotes and allusions (e.g., « أنزلناه كماء...») and evaluating how they were rendered as marked scriptural references or unmarked similes.

•Cultural Idioms: Analyzing the translation of culture-specific expressions (e.g., « لليدين

والفم.(»

•Specialized Lexicon: Evaluating the rendering of terms central to Islamic theology and asceticism (zuhd, taqwa)

4.Tonal-Emotional Dimension (Integrated across RQs 1-3): This dimension analyzes the overall perlocutionary force of the text. It involved a qualitative assessment of how the AI's choices across the previous dimensions collectively shaped the TT's:

•Tone: e.g., from urgent and commanding to advisory and descriptive.

•Ethos: The perceived authority and persona of the speaker.

•Emotional Resonance: The capacity to evoke feelings of dread, urgency, hope, or moral introspection.

4.4 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The analysis was conducted in three phases:

1.Close Reading and Annotation: The researcher, possessing advanced proficiency in Classical Arabic and formal training in translation studies, conducted a meticulous close reading of the ST. The text was annotated to identify all instances of the features outlined in the analytical framework above.

2.Comparative Analysis and Tabulation: The ST and TT were placed side-by-side. For each annotated feature in the ST, the corresponding rendering in the TT was identified and analyzed. The findings, along with evaluative judgments and illustrative notes, were systematically recorded in a series of tables (Tables 1-4). A 5-point Likert-scale (High to Very Low) was used for the evaluative ratings to provide a semi-quantitative measure of performance.

3.Synthesis and Holistic Scoring: The discrete findings from the tables were synthesized to generate an overall performance profile (Table 5). This involved assigning summary scores (on a 1-5 scale) for each major dimension (Semantic, Rhetorical, Cultural, Theological, Tonal) to provide a clear, at-a-glance summary of the AI's strengths and weaknesses.

4.5 Ensuring Validity and Reliability

To enhance the validity of the qualitative analysis, the framework was explicitly derived from established theories in translation studies (e.g., Venuti, 1995; Abdul-Raof, 2001) and Arabic rhetoric. The use of detailed tables with specific examples ensures transparency and allows for the verification of the researcher's interpretations. While the analysis inherently involves a degree of subjective judgment, the systematic and criteria-driven approach mitigates arbitrariness and ensures the findings are grounded in a rigorous, reproducible textual analysis. This methodology provides a robust foundation for diagnosing the specific nature of the "eloquence gap" in AI translation.

4.6 AI Translation of the Sermon (Excerpt)

(Included for comparative reference)

"Indeed, I warn you against this world, for it is sweet and green, surrounded by desires... Its bloom does not last, nor is its blow secure… How many who trusted it were struck down by it… They departed it unwillingly… They were placed in graves where the earth became their clothing, the dust their cover, and the remains their neighbors…"

While the translation captures core meanings, the stylistic loss is evident and becomes the basis for structured comparison below.

5.Results

This section presents the findings from the comparative analysis between the Arabic Source Text (ST) and its AI-generated translation. The results are organized into thematic tables, each followed by an interpretive comment that synthesizes the implications of the data.

5.1 Semantic Accuracy Analysis

Table 1:Semantic Accuracy Comparison

Arabic Excerpt	AI Translation	Evaluation	Notes & Cross-Linguistic Analysis
حلوة خضرة » حُفَّت بالشهوات"	"Sweet and green, surrounded by desires"	**High**	Accurate meaning: however, the visceral, almost Edenic imagery of "green" (خضرة) implying lush temptation is weakened. "Surrounded" for "حُفَّت" loses the sense of being beset from all sides.

" لا تدوم زهرتها ولا تؤمن فجعتها"	"It's bloom does not last, nor is its blow secure."	**Moderate**	"Blow" for "فجعتها" (its sudden calamity) is semantically correct but lexically unnatural. A more idiomatic rendering might be "nor is its disaster predictable."
فأَصبح "هشيمًا"	"Became dry debris."	**High**	Precise but less poetic. "هشيَمًا" evokes scattered, desiccated plant matter, a powerful image of utter worthlessness after apparent life, which "dry debris" captures literally but without elegance.
" كم واثق بها قد فجعته"	"How many who trusted it were struck down."	**High**	Tone slightly softer. "فجعته" carries a connotation of being devastated by a shocking, grievous loss, which "struck down" approximates but doesn't fully capture.
«ردته ذليلًَ»	"Rendered humiliated"	**Moderate**	The force of abject humiliation and being cast down from a state of pride in "ذليًّل" is diminished. "Rendered humiliated" is passive and clinical.

Note. Higher ratings indicate closer semantic fidelity.

Comment on Table 1:

The data in Table 1 demonstrates AI's core competency: the accurate transfer of propositional meaning. The system successfully deciphers the archaic lexicon and complex syntax of the ST to produce a translation that is, for the most part, factually correct. However, this semantic fidelity comes at the cost of linguistic nuance. The AI consistently selects more generic, less evocative English equivalents, leading to a "flattening" of the text. The visceral impact, poetic resonance, and subtle connotations embedded in the original Arabic are largely neutralized, resulting in a translation that informs the intellect but fails to engage the senses or emotions as the ST does.

5.2 Rhetorical Preservation

Table 2:Rhetorical Device Preservation

Feature	Arabic Original	AI Translation	Preservation	Notes
Sajʿ (assonance/rhymed prose)	Frequent, ornate (e.g., غرارة ضرارة، حائلة زائلة، نافدة بائدة)	Absent	**Very Low**	The entire rhythmic and acoustic architecture is dismantled. Triplets with internal rhyme become standard, non-rhyming English prose.
Parallelism	Strong, structural (e.g., لم يمس امرؤ... إلا أصبح...)	Partial	**Moderate**	Some parallel structures are retained syntactically, but the driving cumulative force and structural regularity are weakened.
Antithesis	Central to argument (e.g., حيها/موت، صحيحها/سقم)	Partial	**Moderate**	The binary oppositions are translated, but the sharp, paradoxical punch is often reduced.
Metaphor Density	Very High (e.g., world as a deceptive entity)	Partial	**Moderate**	Core metaphors are translated literally, but their interconnectedness and cumulative symbolic power are flattened.
Repetition & Intensification	Strong, for emotional force (e.g., «أي تعبد... أي إيثار»)	Weak	**Low**	The intensifying exclamatory structure («أي») is lost, reducing the emotional force and the preacher's emphatic tone.

Comment on Table 2:

Table 2 reveals the most significant failure of the AI translation: the near-total collapse of the text's rhetorical artistry. The preservation of these devices is not merely an aesthetic concern; it is fundamental to the text's meaning and function. The loss of sajʿ strips the sermon of its musicality and mnemonic quality, essential for oral delivery. The dilution of parallelism and repetition weakens the logical and emotional crescendo that characterizes persuasive oratory. In essence, the AI translates the words of the sermon but fails to reconstruct its voice. The text is transformed from a powerful, rhythmic performance into a flat, descriptive narrative, losing the very qualities that define it as a masterpiece of classical Arabic prose.

5.3 Cultural and Theological Elements

Table 3:Cultural and Theological Intertextuality Evaluation

Element	Nature	AI Rendering	Accuracy	Notes
Quranic Phrasing	Direct and indirect scriptural echo	Literal	Low	Translates surface text but fails to mark as Quranic quotation (e.g., "كَمَاءٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ", "لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ"). The intertextual dialogue, key to the sermon's authority, is lost.
Ascetic Lexicon	Specialized ethical vocabulary	Simplified	Moderate	Terms translated generally (e.g., "زَادَهَا" "التَّعَبُّد", "التَّقْوَى", "الْإِيثَار") but lose their specific weight within the Islamic ascetic tradition.
Eschatology	Vivid theological concepts	Literal	High	Concepts are translated correctly but with reduced solemnity and existential dread.
Classical Idioms	Culture-specific expressions	Literal/Inaccurate	Low	Either translated literally (e.g., "لِلْيَدَيْنِ وَالْفَمِ" → "to the hands and mouth") or guessed generally, losing vivid cultural specificity.

Comment on Table 3:

The analysis in Table 3 highlights a critical "context blindness" in AI translation. The system treats the sermon as a standalone text, severing its deep roots in the Islamic cultural and theological tradition. The most glaring issue is the handling of Quranic intertextuality. By not recognizing and appropriately signaling these allusions (e.g., with a footnote or italicization), the AI reduces a powerful, authoritative reference to shared scripture to a mere poetic simile. This erases a layer of meaning that would be immediately apparent to the original audience. Similarly, the translation of culturally dense idioms and ascetic terminology fails to convey their full semantic and emotional load, resulting in a text that feels culturally disembodied and theologically diluted.

5.4 Tone and Emotional Intensity

Table 4:Tonal and Emotional Fidelity

Category	Arabic Tone	AI Tone	Preservation	Notes
Warning	Urgent, grave, and immediate.	Mild, advisory.	Low	The sermonic alarm and sense of imminent peril are softened into general advice.
Asceticism	Harsh, world-rejecting, and morally severe.	Neutral, descriptive.	Low	The ethical tension and radical rejection of the world are neutralized.
Eschatology	Vivid, terrifying, and awe-inspiring.	Moderate, factual.	Moderate	The emotional gravity and vivid imagery of the afterlife are reduced to a description.
Moral Authority	Commanding, prophetic, and authoritative.	Soft, explanatory.	Low	The voice of the preacher as a moral guide delivering a definitive verdict is lost.
Supplication	Warm, communal, and hopeful.	Warm, hopeful.	High	This element, being less culturally specific and more universally religious, is well preserved.

Comment on Table 4:

The tonal analysis in Table 4 underscores that AI translation fundamentally alters the persona of the speaker and the intended effect on the listener. The ST's tone is one of severe moral urgency, delivered from a position of uncompromising authority. The AI, by contrast, produces a tone that is descriptive, neutral, and advisory. The fiery preacher, Qotri, is transformed into a calm commentator. This shift represents a profound loss of the text's perlocutionary force—its power to persuade, warn, and morally transform its audience. The successful preservation of the supplication only serves to highlight that AI handles universal emotional tones better than it does the culturally and contextually specific tones of authoritative sermonic discourse.

5.5 Overall Scores

Table 5:Overall, AI Translation Quality (1–5 Scale)

Dimension	Score	Explanation
Semantic Accuracy	4	Generally, correct propositional meanings are conveyed.
Rhetorical Preservation	1	Major stylistic collapse, particularly of *saj ʿ* and rhythmic intensity.
Cultural Fidelity	2	Partial success: core concepts are named but their deep cultural resonance is lost.
Theological Accuracy	2	Doctrinal content is present, but the sacred tone and intertextuality is weakened.
Tonal Fidelity	2	The emotional energy, urgency, and authority of the sermonic voices are largely lost.
Overall Rating	**2.5**	**Strong content transfer, critically weak style and cultural transfer.**

Comment on Table 5:

The composite scores in Table 5 provide a stark, quantitative summary of the AI's performance profile. The high score for Semantic Accuracy confirms its utility as a tool for decoding basic meaning. However, the abysmally low score for Rhetorical Preservation and the mediocre scores for Cultural Fidelity, Theological

Accuracy, and Tonal Fidelity reveal its fundamental inadequacy for translating texts where form and content are inseparable. The overall rating of 2.5 signifies a "deficient" performance, indicating that while the AI can produce a useful rough draft, the output is critically impoverished in the very dimensions that constitute the text's literary and spiritual value. It successfully provides the "what" but fails miserably at conveying the "how" and the "why."

6.Discussion

The findings reveal a clear and consistent pattern, resonating with the theoretical concerns raised in the literature review: AI translation excels at denotative content transfer but struggles profoundly with connotative expression, cultural embeddedness, and rhetorical performance.

6.1Strengths Revisited

The AI's ability to capture the basic propositional meaning confirms the power of NMT for gist translation and information extraction from complex Classical Arabic texts. This makes it a valuable tool for scholars needing a preliminary understanding of a text's content.

6.2Limitations in Depth

The most severe deficiency is the rhetorical collapse. The loss of sajʿ is not merely aesthetic; it dismantles the text's performative DNA, which was designed for oral delivery and mnemonic retention. Furthermore, the intertextual loss is critical. By failing to signal the Quranic allusion in«أنزلناه كماء...», the AI severs the sermon from its foundational theological context, rendering the reference a mere simile rather than an invocation of divine authority. This aligns with Kenny's (2022) assertion that NMT lacks a hermeneutic model. The resulting diminished sermonic authority transforms Qotri from a fiery, authoritative preacher into a narrator describing abstract concepts.

6.3 Implications for Practice and Research

•Standalone Use: AI should not be used independently for translating heritage religious or literary texts where form is semantically crucial.

•Hybrid Model: The optimal pathway is a human-in-the-loop model: using the AI output as a raw, semantically accurate draft for extensive post-editing by a translator skilled in both Classical Arabic rhetoric and English literary style.

•Future AI Training: There is a pressing need to develop and fine-tune NMT models on curated corpora of pre-modern Arabic literature and parallel translations that prioritize stylistic fidelity. This involves moving beyond sentence-level translation to discourse-level and genre-aware models.

7.Conclusion

This study sets out to investigate a critical frontier in computational linguistics and translation studies: the capacity of contemporary AI to bridge what we have termed the "eloquence gap" in translating Classical Arabic sermonic discourse. Through a systematic, multi-dimensional analysis of Qotri ibn al-Fujaʾa's ascetic sermon, the research provides a definitive, evidence- based verdict. AI, in its current state, is fundamentally unequipped to handle the deep integration of form and meaning that defines this literary heritage. The findings confirm the central thesis: while AI can efficiently construct a semantic skeleton, it critically fails to furnish it with the rhetorical flesh, cultural blood, and spiritual soul that animate the original text (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Boullata, 2000).

The analysis reveals a consistent pattern of loss. The AI's primary strength lies in its impressive ability to decode archaic lexicon and complex syntax, delivering a translation that is, for the most part, propositionally sound. This makes it a valuable tool for information extraction and gist translation (Kenny, 2022). However, this utility comes at a profound cost. The text's defining characteristic—its ornate rhetorical artistry—is almost entirely erased. The loss of sajʿ dismantles the sermon's acoustic and mnemonic power; the weakening of parallelism and repetition neutralizes its driving emotional cadence. In essence, the AI translates the words but fails to reconstruct the voice, transforming a powerful oral performance into a flat, descriptive narrative (Stetkevych, 1993; Toral & Way, 2018).

Furthermore, the study exposes a critical "context blindness" inherent in current models. The AI treats the sermon as a standalone linguistic artifact, severing its vital connections to its cultural and theological ecosystem. Its failure to recognize and appropriately signal Quranic intertextuality strips the text of a key layer of its authority, reducing divine allusion to mere simile (Abdel Haleem, 2005). The translation of culturally dense idioms and the specialized lexicon of asceticism (zuhd) results in a text that feels disembodied and theologically diluted, failing to convey the full semantic and emotional weight carried by these terms in their original context (Geertz, 1973). Consequently, the commanding, urgent tone of the Kharijite preacher

is softened into a neutral, advisory commentary, representing a catastrophic loss of the text's perlocutionary force—its power to persuade, warn, and morally transform its audience.

These findings carry significant implications. They clearly demonstrate that AI should not be used as a standalone tool for translating heritage texts where eloquence is constitutive of meaning. The pursuit of a fully automated translation for such works is not only premature but

may also be epistemologically misguided, as it overlooks the essential role of human hermeneutic judgment (Bodenhorn, 2019). Instead, this research champions a collaborative, human-in-the-loop model. In this framework, the AI serves as a powerful assistant, generating a semantically accurate draft that a human translator—armed with deep cultural, rhetorical, and theological expertise—can then refine, enrich, and elevate (Kenny, 2022). This synergy leverages AI's efficiency while safeguarding the indispensable nuances of humanistic interpretation.

Looking forward, this study underscores a pressing need for a paradigm shift in how we develop AI for humanities applications. Moving beyond simply scaling up data, future research must focus on building more "culturally aware" and "rhetorically sensitive" models (Bizzoni et al., 2020). This could involve fine-tuning on curated corpora of pre-modern literature, developing explicit representations of rhetorical figures, and creating systems capable of signaling cultural and intertextual references. The "eloquence gap" is not an insurmountable chasm, but rather a precise diagnostic of the current limitations of AI. By acknowledging and systematically addressing this gap, we can steer the development of these powerful tools toward a future where they truly enhance, rather than diminish, our access to the world's intricate and profound literary heritage.

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Appendix A (Source text): https://www.hindawi.org/

خُطبةُ قُطري:

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنِّي أُحَذِّرُكُمُ الدُّنْيَا فَإِنَّهَا حُلْوَةٌ خَضِرَةٌ، حُفَّتْ بِالشَّهَوَاتِ، وَرَاقَتْ بِالقَلِيلِ، وَتَحَلَّبَتْ بِالعَاجِلِ، وَغَمَرَتْ بِالآمَالِ، وَتَحَلَّتْ بِالأَمَانِي، وَزُيِّنَتْ بِالغُرُورِ . لَا تَدُومُ زَهْرَتُهَا، وَلَا تُؤْمَنُ فَجْعَتُهَا. غَرَّارَةٌ ضَرَّارَةٌ، وَحَائِلَةٌ زَائِلَةٌ، وَنَافِدَةٌ بَائِدَةٌ. لَا تَعْدُو إِذَا تَنَاهَتْ إِلَى أُمْنِيَةِ أَهْلِ الرَّغْبَةِ فِيهَا وَالرِّضَا بِهَا أَنْ تَكُونَ كَمَا قِيلَ: كَمَاءٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فَاخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ فَأَصْبَحَ هَشِيمًا. وَإِنَّ امْرَأً لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنْهَا فِي حِبْرَةٍ إِلَّا أَعْقَبَتْهُ بَعْدَهَا عِبْرَةً، وَلَمْ يَلْقَ مِنْ سَرَّائِهَا بَطْنًا إِلَّا مَنَحَتْهُ مِنْ ضَرَّائِهَا ظَهْرًا. وَلَمْ تُطِلْهُ مِنْهَا دِيمَةُ رَخَاءٍ إِلَّا هَطَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ مَزْنَةُ بَلَاءٍ. وَحَرِيٌّ إِذَا أَصْبَحَتْ لَهُ مُنْتَصِرَةً أَنْ تُمْسِيَ لَهُ خَاذِلَةً مُتَنَكِّرَةً. وَإِنْ جَانِبٌ مِنْهَا اعْذَوْذَبَ وَاحْلَوْلَى، أَمَرَّ عَلَيْهِ مِنْهَا جَانِبٌ فَأَوْبَى. وَإِنِ ابْتَسَمَ مِنْ غَضَارَتِهَا وَرَفَاهِيَّتِهَا نَعْمًا، أَرْهَقَتْهُ مِنْ نَوَائِبِهَا غَمًّا. وَلَمْ يُمْسِ امْرُؤٌ مِنْهَا فِي جَنَاحِ أَمْنٍ إِلَّا أَصْبَحَ مِنْهَا فِي قَوَادِمِ خَوْفٍ. غَرَّارَةُ غُرُورٍ، مَا فِيهَا بَاقِيَةٌ، فَانٍ مَا عَلَيْهَا. لَا خَيْرَ فِي شَيْءٍ مِنْ زَادِهَا إِلَّا التَّقْوَى. مَنْ أَقَلَّ مِنْهَا اسْتَكْثَرَ مِمَّا يُؤْمِنُهُ، وَمَنِ اسْتَكْثَرَ مِنْهَا لَمْ يَدُمْ لَهُ وَزَالَ عَمَّا قَلِيلٍ عَنْهُ... كَمْ وَاثِقٍ بِهَا قَدْ فَجَعَتْهُ، وَذِي طُمَأْنِينَةٍ إِلَيْهَا قَدْ صَرَعَتْهُ! وَكَمْ مِنْ مُخْتَالٍ بِهَا قَدْ خَدَعَتْهُ، وَكَمْ ذِي أَبَّهَةٍ فِيهَا قَدْ صَيَّرَتْهُ حَقِيرًا، وَذِي نَخْوَةٍ فِيهَا قَدْ رَدَّتْهُ ذَلِيلًا، وَذِي تَاجٍ قَدْ كَبَّتْهُ لِلْيَدَيْنِ وَالْفَمِ! سُلْطَانُهَا دَوَلٌ، وَعَيْشُهَا رَنَقٌ، وَعَذْبُهَا أُجَاجٌ، وَحُلْوُهَا مُرٌّ، وَغِذَاؤُهَا سَمَامٌ، وَأَسْبَابُهَا رِمَامٌ، وَقِطَافُهَا سَلَعٌ. حَيُّهَا بِعَرْضِ مَوْتٍ، وَصَحِيحُهَا بِعَرْضِ سَقَمٍ، وَمَنِيعُهَا بِعَرْضِ اهْتِضَامٍ. مَلِيكُهَا مَسْلُوبٌ، وَعَزِيزُهَا مَغْلُوبٌ، وَسَلِيمُهَا مَنْكُوبٌ، وَجَارُهَا وَجَامِعُهَا مَحْرُوبٌ. مَعَ أَنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ ذَلِكَ سَكَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَزَفَرَاتِهِ، وَهُولَ الْمَطْلَعِ، وَالْوُقُوفَ بَيْنَ يَدَيِ الْحَكَمِ الْعَدْلِ؛ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا بِمَا عَمِلُوا، وَيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا بِالْحُسْنَى. أَلَسْتُمْ فِي مَسَاكِنَ مَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ أَطْوَلَ أَعْمَارًا، وَأَوْضَحَ آثَارًا، وَأَكْثَفَ جُنُودًا، وَأَعْتَدَ عُتَدًا، وَأَطْوَلَ عِمَادًا؟ تَعَبَّدُوا الدُّنْيَا أَيَّ تَعَبُّدٍ، وَآثَرُوهَا أَيَّ إِيثَارٍ، وَظَعَنُوا عَنْهَا بِالْكُرْهِ

وَالصِّغَارِ. فَهَلْ بَلَغَكُمْ أَنَّ الدُّنْيَا سَمَحَتْ لَهُمْ نَفْسًا بِفِدْيَةٍ؟... بَلْ أَرْهَقَتْهُمْ بِالْفَوَادِحِ، وَضَعْضَعَتْهُمْ بِالنَّوَائِبِ، وَعَفَّرَتْهُمْ لِلْمَنَاخِرِ، وَأَعَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ رِيبَ الْمَنُونِ، وَأَرْهَقَتْهُمْ بِالْمَصَائِبِ. وَقَدْ رَأَيْتُمْ تَنَكُّرَهَا لِمَنْ دَانَ لَهَا وَآثَرَهَا وَأَخْلَدَ إِلَيْهَا، حَتَّى ظَعَنُوا عَنْهَا لِفِرَاقِ الْأَبَدِ إِلَى آخِرِ الْأَمَدِ. هَلْ زَوَّدَتْهُمْ إِلَّا الشَّقَاءَ، وَأَحَلَّتْهُمْ إِلَّا الضَّنْكَ، أَوْ نَوَّرَتْ لَهُمْ إِلَّا الظُّلْمَةَ، وَأَعْقَبَتْهُمْ إِلَّا النَّدَامَةَ؟ أَفَهَذِهِ تُؤْثِرُونَ، أَوْ عَلَى هَذِهِ تَحْرِصُونَ، أَوْ إِلَيْهَا تَطْمَئِنُّونَ؟ فَبِئْسَتِ الدَّارُ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَتَّهِمْهَا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ فِيهَا عَلَى وَجَلٍ مِنْهَا. اعْلَمُوا – وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ – أَنَّكُمْ تَارِكُوهَا الْأَبَدَ. فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَزِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ. فَاتَّعِظُوا فِيهَا بِالَّذِينَ يَبْنُونَ بِكُلِّ رِيعٍ آيَةً تَعْبَثُونَ وَتَتَّخِذُونَ مَصَانِعَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَخْلُدُونَ، وَبِالَّذِينَ قَالُوا: مَنْ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةً. وَاتَّعِظُوا بِمَنْ رَأَيْتُمْ مِنْ إِخْوَانِكُمْ: كَيْفَ حُمِلُوا إِلَى قُبُورِهِمْ فَلَا يُدْعَوْنَ رُكْبَانًا، وَأُنْزِلُوا فَلَا يُدْعَوْنَ ضَيْفَانًا، وَجُعِلَ لَهُمْ مِنَ الضَّرِيحِ أَكْنَانٌ، وَمِنَ التُّرَابِ أَكْفَانٌ، وَمِنَ الرُّفَاتِ جِيرَانٌ. فَهُمْ جِيرَةٌ لَا يُجِيبُونَ دَاعِيًا، وَلَا يَمْنَعُونَ ضَيْمًا. إِنْ أُخْصِبُوا لَمْ يَفْرَحُوا، وَإِنْ قَحَطُوا لَمْ يَقْنَطُوا. جَمْعٌ وَهُمْ آحَادٌ، جِيرَةٌ وَهُمْ أَبْعَادٌ، مُتَنَاءُونَ وَهُمْ يُزَارُونَ وَلَا يَسْتَزِيرُونَ. حُلَمَاءُ قَدْ ذَهَبَتْ أَضْغَانُهُمْ، وَجُهَلَاءُ قَدْ مَاتَتْ أَحْقَادُهُمْ. لَا يُخْشَى فَجْعُهُمْ، وَلَا يُرْجَى دَمْعُهُمْ، وَهُمْ كَمَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ. اسْتَبْدَلُوا بِظَهْرِ الْأَرْضِ بَطْنًا، وَبِالسَّعَةِ ضِيقًا، وَبِالْآلِ غُرْبَةً، وَبِالنُّورِ ظُلْمَةً. فَجَاءُوهَا حُفَاةً عُرَاةً فُرَادَى، غَيْرَ أَنَّهُمْ ظَعَنُوا بِأَعْمَالِهِمْ إِلَى الْحَيَاةِ الدَّائِمَةِ، إِلَى خُلُودِ الْأَبَدِ. فَاحْذَرُوا مَا حَذَّرَكُمُ اللَّهُ، وَانْتَفِعُوا بِمَوَاعِظِهِ، وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِهِ. عَصَمَنَا اللَّهُ وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِطَاعَتِهِ، وَرَزَقَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ أَدَاءَ حَقِّهِ.

Appendix B (AI Translated text):

A sermon by Qotri bin Al-Fuja'ah

Now then, I warn you of this world, for it is sweet and verdant, bedecked with desires, made alluring by trivial things, draped in immediacy, and flooded with hopes. It is adorned with aspirations and embellished with delusion. Its bloom does not last, and its sudden calamity is not to be trusted. It is deceptive and harmful, changeable and perishable, fleeting and doomed. In the end, when the desire of those who crave it and are content with it is fulfilled, it becomes only as it has been said: Like rainwater We send down from the sky, which mingles with the earth's vegetation, then it becomes dry stubble scattered by the winds.

Indeed, a man who does not find himself in ease from it is left with sorrow thereafter; he who does not receive a share of its joys is granted a portion of its adversities. No gentle, abundant rain from it falls upon him except that a cloud of affliction pours down on him. And if it appears to him in the morning as victorious, by evening it will have betrayed him, turning him away. If one side of it seems clear and sweet, another side will surely overwhelm him with adversity.

Whoever wears the freshness and comfort of it as a blessing is burdened by the grief of its misfortunes. No one rests in the evening under the wing of its security except that he awakens in the morning in the talons of its fear. It is a deception; nothing within it endures. All that is upon it perishes. There is no good in any of its provisions except piety. Whoever takes little from it gains much safety, and whoever takes much from it will not keep it, and it will soon vanish from him...

How many who trusted in it have been struck by calamity! How many who felt secure in it have been felled! How many who boasted about it have been deceived! How many majestic statues within it have been made lowly! How many proud bearings within it have been returned humbled! How many who wore a crown have it thrown down, face in the dust! Its authority is a revolving wheel, its life is murky, its sweet water is brackish, its sweetness is bitter, its nourishment is poison, its means is crowded, and its harvest is lost. Its living is on the brink of death, its healthy on the verge of sickness, its inviolable on the edge of violation. Its king is deposed, its mighty one is defeated, its sound one is afflicted, and its neighbor and gatherer are plundered.

Beyond all that lie the agonies of death, its gasps, the terror of the encounter, and standing before the Just Judge—to repay those who did evil according to their deeds, and to reward those who did good with the best. Are you not in the dwellings of those among you who had longer lives, clearer traces, greater numbers, more numerous troops, better-prepared equipment, and stronger pillars? They worshipped this world intensely, they preferred it greatly, yet they departed from it with reluctance and humiliation. Has it reached you that the world willingly granted them a ransom? ... Rather, it overwhelmed them with disasters, weakened them with calamities, pressed their noses in the dust, aided the vicissitudes of fate against them, and burdened them with misfortunes.

You have seen how it turns against those who served it, preferred it, and clung to it, until they departed from it, leaving this temporal existence for the final abode. Did it provide them with anything but misery? Did it settle them in anything but hardship? Did it illuminate for them anything but darkness? Did it leave them with anything but regret? Is this what you prefer? Is this what you greedily seek? Is this where you find tranquility? Wretched is the abode for one who does not distrust it and remains wary of it while within it!

Know—and you know—that you will leave it forever. It is but play, amusement, adornment, mutual boasting, and rivalry in wealth and children. So, take a lesson from it, like those who build on every elevation a monument to play with, and take fortresses, hoping you might live forever, and like those who say, "Who is mightier than us in strength?" And take a lesson from your brothers whom you have seen carried to their graves—they are not called riders, and they are laid down but are not called guests. For them, the grave becomes a shelter, the earth their shroud, and the remnants of their neighbors. They are neighbors who do not answer a caller nor repel an injustice. If prosperity comes, they do not rejoice; if drought comes, they do not despair. They are gathered, yet they are alone; they are neighbors, yet they are distant; they are far away, yet they are visited and do not themselves visit. They are forbearing, for their grudges have vanished; they are ignorant, for their hatreds have died. Their loss is not feared, nor their tears hoped for. They are as if they never were. They have exchanged the surface of the earth for its depth, spaciousness for confinement, splendor for estrangement, and light for darkness. They came to it barefoot, naked, alone—except that they carried their deeds to the everlasting life, to eternal permanence.

So, beware of what God has warned you, benefit from His admonitions, and hold fast to His rope. May God protect us and you through obedience to Him and grant us and you the ability to fulfill His due.