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THE SIMILES (EL MÂNI)

OF

SIDI HAMMO.

Collected and translated

by

R. L. N. Johnston.

THE SIMILES (EL MÂNI)

of

SIDI HAMMO.

Preface.

This translation is the result of some years' occasional work in southern Morocco. The verses were taken down from the mouths of peasants, shepherds, sheikhs and scribes of the Berber clans inhabiting the mountains of Haha and the Great Atlas, where the Mâni of Sidi Hammo are to-day household words. Each verse has been examined and verified by at least half a dozen expert native students.

Where the slightest doubt has arisen of the authenticity of any proverb it has been rigorously expunged.

The language of Sidi Hammo - at once the Burns and the Solomon of southern Morocco - is the purest form of Tamazight-Shilhah, as he himself was pure Amazigh. To the Shilhah of the plains, Tamazight - the "tongue of the Free" - holds the same position as classic Arabic compared with the vulgar dialect, with this difference, that the Morocco Berbers possess no written language. Happily every sound can be represented by Arabic characters and points, hence absolute accuracy in transliteration - in these characters - has been secured.

What is definitely, or indefinitely, known of Sidi Hammo may be summed up in very few words. A native of Aouluz, on the southern slopes of the great range, he led the life of a strolling minstrel, and seems to have wandered over the greater part of Shilhah-speaking Morocco, leaving behind him, at every stage of his journeys, a reputation for wit and wisdom which has by no means withered with time. No one professes to know, even approximately, the period of his existence, but from internal evidence we gather that it was subsequent to the introduction of green tea to Morocco, and therefore comparatively modern. There is every reason to suppose that he died in the district of Iskrouzen, among the mountains he loved, and near to the spot where his shrine is to-day visited by more pilgrims than are drawn to the average "saint". Indeed, despite an occasional lapse into conventional piety, there is nothing of the ascetic about Sidi Hammo. On the other hand, among hundreds of verses, ethical, practical and amatory, which I have examined, I have not come across one containing a phrase which even suggests the realistic licentiousness common to Arab poetry. Sidi Hammo may have been a sinner, but he was emphatically a gentleman.

To the Atlas mountaineers the great charm of his couplets is the wrapping up an idea in simile. To read the hidden meaning implies both intelligence and sympathy. With the Berbers the "master of song" is also "master of similes"; and little wonder -

human nature being what it is - that his most cherished parables are those which have to do with woman. Here, too, one cannot help remarking the wide gulf between the Arab and the Berber. With the former, woman at her best is a beauteous sensuous toy, in due time to be cast aside and always inwardly scorned. Sidi Hammo loves and hates, but he makes no pretence of despising her.

Despite his many jeers at the fair sex, all his allusions to Fadma are couched in terms of the most tender devotion. If tradition be accepted, this was the maiden whom he championed in a singing competition with a brutal negro Drawi. This minstrel having slandered the girl, young Sidi Hammo made pilgrimage to the shrine of Moulai Ibrahim, obtained saintly inspiration, returned to Aouluz, and most effectually silenced the ruffian in a contest of "meanings" in presence of the whole clan. One severe hit at the swarthy slanderer has come down to us:

"Great and only Allah! By what law shall the raven devour sweetmeats?"

For Fadma, indeed, nothing is too good. Fadma, tripping like a pigeon when she nears the spring, preening her plumes the while. Fadma, about whose way earth and sky grow bright; Fadma, a queen uncrowned, for none has seen her face, or heard the laugh of the little mouth, or stroked the eyebrows painted by nature's self. Fadma, his first love, and perhaps his last.

The Translator.

R. L. N. JOHNSTON.

THE SIMILES (EL MÂNI) of

SIDI HAMMO.

In the Name of Allâh, the Compassionate!

Said the Composer, Sidi Hammo, upon whom rest the mercy of Allah:

Verse
1. Like orts from a banquet, stale, tasteless and cold,
Is our life of to-day when compared with the old.

2. Alas for me, my heart is sore;
The lords of poesy are no more.
The glorious hours that lived are fled;
The song, the song itself, is dead.

3. O Woman! As constant as air or the wave;
In turns you're a tempest, a tyrant, a slave.
Who trusts to your faith, be he never so brave,
Shall sink in despair, with your scorn for his grave.

4. Like silk, which never frets the skin,
Is patience in this world of sin.
Who bears, has learned to conquer all
The ills that may, that must, befall.

This say I, knowing well that I,

With all our brethern here, must die;

Aye, sleep within a lowly bed,

With wild flowers wreathing o'er my head.

May the mercy of the Lord rest upon the lowly Sidi Hammo, who said it. Arham Arbbi Sidi Hammo, isinna, Igallin.

To FADMA.

5. For every ill the doctor boasts a pill,

Save Death and Love - These foes o'ercome us still.

6. The sick man is dying for grapes, and the Lord of the vineyard denies him so much as a bunch.

7. I begged of the gardener a bloom; - but one. Said he, "Go your way, fool. If I gave to all who pass, I should have none to give."

8. At every door where I crave an alms they say, "The Lord help you! We are tired of you beggars."

9. Would that my heart had an open door, to show you the fire of my love.

10. Though I dwell

Mid the chills of the tomb and the torments of hell,

I cannot a tithe of my sufferings tell.

11. Oh for wrought iron, to forge a curb for my heart, that would rush to one who gives me not a thought!

12. So I attain my heart's desire,
The world be hurled to rack and fire!
We all must die - And thus would I.

13. Will the lord of the shrine scold the worshippers? What brings them save devotion?

14. What have I done, O Fadma, that unless I speak of you my heart weeps?

15. To rest awhile from the labours of the chase, I built me a hut near the spring. From every hillside thirst brings the gazelles to my very door.

16. By the Face of the Lord! Tell me your names, O ye pigeons![m] Is not one Ayesha? One Rakiya? One Mámass, and another Miriam?

17. Welcome to the messenger who said, 'I have seen her; she is well.' At that moment my heart saw her.

18. O Fadma, like unto the pigeon when she nears the stream; drawing together her little feet, and preening her plumes.

19. The smith seeks the like of you, O Fadma; fine gold that will not fret the skin.

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[m]Girls.

20. Like a feast of walnuts and almonds to the folk of Ounain, so art thou to me, Fadma, my girl gazelle!

21. By the sanctuary of the moon, of the sun and of the stars! Let not my face grow stale to my Beloved.

22. How cruel is absence from the loved one's side!

23. Is it your treachery, O runnel? Or has the spring itself robbed me of its waters?[m]

24. O learned scribe, writing down the chapter of the day! Tell me the remedy for one who has bought an orchard and lost it.

25. The fool may dream of joys in paradise above,
Who never rode a colt, or taught a maiden love.

26. With your steed for a friend,
And a love you can trust,
This is heaven itself
E'er you sink to the dust.

27. All beauty, brothers, is a shrine,
A gift from heaven, half divine.

28. Of a beauty possessed, by Heaven I'm blessed.
To Moses and Aaron[m2] I leave all the rest.

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[m] That is to say, the mistress or the messenger.

[m2] The Jews, rich in this world's goods.

29. By what sweet shrine did Fadma's parents pray,
That earth and sky grow bright about her way?
My Fadma! Queen of loveliness and grace;
As yet uncrowned, for none has seen her face.

May the mercy of Allāh rest upon Sidi Hammo, the lowly master of the song.

SOME OTHER WOMEN.

30. Of the mountain unknown, gallant hunter, beware;
Who says that no lion shall devour thee there?

31. Were your treasure as great as the Atlas, my friend,
There be women I know who would show you its end.

32. O maiden! O Money! What will we not endure to win you?

33. My wants are few, thank God. Although I see
The minted gold, it has no pangs for me.

34. The greenhorn saw the new barley and would straightway pound it, never knowing who planted it, whether in rain or wind.

If you would marry, my son, and have peace, look for a decent pedigree.

35. When woman and her daughter join forces, beware!

36. When the stream's in spate, the jinn (devil) plays more mischief than the water. (Tears)

37 Bitter as the seed of the oleander[m], which scorches the entrails, are the women of Rome (Europe)

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[m] An allusion to the proverb, "The very beauty of the oleander is bitter."

38. If we are to be one, first clear the water of weeds. If not, better we part at once, for we shall not cross the stream.

39. If you cannot fish from your own boat, stick to one who knows the reefs, lest you strike a rock and be smashed to pieces.

40. If you be oleander, I will turn to aloe, more bitter still. Be rather the soap, and I the cloak, and I will add the dye.

41. If you are a serpent at the wayside, I am Sidi ben Aissa,[m] and little do I fear you.

42. Are you the torrent? Then I am the rock which will hold you up till you dry.

43. Bismillah! In Allah's name! I take up the pen, I take up the writing board, and will set down your foes. The straggler bees who betray the wealth of the hive, while the true workers keep house on the cliff edge.

44. They are grinding wheat, and feeding us on barley.

45. Never will I buy a horse from the auction. Second hand riding has no charm for me.

46. O fool, looking for nobility in woman.

47. Of a truth, I am the fool. For who will love the pauper? Even in death he is despised.

48. Better to say farewell while some glamour remains than to suffer jealousy.

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[m] The patron saint of the snake charmers (Aissawa).

49. Were there but one mill, who would grind corn?
With but one stone, who could build?
Were there but one yoke of bullocks, all would starve,
Drinking from one spring, all would die of thirst.
Were there but one oudad,[m1] what traps we would lay!
Gracious heaven! The forest is full of oudaden,
And I am perplexed which to choose.

50. The jackal has not been to school, and never recited a chapter.[m2] Yet what has happened once he remembers - and understands.

51. Woman is like a figtree. Though there be no fruit one looks for it.

52. Look up your delf that none other may open. Though it hold butter and honey you may rest tranquil.

53. O platter, we fed from you freely, I own;
Your breaking at last will not cause me a groan.

May the mercy of Allāh rest upon the lowly master of the song.

Of Life and Love, and Lesser Matters.

54. When the pool fills, distant fields get the water.
Far from its roots is the shade of the palm.

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m1 The wild sheep, ovis tregalaphus.

m2 There are no schools for girls in Berber Land.

55. The rill has burst from the cliff. Think not to turn back its waters to the thirsty lands above.

56. Patience, beloved. Not yet would I open the spring. Wait until I have planted for thee trees of henna and vines.

57. Keep your heart free, and the Lord will look after the rest. Love's only cure is to endure.

58. The beard may be large and the wit small.

59. Take your way, beloved. Take your own way, till none is left to you but me. In Time is Luck, and Luck lived before we did.

60. The jackal grows weary of howling,[m]
The scribe must grow sick of his pen.
From the cliff the oudad will weary
Of plunging headfirst down the glen.

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[m] In his occasional jeers at the fair sex Sidi Hammo compares them with the jackal, the cunning humbug of Moorish fable, who almost invariably overreaches himself. As an object of pursuit, woman becomes the oudad, or wild sheep of the Atlas spurs. Here he alludes to this animal's habit of throwing itself on to its powerful horns, from crag to crag, in descending the mountain side.

61. Where art thou, O bee eater? The swarm is passing. The breeze has blown up even the stragglers.

62. Small though it be, steel is the king of iron.

63. Does one show a light to the blind? Take him by the hand. For the hand gives safety to the brow.

64. In the heavens the eagles vowed a bond of brotherhood. They came down to earth - and dispersed. Such is the cursed greed of gain.

65. O colt, led by the salesman, who shall be thy buyer? He alone to whom the Lord has decreed the Luck.

66. The luck that is of earth we know;
And, as for what may be above,
Lord send it to us here below.

67. I come from earth's loftiest summits, and now, to bear a care, or cast it off, to me is one. For Luck, and Luck alone, can grant the heart's desire.

68. Happy the man of whom little is spoken. The jackal and I have endured much slander.

69. O jackal, open not by day; await the face of night. All you meet are masters of hounds, trained only on your account.

70. The dreamer may babble; he ne'er took a note
Of what his opponent by notaries wrote,*
Until - when the claim in due process is laid -
"A false accusation!" he cries. "Why, I paid."

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* Among the illiterate Berbers every contract of importance must be drawn up by notaries.

71. As for me, I have neither forgiven nor forgotten. But the seasons - not the days - will show.

72. Said the water mill to the master of the house, "Sleep in peace. All you can grind in a year, I will grind in a moon. All you can grind in a moon, I will do it for you in a day.

73. There's naught in life to match one's wife.
When supper's done, she is the one
With whom one loves to sit and chat.[m]

74. I met a hunter. "Whither bound?" I ask. "Under yon cliff," says he, "is a young oudad which I must have."

75. I liken myself to a hunter, bringing back torn slippers, bruised arms and weary feet.

76. Truth, O mother mine, a very jackal am I . If I meet the goatherds, their cry is, "Strike the jackal Jew!" If I meet the schoolboys, "Strike the jackal Jew!"

77. My lot is that of the orphan, who washes his hand for dinner, when someone comes and thrusts him aside weeping, poor lad.

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[m] This quaint confession would encourage one to hope that our poet, despite his admiration for various "pigeons" and almond eyed gazelles, was in the main - like most of his Berber brethren - a better husband than the majority of Arabs.

78. Or of the schoolboy, far from his mother. The feast comes, and brings him nothing but tears.

79. O mother mine, merciful heart! From wandering o'er the earth I bring back nothing but a great longing. Cursed be the gold hunger which has cut off the streams.

80. Will glass bear handling? Will paper bear water? Will the noble suffer a churlish neighbour?

81. Does the torch promise safety to the gunpowder?

82. Will I forgive him who opened yonder window?[m] Never! Nor him who laid the foundation, and fixed the beam.

83. May the angel of death not take me till I have repaid this loan in kind!

84. Hide your hurt and make no plaint, that none may know you suffer but yourself.

85. Once bankrupt, who refuses to swear he's insolvent? Your creditors will grow sick of hearing the oath.

And may the Lord have mercy upon Sidi Hammo, the lowly master of the song.

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[m] To spy into his affairs.

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WITH THE TEA TRAY.

86. The cloud rolls in the sky, the bees are on the wing; the marksman cocks his musket, and the Christian steers his bark for the distant shores.

87. In a dream, O mother mine, I saw a colt,* saddled, and wearing a neck charm. He wanted only a rider.

88. Welcome to him whom the road has brought our way. He draws near our home, and pauses.

89. Welcome, O minstrel! What is mine is thine. This house did I build that in it my all should become thine.

90. The tea tray glitters with its chased pattern. Yet is the frash (the plain disc on which the teapot stands) the choicest circle of all.

91. For the Lord's sake, O master of the tray, give me more. O tiny tumbler of tea! 'Tis only in drinking of thee that my thirst is quenched, my heart saved from bursting.

92. O runnel, bringing water to the henna trees and the vines! Though you cost tons of treasure, yet were you cheaply bought.

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* In the bard's amatory mood, woman becomes a dainty pigeon, a honey-giving bee, a gazelle, a fragrant fig tree, a sacred shrine, a "little brother " or an untamed colt, for his similes are quite untrammelled by considerations of gender. The Shilhah tongue lends itself to this word play.

Green tea, it should be remembered, flavoured with the daintiest herbs, and drunk in small glasses, is the fluid luxury of Berber Land.

LOST LOVE.

93. To hell with this world since I am no longer of it! If only some who have known it were here!

94. Where is Sheddad, son of Ayad, with his golden wall? Where is its foundation of molten copper? Where is Allāh's own messenger, riding on Borak with rattling rein? Where art thou, Fadma, beauteous as the moon?

95. The Time has flown, the lords of poesy are no more. Nobility is dead, youth has vanished. Dollars are all in all. Who dare bid for greatness save in cash?

96. With whom hold converse? What remains but mistrust

97. and treachery? Were there but one who could eat, wipe his mouth, and let the words vanish!

98. He* - he who betrayed me - gave me the vow (aman), as I gave it to him. He swore that falsehood should never come between us.

99. Where is he who said, 'If you suffer, I will tend you'? I am sick unto death, and he comes not near me.

100. I took him for silver; he turns out brass. Fit for nothing but an ablution bowl.

101. This I say, well knowing I have no wit left but to rave.

---

* 'He' may be read 'she'.

102. Better, far better, speak your words to the trees of the forest, and keep company with the glens and streams. For man, living man, is faithless.

103. Rather abide in the wilds a year, two years, seeking a comrade worthy your heart. Finding none such, die.

104. My heart, O mother mine, is not like the camel's. When he breaks his knees he throws off his load and - sleeps.

105. Perish the love that endures not till death!

106. That day we met. What high hope we had! Then came the treachery. O, my beloved, there was none, none, none like thee.

107. The laugh of the little mouth! Eyebrows painted by nature's self. These I could see and hear. Would I had read your heart!

108. Take your way, young brother. May Allah give you ease, for I cannot call you to account. Before the Lord, may be, we shall meet.

May the mercy of Allāh rest upon the lowly singer, Sidi Hammo.

CONCERNING FRIENDS, TRUE AND FALSE.

109. The real orphan is he who has no friend.

110. With friends one may attain the mountain springs, aye, draw water from the very summit as from the plain.

111. O man of many friends, two will suffice. Should one fail you, try to trust the other.

112. Let him who bears with worthless folk bear their sins.

113. The very gazelles will not herd, nor waters join, save in the stream; nor friendship live with greed of gain.

114. To test your friend, trust him with much treasure. If he have the gold hunger, see that he eat (rob) you not. If he be true, open your all to him, for he is yours.

115. Have I not tried the heart strings, as in my hand? Dream not that he to whom you have given nothing will follow you.

116. Once did my heart of heart repent the power
Of spoken words; when, in a darkling hour,
I craved a kindness of a seeming friend,
Whose false excuses marked love's bitter end.

TO A DISDAINFUL DAMSEL.

117. "Stretch skyward, Atlas, till thou're weary," thus I cried.
"Across thy brow there comes a road. So much for pride."

118. Though of wings you're possessed,
Yet despise not the earth.
When aweary for rest
You will learn all its worth.

119. "O lord of the saddle, no airs," thus I said.
"The cloth may be new, yet be sure it will fade."

120. The saddle holds but one, my friend. Rather than mount pillion I will forego riding.

OF MAIDENS AND MONEY.

121. O lovely girls! O lovely dollars! May the beauty of both be ours.

122. How the dollar lends a charm to the face.

123. Who counts the days of the pauper? He went on a journey, and no one knows he has returned.

124. Even in life the penniless one is dead.

125. Your dollar makes a grand defence;
Who can withstand its eloquence?
Be right or wrong, be false or true,
The man you pay will plead for you.

126. Yet is a little wisdom better than money. Even a bankrupt can borrow cash.

127. Can a man handle the scales and not eat (cheat)? Day by day he chips pieces off the weighing stones. Even the cobblers devour no small share, swelling and weighting the hide with blood from the shambles. Have we not seen the sellers of second-hand mats soaking them in the pool near the market?

128. If marry you must, choose the best that you can;
If not, take your gun and have sport, single man!
Rather wed a poor maid than a widow with money.
The first at the hive gets the richest of honey.

OUR RULERS.

129. There's a bull in the north[m]
Threshing corn grown in Soos.
The Kaids and their sheikhs,
They are infidels all;
The palace a pool
Where rank waters collect,
Where no one can drink
Save those leeches the sheikhs.

130. In paradise, Allāh be praised, is neither Kaid nor Kadi, sheikh nor sharif, but only Thou.

---

[m] The Sultan.

FRAGMENTS.

131. Who denies that love has pangs? May he be athirst, and far from the well! May he be enamoured of the golden fish darting downwards into the waters. Or of the bright-winged locust, spurning the earth.

132. As though she were a great sultan of whom I begged an alms, she vouchsafes me not so much as an answer.

133. O sufferer, lose not thy heart; remember the Lord is kind. The greatest of things created is less than his mercy to man.

134. How far more hard to keep silence than to speak. And how dangerous is a secret shared.

135. Death makes life worthless.

136. However large be your share of this life, death will carry you off.

137. Beauty begets beauty. Is the mule father to the horse?

138. Sweeter than butter to the weary reaper is thy face. Let me but see it, and I will toil till I faint.

139. The eye shows if the words please. If he love them not, mark how his glance drops.

140. If you must swim, plunge into the green waves, not into the muddy pool.

141. Talking much and saying little loses what countenance you had.

142. The poor hawk* is crying, "I found a seagull in my nest. He has laid waste my house, and may the Lord do so to him."

143. Though one drink from your spring under the cliff, cover him with earth lest the arch liar see him.

144. What brings on early death like bare feet, poor food and sleep without ease? May Luck come to me where I am.

And may the mercy of the Lord rest upon Sidi Hammo, the lowly master of the song.

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* 'Poor hawk' is obviously ironical. A nobleman jealous of a clown.

BIRCH-GREENSBERGER
☆ R S ☆
LINEN
TYPEWRITER PAPER

(From the Translation by R. L. N. Johnston)

SONGS and PARABLES of SIDI HAMMO.

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Saith the Composer, Sidi Hammo, upon whom the eternal mercy of Allah:

Like orts from a banquet, stale tasteless and cold,
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Alas for me, my heart is sore;
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O Woman! As constant as air or the wave,
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In turns you're a tempest, a tyrant, a slave.
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Like silk, which never frets the skin,
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This say I, knowing well that I,
With all our brethren here, must die;
Aye, sleep within a lowly bed,
With wild flowers wreathing e'er my head.
And may the mercy of the Lord belong
To Sidi Hammo, singer of the song.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ١ على سيدنا محمد وآله وصحبه

قال الناظم رحمه الله تعالى

زنده عشق مدت زمتیچرك ايك

انچك ادنى اكرنه ايدعلم

انسى نك نشر ز امرى امت

اد مدد امنيون امرى امت

ازحمه ازب سنى حمه اسى اكليس

تشمن دوصرد سعد دوسف

ينكس بمن اكى انس ازدروح

ازحمه ازب سنى حمه منمرك اسى

Facsimile of a page from

the original manuscript of the

Songs and Parables

of

SIDI HAMMO,

in the possession of the

Translator;

Reduced to quarter size.

24 Blatt + 1 Foto

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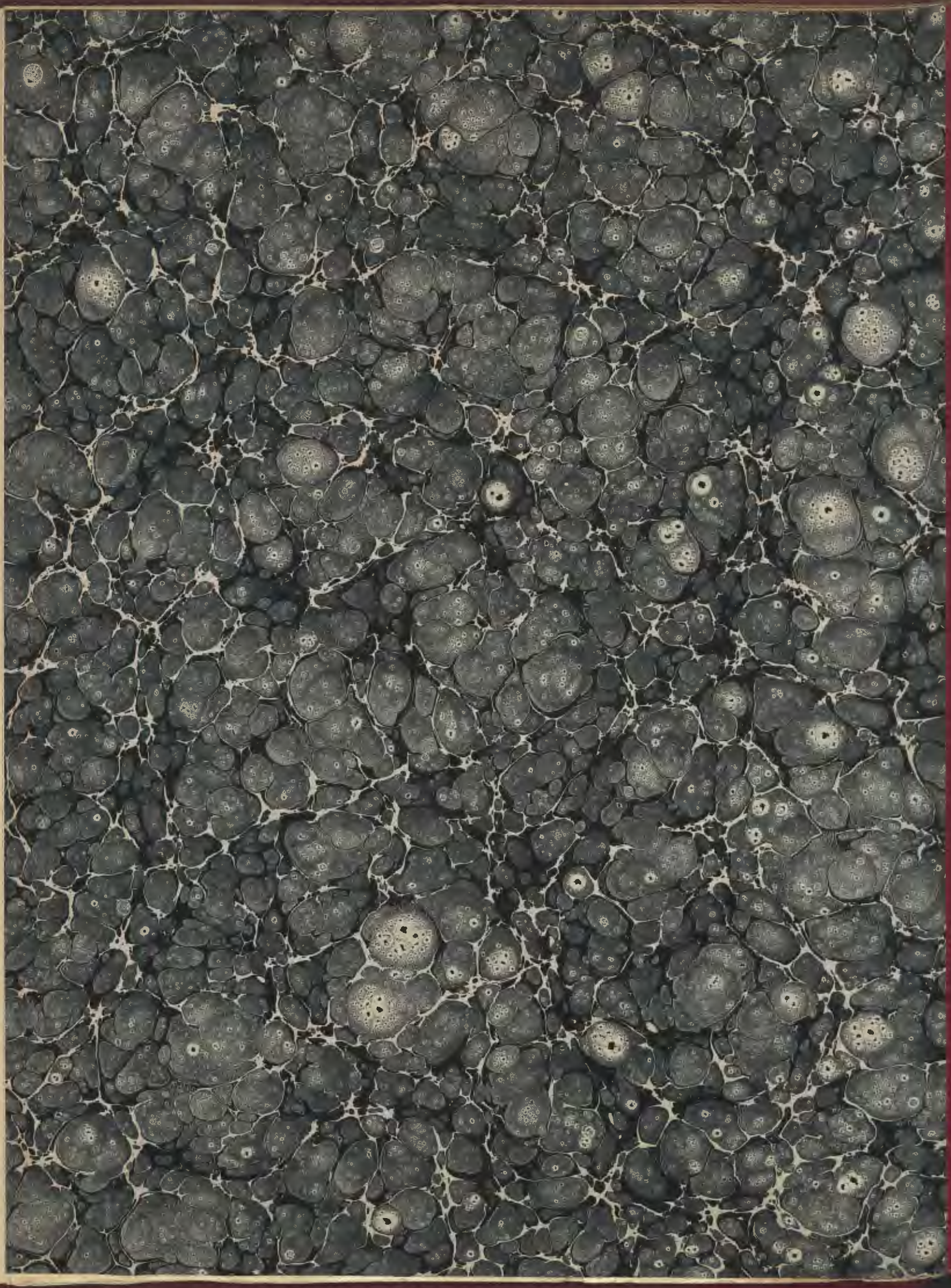

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