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Translator's Preface

Lisa Marie Anderson

The German-Jewish writer Else Lasker-Schüler was born in 1869 in Wuppertal-Elberfeld. She gained fame in Berlin and throughout Europe as her poems and plays began to be published in the first decade of the twentieth century, and was a leading literary voice of her generation. Soon after the Nazis came to power, she fled to Zurich, and later emigrated to Palestine. Lasker-Schüler died in 1945 in Jerusalem and was buried on the Mount of Olives.

The poet Gottfried Benn once characterized Lasker-Schüler's poetry as a meshing of Jewish subject matter, oriental imagination and German language. She was wonderfully innovative with all three, and it is her unique playfulness that provides "An Old Tibetan Rug" with its characteristic charm. The poem appeared in *My Wonder*, a collection of Lasker-Schüler's Expressionist poems published in 1911. It exemplifies her creativity especially with language, which yielded beautiful re-combinations and neologisms. These are not easy to render in English, but I have attempted in this translation to retain the linguistic playfulness which contributes to the poem's feeling of sometimes breathless adoration and infatuation.

EIN ALTER TIBETTEPPICH

Deine Seele, die die meine liebet,
Ist verwirkt mit ihr im Teppichtibet,

Strahl in Strahl, verliebte Farben,
Sterne, die sich himmellang umwarben.

Unsere Füße ruhen auf der Kostbarkeit,
Maschentausendabertausendweit.

Süßer Lamasohn auf Moschuspflanzenthron,
Wie lange küßt dein Mund den meinen wohl
Und Wang die Wange buntgeknüpfte Zeiten schon?

AN OLD TIBETAN RUG by Else Lasker-Schüler

Translated by Lisa Marie Anderson

Your soul, which loves my own,
Is interwoven with it in the Rug-Tibetan,

Strand into strand, colors smitten,
Stars which wooed each other across the heavens.

Our feet rest upon the treasure,
Thousandsandstillthousandsacrossthemeshes.

Sweet lama's son on a musk-plant-throne,
How long has your mouth been kissing my own
And cheek to cheek been brightly tied together?