

For Whom the Bell Knells

Al Salehi

Shadows evaporate
as contrite strands of light
escape timidly above the fresh ruins.

A muffled minaret's bell knells,
calling the people
to their *mourning* prayers —

filling the streets
with kneeling
ghosts.¹

¹ *Many mosques, traditional sacred places of worship, have closed in the hardest hit areas of the country, while those in western Ukraine have been transformed into shelters for displaced Ukrainians. As of March 27, 2022, an estimated 10,000 Muslims have died in the war with Russia so far. There were about 1.5 million Muslims living in Ukraine prior to Russia's invasion, and most of them were in areas hardest hit by the war. Many Muslims have died defending their country, including those who are fighting as part of the Ukrainian army. Ukraine's Muslim community stretches back centuries. The first documented emergence of Islamic culture in Ukraine came in the 19th century, but Ukraine's southern region of Crimea was once governed by descendants of the great Genghis Khan centuries before.*