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*An Analytical Survey of Persian Works
on Indian Learned Traditions*

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Miftāḥ al-surūr-i ‘Ādil-šāhī

The author lived in Mālwa and Bijapur in the first half of the 10th/16th century. His name is not totally clear. The manuscript under scrutiny (Ms. London, British Library, IO Islamic 2473, f. 1b) reads “Maḥmūd(-i) Ayāz”. Different manuscripts have “Muḥammad(-i) Ayāz” and “Niyāz Maḥmūd” (Munzawī 1382š/2003, p. 3719). “Niyāz Maḥmūd”, however, is unlikely, since the British Library manuscript clearly reads “the servant of the wantless court (*banda-yi dargāh-i bī-niyāz*) Maḥmūd(-i) Ayāz”. Hence, “*niyāz*” is not part of the name. Information on the author is entirely derived from the foreword of his treatise. He refers to himself and his forefathers as being content servants of the Khiljī dynasty of Malwa until political turmoil took place. He thus decided to take refuge with the ‘Ādil Šāh ruler, to whom he intended to introduce himself by a book on medicine (*tibb*), since he had studied it for a large part of his life (Ms. London, British Library, IO Islamic 2473, ff. 2a-3a).

The *Miftāḥ al-surūr-i ‘Ādil-šāhī* (‘Ādil Šāh’s Key To Delight) is an original Persian work on ‘*ilm al-bāh*’ (lit. ‘knowledge of coitus’) dedicated to Abū al-Mujāhid (or Maḥāmid) ‘Ādil Šāh (probably the sultan Isma‘īl, r. 915-941/1510-1534) and written in Burhānpūr (Munzawī 1382 s/2003, p. 3719). The author’s arrival in Burhānpūr is dated in several manuscripts as *muḥarram* 922/February 1516 (Ms. London, British Library, IO Islamic 2473, f. 2b) or 923/1517 or 926/1519 (Munzawī 1382 s/2003, p. 3719), but 926 (given as “*muḥarram-i sittīn (!) wa ‘iṣrīn wa tis ‘i-mi ‘a*”) could easily be a writing error for 922 (i.e. “*muḥarram-i iṭṭayn wa ‘iṣrīn wa tis ‘i-mi ‘a*”). In Burhānpūr, the author heard that the ‘Ādil Šāh king was absent from the capital due to a military expedition. Deciding against following him empty-handedly to the camp, the author resolved to write a treatise and wait until the return of the ruler. Hence, the work has been composed in 922/1516 (alternatively 926/1519; 923/1517) or shortly afterwards. The *Miftāḥ al-surūr* can be classified as part of the later literature on ‘*ilm al-bāh*’ that evolved in the late medieval and early modern Muslim world by merging elements

of the formerly independent genres of purely medical and erotological works (Franke 2012). The author indeed classifies his work as a treatise (*risāla*) on *quwwat-i bāh* (potency) (Ms. London, British Library, IO Islamic 2473, f. 3b) and explicitly states to have discussed information from the “books of the philosophers of India and Rūm” (*kutub-i ḥukamā-yi Hind wa Rūm*). Although he does not list all of his sources, judging from contents he most probably used a version of the *Kitāb albāb al-bāhiyya wa al-tarākīb al-sulṭāniyya*, a treatise on coitus (*bāh*) ascribed to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). The *Ladḍat al-nisā'* and the *Alfiyya wa šalfiyya* – illustrated books on sexual matters in various versions not always extant today – are sources explicitly named.

The treatise is structured as follows: in a preface the author gives an account of the events leading to the composition of the work. The introduction explains the basic medical concepts behind potency (*quwwat-i bāh*) and general rules for practicing sexual intercourse. In chapter one the author explains in sub-chapters from one to three various medical issues of Arabic and Persian texts like the preservation of potency and benefits and harms of sexual intercourse. Sub-chapters from four to six introduce types of women according to Indian literature and philosophers of Rūm and discuss positions for sexual intercourse and erotic techniques like embraces, kisses and the application of fingernails. Chapter two provides single and compound medicines for enhancing potency and chapter three single and compound foods. In the conclusion, the author elaborates on bandages and clothes for different seasons and on cosmetic issues. The bulk of the work is devoted to medicines and foods, but erotological information makes up more than half of chapter one.

The influence of Indic works on sexual intercourse and erotology is notable in the *Miftāḥ al-surūr* especially in sub-chapters four to six of chapter one. The author describes the four Indian types of women of the *Kokaśāstra* tradition (*padmini*, *čitrini*, *sankhini*, *hastini*) along with ten *rūmī* types in order to facilitate the choice of pleasurable slave girls and wives for the aristocracy according to physiognomy. Men are also warned about detrimental effects of sexual intercourse with unsuitable types of women. Erotic techniques to enhance sexual pleasure are treated afterwards. Both, the description of the four types of women and the presentation of the erotic techniques are particularly reminiscent of the *Ladḍat al-nisā'* in the Naḥṣabī tradition.

With regard to different positions of sexual intercourse, however, in spite of admitting that they are a matter of individual tastes, the author defends the Muslim medical

notion that only missionary position is not detrimental to men’s health. Here, the reasoning is exactly the same as in the treatise on coitus ascribed to al-Ṭūsī (compare Ms. London, British Library, IO Islamic 2473, f. 19a and Ṭūsī 2014, p. 112 and pp. 49-50 of the edition). Nevertheless, the author adduces lack of space as the reason for referring the reader to various positions given in illustrated books like the *Alfiyya wa šalfiyya* and the *Ladḍat al-nisā’*.

Moreover, in accordance with Muslim medical views, the author criticizes the “ignorant physicians and yogis” (*juhhāl-i aṭibbā wa jōgiyān*) who advocate complete abstinence from sexual intercourse (Ms. London, British Library, IO Islamic 2473, f. 11b). On the other hand, for information on types of women as well as medicines and foods he draws on both Muslim and Indian traditions without further discussion. The chapter on medicines contains also Indic terms in Arabic script. Unfortunately, the author does not name his sources on Indic medical knowledge. Judging from erotological knowledge, he may have used Persian translations of Indic medical works as well. However, as he mentions in the foreword having had teachers (*ustādān-i ḥwīš*) in medicine, it is also possible that some of his sources on Indic medical knowledge were oral.

Manuscript: London, British Library, IO Islamic 2473, ff. 65, **ii**) Monday, 8 *ramazān* year 20 (?), **vii**) Ethé suggests that 8 *ramazān* year 20 could mean year 20 of Muḥammad-Šāh’s reign which would be 1151/20 December 1738, but that was a Saturday, not a Monday, **viii**) Ethé 1903, vol. 1, c. 1262.

Legend: i) Place of copying; ii) Period of copying; iii) Copyist; iv) Commissioner; v) Information on colophon; vi) Description of miniatures/illustrations; vii) Other remarks; viii) Information on catalogue(s)

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