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Perso-Indica
c/o Fabrizio Speziale
University Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3
Département d'Études Arabes, Hébraïques, Indiennes et Iraniennes
13 rue Santeuil
75231 Paris cedex 05
France
e-mail: info@perso-indica.net

Bilawhar wa Buyūdasf

‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ṭālib Niẓām Tabrīzī, known as Niẓām al-Wā‘iz, was an historian and scholar of the Jalāyirid (1335-1432) and the early Timurid (1370–1507) periods. He served three sultans, the Jalāyirid rulers Uways I (r. 1356-1374) and Aḥmad (r. 1382-1410) and then Tīmūr Lang (r. 1336-1405). He is also believed to be the famous Niẓām al-Dīn Šāmī, or Niẓām Šanab Ġāzānī, the author of the *Zafarnāmayi Šāmī*, a book on Timur’s conquests and kingdom. According to some accounts, he was born in 740/1339-1340, in *šanab* or *šām*, a quarter today located in Tabriz (Iran). His death occurred somewhere around 812/1409, and he probably completed *Bilawhar wa Buyūdasf* between 790-800/1388-1398 in Baghdad, the capital of the Jalāyirid sultanate. He dedicated his work to sultan Aḥmad (Dānišpažūh 1341š./1962, pp. 90-91; Īmānī 1380š./2001, pp. 37-43).

Niẓām Tabrīzī’s *Bilawhar wa Buyūdasf* is the rewriting of a Persian translation of an Arabic version of the story about the life of Buddha and the way he reached enlightenment following the teachings of Bilawhar. It is not clear which Arabic version was used. For what concerns the Persian translation, the translator’s name is left blank in the manuscript of Malek Library. The scribe probably intended to fill it later with red ink (*šangarf*). But the name of the translator is mentioned in the manuscript copy of *Bilawhar wa Buyūdasf* preserved in London as “Sirāj al-Millat wa al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ġaznawī”. The work of Sirāj al-Dīn al-Ġaznawī was the base of Niẓām Tabrīzī’s version (Ms. London, British Library, British Museum 13214, see Gimaret 1971, p. 45). Gimaret suggests that he could have been an author of the 5th/11th or 6th/12th century, connected with the Ghaznavid court. He remarks that his name is similar to that of the poet Muḥtārī who was called “Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Uṭmān ibn Muḥammad Ġaznawī” (d. before 516/1122-1123) (Gimaret 1971, pp. 44-45). However, this identification is quite doubtful, in particular as Gimaret

points out that the celebrated poet of Ghazna, Sanā'ī (d. ca. 1087/1130), a companion and a contemporaneous of Muḥtārī, names him Ḥakīm abū 'Umar 'Uṭmān ibn 'Umar Muḥtārī in the title of a laudatory poem (*qaṣīda*) in his praise (see Sanā'ī Ġaznawī, 1388š/2009, pp. 481-485). Moreover, the name mentioned in the preface of the London manuscript mostly recall that of Sirāj al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Sajāwandī, who was also called al-Ġaznawī (d. ca 600/1204), a ḥanafī scholar and the author of *al-Sirajīyya*, a book on inheritance share according to Ḥanafī jurisprudence. (see Ibn Quṭlūbuġā 1413/1992-1993, p. 245).

It is not clear whether Sirāj al-Dīn's text had a preface. Niẓām Tabrīzī's preface includes praises to God, to prophet Muḥammad and his descendants, to sultan Aḥmad, and an account of the reason behind the rewriting of the text (Niẓām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, pp. 1-10). Niẓām Tabrīzī expressly says he had access to a copy of Sirāj al-Dīn's translation in sultan Aḥmad's library and he defines it as "a treasury of knowledge and manners" (*ganjīna-yi ḥikam wa ādāb*). However, according to him Sirāj al-Dīn has exaggerated in using rhyming prose (*saj*'), verbosity, and presenting rhymed sections which are repetitions of the same in prose. Therefore, Niẓām Tabrīzī decided to make an abridgement of Sirāj al-Dīn's translation; then sultan Aḥmad ordered him to write a preface to his work in order to distinguish it from the earlier translation. Niẓām Tabrīzī claims to have made a "sound epitome" (*ḥusn-i iḥtiṣār*) of the book. Moreover, he also explains that he has made some changes and deliberately added subject-matter of his choice to the original text (Niẓām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, p. 10).

The content of the work and its general structure follow those of other versions and narratives of the story of *Bilawhar wa Būdāsaf*, such as the Arabic version of Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991) (see Gimaret 1971, p. 45; Mujtabā'ī 1383š./2004, p. 533). Nevertheless, there are some differences between Niẓām Tabrīzī's text and other versions. Unlike the customary tradition in Persian and Arabic literature, the name of the prince has not been mentioned as Būdāsaf or Ūzāsaf but as Buyūdasf. It is not clear whether the name has been changed by Sirāj al-Dīn or Niẓām Tabrīzī. According to Muḥammad Rawšan, it is a variant form of Būdāsaf (Rawšan, 1381š./2002, p. xiii).

In comparison with other accounts, Sirāj al-Dīn and Niẓām Tabrīzī's versions omit some short stories and conversations (Nawḍarī 1385š./2006, pp. 55-64) and add a few parts. There are at least two added parts which do not seem to exist in other

versions. The first is a conversation at the beginning of the story before Buyūdasf faces the three signs of sickness, old age and death. The conversation takes place between one of the courtiers who has turned to an ascetic and Buyūdasf's father, called either Čunayš, Ĥunayš, or Ĥunayš, which seems similar to the name Junaysār used in the Ismā'īlī version in Arabic (probably written between 129-279/ 750-900, it is called "Ismā'īlī" because it was found among Ismā'īlīs of India; however, there is no relation between this version and Ismā'īlī doctrines, see Gimaret 1971). The conversation deals with moral and philosophical subjects which are not linked to the story. Because of their close similarities with other books, we can say they are taken from other sources, as to the ascetic's explanation of the "five outer senses" (*ḥawāss-i ḥamsa-yi zāhirī*) which is similar to the philosophical explanation of the five senses found in Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Hamadānī's *'Ajā'ib-nāma*, a book on cosmography and marvels of creatures written between 555-562/1160-1167 (Nizām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002 p. 25-27, Nawḍarī 1385š./2006 p. 66).

The second instance is found in the chapter where Bilawhar's training has come to the end and he decides to leave Buyūdasf. Sirāj al-Dīn, the translator of the book, says that: "*Bilawhar's* training has come to its end, but because the main reason of translation is warning the unaware and guiding aspirants (*tanbīh-i gāfilān wa iršād-i mustaršidān*), I asked a few questions of my choice from the prince and the response from Bilawhar" (Nizām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, pp. 277-278). This digression from the original story is presented as an explanation of the "kinds of happiness" and the "manners of obtaining knowledge" (Nizām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, pp. 279-326). The number of verses of this chapter is smaller in comparison with other chapters. One may also notice some similarities between this part and the contents of the chapter on "practical wisdom" (*ḥikmat-i 'amalī*) of the *Aḥlāq-i nāsirī* of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) (Nizām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, pp. 294-296).

The *Bilawhar wa Buyūdasf* is written in a style similar to that of the *Kalīla wa Dimna* by Naṣr Allāh Munšī (12th century) and the *Sindbād-nama* by Zāhīrī al-Samarqandī (12th century). The text is intermingled with Persian and Arabic allegories and verses of poets. Sanā'ī's verses in particular are quoted more than forty times (Nizām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, pp. 16, 35, 44, 51, 56-58, 65-66, 68). Other passages include quotations, among the others, from Persian poets such as Faḥr al-Dīn As'ad Gurgānī (11th century), Naṣīr Ḥusraw (d. 481/1088), 'Umar Ḥayyām (d. ca 526/1131), Anwarī (12th century), Ḥāqānī (12th century), Qawāmī Ganjawī (6th century/12th

century) Niẓāmī (d. 605/1209), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), Sa‘dī (d. 690/1291-2) and from Arabic poets such as al-Ḥuṭaī‘a (d. ca 40/661), al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965) and al-Sarī al-Raffā’ (d. 362/973) (Niẓām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, pp. 61 and 210 for Gurgānī; pp. 134, 169, 210 and 259 for Nāṣir Ḥusraw; pp. 21 and 156 for Ḥayyām; pp. 194 and 263 for Anwarī; p. 14 for Ḥāqānī; p. 258 for Qawāmī Ganjawī; p. 1 and 118 for Niẓāmī; pp. 67, 69, 156, 211 and 228 for Rūmī; p. 6 for Sa‘dī; p. 69 for Ḥuṭaī‘a; p. 56 for al-Mutanabbī; p. 38 for al-Sarī al-Raffā’). Another interpolation is the account of the “idiot who wanted to buy a donkey” (*ablah-i ḥar ḥar*) which is a well-known story in Arabic and Persian literature and is also found in the ‘*Uqalā al-majānīn*’ of Nīṣabūrī (d. 406/1015-1016) and *Risāla-yi dilguṣā* of ‘Ubayd Ḍākānī (d. 772/1370-1371) (Niẓām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, pp. 163-164, Nīṣabūrī 1387/1967, p. 119, ‘Ubayd Ḍākānī 1343š./1964, p. 241).

A specific feature of Niẓām Tabrīzī’s version is its strong Islamic and Shiite perspective. It should be mentioned that Jalāyirid rulers had Shiite tendencies to some extent (see Yūsufīfar 1394š./2015, p. 352) and Niẓām Tabrīzī was most probably sympathetic to the Shiite elements in *Bilawhar wa Buyūdasf*. This perspective is also suggested by his other book, *Mujadwalī dar dīkr-i ‘itrat-i nabī*, which includes a short history of the prophet and the twelve Imams. Besides the praises of Muḥammad and his descendants in the preface, in many cases the story is highlighted with quotations from the Quran and the *ḥadīth*. Moreover, several *ḥadīths* ascribed to the Shiite imams are mentioned. For instance, the text frequently refers to poetical verses and prayers in Arabic ascribed to the first Imam, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661, see for example, Niẓām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, p. 95; cf. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd 1385/1965, p. 57), and it mentions some poetical verses attributed to the fourth imam, Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (d. ca 95/713-714, see Niẓām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, p. 39; cf. Ibn al-‘Asākir 1415/1994-1995, p. 407). *Ḥadīths* attributed to sixth imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and to the tenth imam ‘Alī al-Naqī (d. 254/868) are also quoted (Niẓām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, pp. 120, 55; cf. Mas‘ūdi 1409/1988-1989, p. 11). However, the text does not mention the names of the imams and of other Muslim scholars from which quotations are made, such as the names of Muslim poets.

Furthermore, the omission of certain parts can be seen as a choice to exclude materials which did not agree with the Islamic viewpoint, such as the story (drawn from the *Buddhacarita*) of the pregnancy of Buddha’s mother, relating that she felt a great white elephant had fallen in her womb (see Aśvaghōṣa 1972, p. 20; see also, Gimaret

1971, p. 66). This story is also omitted in the Arabic version (*Kamāl al-Din wa Tamām al-Ni'ma*) of the Shiite scholar Ibn Bābawayh. Nizām Tabrīzī's version even skips certain parts which are kept in Ibn Bābawayh's narrative and by other scholars, such as the part on Yūdāsaf sitting under the bodhi tree (Ibn Bābawayh 1363š./1984, p. 637; see also Majlisī 1349š./1970, p. 339). On the other hand, Nawḍarī argues that certain Manichaeic or Anti-Manichaeic elements are also present in Nizām Tabrīzī's version. Besides Bilawhar and his companions' solitude and vegetarianism, Nizām's version relates the story of the Sassanid emperor Shapur I (r. 240-270), who accuses Mani of destroying the world and threatening the extinction of humankind (Nizām Tabrīzī 1381š./2002, p. 74). Nevertheless, this story is not mentioned in Ibn Bābawayh's and the Ismā'īlī Arabic versions (Nawḍarī 1385š./2006, p. 72-78).

These variations suggest that Nizām Tabrīzī's *Bilawhar wa Buyūdasf* - or Sirāj al-Dīn's translation on which it is based - have been produced for an Islamic environment and probably for a Shiite readership. It is not clear to what extent these features are due to Nizām Tabrīzī's rewriting or if, at least in part, they were already present in Sirāj al-Dīn's translation. One may also raise the question if, besides the reason claimed in the preface, there were also other reasons behind Nizām Tabrīzī's rewriting, and if these could have included the production of a more Islamized version of the story. The reason for the rewriting given by Nizām Tabrīzī is not entirely convincing. He explains in the preface that he wanted to simplify Sirāj al-Dīn's artificial and rhythmic prose. However, his own style is the ornate prose (*naṭr-i fannī* or *naṭr-i maṣnū'*) which includes elaborated devices, studied elegance (*takalluf*) and verbosity (*īṭnāb*). This style was quite common among authors contemporary to Nizām Tabrīzī and he uses it also in other of his writings, such as the *Rīyāz al-mulūk* which is a Persian translation of the *Sulwān al-muṭā'*, the Arabic mirror for princes written by the Sicilian scholar Ibn Zafar a-Ṣiqillī (12th century).

Manuscripts: **London**, British Museum, 13214, ff. 107, **ii**) between 801-803/1399-1401, **iii**) Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ṭālib Tabrīzī, known as Humām Ṭabīb (the author's brother), **vii**) This manuscript is included in an anthology with other works including the *Sulwān al-muṭā'*. **Tehran**, Malik Library, 4187, ff. 123, **ii**) *ḍū' al-qa'da* 810/ 7 April – 6 May, 1408, **iii**) Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn

Abī Ṭālib Tabrīzī, known as Humām Ṭabīb, **viii**) Afšār-Dānišpažūh, 1354š./1975, vol. 2, p. 59.

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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Masoud Faryamanesh

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