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

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## AN ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF PERSIAN WORKS ON INDIAN LEARNED TRADITIONS

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Perso-Indica  
c/o Fabrizio Speziale  
École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales  
Centre d'études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du sud  
54 Boulevard Raspail  
75006, Paris  
France  
e-mail: [fabrizio.speziale@ehess.fr](mailto:fabrizio.speziale@ehess.fr)

## *Ḥawz al-ḥayāt*

The *Ḥawz al-ḥayāt* (The Pool of Life) is evidently the earliest Persian translation of the Arabic text entitled *Mir 'āt al-ma`ānī fi idrāk al-`ālam al-insānī* (The Mirror of Meanings for the Comprehension of the Human World), which was itself a translation of a body of tantric and yogic teachings known under the title *Amṛtakūṇḍa* (The Pool of Nectar). These works also drew upon a text called *Kāmarūpancāśikā* (the Fifty Kamarupa Verses), which had been translated into Persian by the mid-8th/14th century. The *Mir 'āt al-ma`ānī* was probably composed sometime in the 9th/15th century, by an author trained in the Illuminationist (*išrāqī*) philosophy of Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) - perhaps one of the students of Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d. 908/1502), a number of whom left Shiraz to seek their fortune in India. The anonymous translator of the *Ḥawz al-ḥayāt* only states of himself that he rendered the Arabic text into Persian at the request of his unnamed “soul brother and lover of the two worlds,” so that the work could be widely understood.

The date of the *Ḥawz al-ḥayāt* is uncertain, but it must have been in circulation in Indian Sufi circles by around 1500, to judge from the following testimonies. The Čištī Sufi master ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (d. 944/1537), who was quite knowledgeable on the subject of yoga, sometime after 1491 taught the *Ḥawz al-ḥayāt* to a disciple named Sulaymān Mandawī (Rukn al-Dīn 1311/1894, p. 41, *latīfa* 55). A Šaṭṭārī Sufi, Bahā’ al-Dīn Anšārī (d. 922/1515), referred to yogic mantras with Arabic translations in chapter iv of his *Risāla-i Šaṭṭāriyya*, drawing upon what he calls Hindi *dīkr* practices; these appear to come from chapter vii of the *Ḥawz al-ḥayāt*. This text also evidently preceded a revised translation, the *Baḥr al-ḥayāt* (The Pool of Life), composed by Muḥammad Ġawṭ (d. 970/1563). This relationship is demonstrated in numerous passages, such as the opening section of the *Baḥr al-ḥayāt*, which quotes verbatim from the *Ḥawz al-ḥayāt*, in its account of the introduction of the book to Muslims (Ġawṭ 1311/1894,

pp. 2-3) and elsewhere. So it is correct to say that Muḥammad Ġawṭ had the *Hawz al-ḥayāt* before him when he wrote his much longer *Baḥr al-ḥayāt* (Ahmad 1998, p. 4). However, the justification for the new version was not the need to simplify the language or style of the text, but the desire to correct the Sanskrit mantras, which inevitably became garbled when copied by Persian scribes (e.g., the Hindi word *alakh* is regularly written as *allāh*). Nevertheless, there is material in the frame story of the introduction to the *Baḥr al-ḥayāt* that also suggests access to a no longer extant earlier recension of the Arabic text (Ernst 2006).

The text of the *Hawz al-ḥayāt*, which closely follows the Arabic original, is divided into an introduction and ten chapters (*bāb*): (i) on the knowledge of the microcosm (*ʿālam-i ṣaġīr*); (ii) on the influences of the microcosm; (iii) on the knowledge of the heart and its realities; (iv) on the knowledge of the quality of discipline (*riyāzat*, yogic *āsana* postures); (v) on the quality of the breath and its realities; (vi) on the knowledge of preservation of semen; (vii) on the imagination and what is connected to it; (viii) on the sign of death, and averting it; (ix) on spirit subjugation and what is connected to it; (x) on the story of the experience. Several copies omit nearly the whole of chapter nine, perhaps from reluctance to discuss the summoning of Hindu goddesses.

The structure of this work is complex, and it brings together materials from remarkably diverse sources. The introduction begins with an account of the book's composition, relating that a yogi from Kāmarūpa revealed the text after he converted to Islam after losing a disputation with Qāzī Rukn al-Dīn Samarqandī (d. 615/1218-1219 in Bukhara) in Gaur; the latter then rendered it from the Indian language into Arabic in ten chapters, from which the present Persian translation was made (no reference is made to the second translation into Arabic mentioned in the *Mir'āt al-ma'ānī*). This narrative appears largely fictional, however, due to its improbably early date (the reign of 'Alī Mardān, 603-604/1206-1207) immediately after the Muslim conquest of Bengal, the formulaic and Qur'anic character of the disputation, and the absence of any evidence that Samarqandī (a specialist in theological debate) ever went to the farthest frontier of India. The quick capitulation of the yogi, his declaration that Hindu deities agree with the Muslim prophets, and his metamorphosis into a master of Islamic law, is a hagiographical trope. It provides a Muslim hermeneutic of Hindu beliefs, rather than a historical account of conversion to Islam.

The introduction proceeds with additional frame stories taken directly from two Middle Eastern sources. First is an abridgement of the famous parable of the descent of the soul into matter, from the Gnostic “Hymn of the Pearl,” which is found in Greek and Syriac versions of the Acts of Thomas in the New Testament Apocrypha (Barnstone — Meyer 2005, pp. 386-394; Ernst 2006). An Arabic version of this story has been attributed to the philosopher Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037). Second is a detailed allegorical portrayal of the internal and external senses taken from one of the most important Persian writings of the Iṣrāqī (Illuminationist) philosopher Suhrawardī (d. 1191), in the sixth chapter of the allegorical *Risāla fī ḥaqīqat al-`iṣq* (Treatise on the Reality of Love; Suhrawardī 1992, pp. 64-68). This framing establishes an Iṣrāqī presentation of the text, although this was not always recognized by Sufī readers, who were rarely trained in philosophy. The *Hawz al-ḥayāt* cites additional techniques of divination by breath in chapter two, and subjugation of yoginis in chapter nine, which closely resemble practices described in the *Kamarūpančāśikā*; the latter text is mentioned by name in a couple of manuscripts of the Arabic version, but not in the *Hawz al-ḥayāt*. Similarities have also been detected to Sanskrit works on divination by breath, such as the *Śivasvarodaya* and the *Narapatijayacaryāsvarodaya*. Although no original Sanskrit *Amṛtakunḍa* has been found, it is reasonable to suppose that the *Hawz al-ḥayāt* is based upon “a compilation of several yogico-tantric texts” (Sakaki 2005, p. 138).

The analogies between microcosm and macrocosm discussed in chapter i draw on the cosmological vocabulary of the 4th/10th-century Arabic *Rasā`il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā`* (Epistles of the Brothers of Purity; Netton 1982, pp. 14-15), even as they connect to well-established Indic themes. Chapter ii also describes the five elemental breaths and their extent as measured by fingers. Chapter iii on the heart has little to do with Indian sources. Chapter iv in contrast provides descriptions of five of the traditional number of 84 yogic postures (*āsana*), which are deemed to be sufficient. Chapter v provides additional details on the three directional breaths, while chapter vi gives instructions on how to avoid loss of semen for the prolongation of life. Chapter vii describes meditations on the cakras, described as locations (*mawza`*) within the body, accompanied by Sanskrit mantras called words (*kalima*), conveniently translated into the Arabic names of God, plus visualizations of shapes (*aṣkāl*) illustrated with diagrams. Chapter viii provides guidance on how to recognize the signs of impending death by observing signs in the visual afterimage of one’s shadow or reflection. A more

elaborate regime is proposed in chapter ix for subjugation (*tashīr*) of the 64 yoginis to one's will, although this section is cut to a few sentences in several copies. Chapter x has no explicit reference to Indian doctrines, but expands on themes of microcosm, and the separation of the soul from the world as far as possible. It concludes the *Hymn of the Pearl* narrative by a reunion with the metaphysical self. Throughout, the text emphasizes the importance of employing imagination (*wahm*) to powerful effect. The contents of the text, as indicated here, are practical and replicate established Indic practices, though the frame stories, glosses, and explanations connect the material to Islamicate interpretations (Ernst 2003).

Manuscripts of this text are typically accompanied by as many as 14 diagrams related to meditation practices. These include the visualization of the “constellations of the heart” in chapter iii, depictions of the 7 cakras in chapter iv, and a combined visualization of all 7 cakras. Like the corresponding diagrams in the Arabic *Mir'āt al-ma`ānī*, these diagrams vary from tiny scrawls to large sketches, often remaining enigmatic, and some take on the forms of Arabic letters. The Arabic *Mir'āt al-ma`ānī* enjoyed considerable popularity in Ottoman territories and European libraries - there are at least 80 known copies, but only one in India - in part because half the copies are misattributed to the Andalusian Sufi, Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240). The Persian translations, beginning with the *Hawz al-ḥayāt*, circulated mainly in India (and to a lesser extent, Persia), among readers who were eager to engage with its marvelous practices. It has been rewritten repeatedly by authors wishing to clarify and restate its aims and techniques, in texts such as *ʿAyn al-ḥayāt* (extant in two anonymous recensions, one of them from Ahmednagar, probably of the 10th/16th century), the above mentioned *Baḥr al-ḥayāt* by Muḥammad Ġawṭ (1550), an anonymous 19th-century revision from Burhanpur entitled *Amritakundaliyya*, and *Latā'if al-ḥayāt* by Abū al-Qāsim Sāsānī (in Patna, 1247/1858-1859). Its overall presentation of yoga practices forcefully assimilates them to Islamic philosophical and mystical terms and concepts, and that is its major contribution.

**Manuscripts:** Patna, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2075/11, ff. 62b-72b, vii) part of an anthology of prayers, called *Risāla-yi ad'iya*, viii) 'Abd al-Muqtadir

1980, p. 69 . **Hyderabad**, Salar Jung Oriental Library, Majmu`a-i Rasa'il 2, ff. 12b-31a, **ii**) 1066/1656, **vii**) Chapter 9 contains only a few lines. A notation on the first page reads, "this is the *Hawz al-hayāt*, in ten chapters. Qāzī Rukn al-Dīn made it in thirty chapters, and a different version has been made with the name *Bahr al hayāt* with diverse expression and explanation.", **viii**) Ashraf 1997, vol. 11, p. 164. Private collection, 15 ff., **i**) Jalesar, U.P., **ii**) 20 rabī` al-awwal 1194/ March 25, 1780, **iii**) Ḥāfiẓ Mīr Ġulām Muḥammad, **vii**) Entitled *Risāla-i ḥawd al-hayāt dar `ilm-i jog*, chapter 10 missing, bound with *Risāla-i pīrān-i šaṭṭār*, by Muḥammad Muzaffar ibn Muḥammad Farīd al-Qādirī al-Burhānī al-Rāpī, contains additional materials on diet in chapter 2 and on sex in chapter 6. **New Delhi**, Jamia Millia Islamia, Dr. Zakir Husain Library, C279 Persian, ff. 10, **ii**) rajab 1202/April 1788, **iii**) Mīr Ḥasan wuld Sayyid `Arab Šāh Dihlavī, **vii**) Note on p. 1: "This is a rare book. In the year 1310 . . . Muḥyī al-Dīn Mīrzā `Ālamgīr . . . ḥalf-i Rizwān Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā Maḥmūd Ḥaydar Ġūrgānī on the date 15 [Jumādī al-awwal] 1318 hijrī corresponding to 9 [September] 1900," ends abruptly in the midst of chapter 6, **viii**) Markaz-i Taḥqīqāt-i Fārsī, 1999, p. 170, MS no. 0616. **Karachi**, National Museum 1972-104, pp. 180-201, **ii**) 12 šawwal 1221/22 December 1806, **vii**) Note on p. 181: "This book was from Ḥazrat Sayyid Kamāl al-Dīn ibn Ḥazrat Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Qādirī, 6 rajab 1223 (28 August 1808), price ten rupees", **viii**) Munzavī, 1364 š./1985, vol. 4, p. 2146 (erroneously identified as the *Bahr al-hayāt* of Muḥammad Ġawṭ). **Tehran**, Kitābhāna-i Majlis-i Šūrā-yi Islāmī, 12622/3, ff. 182b-201b, **ii**) 1212/1797-1798, **vii**) Third treatise in an anthology containing the *Jawāhir-i ḥamsa* of Muḥammad Ġawṭ, the *ʿIlm-i zamīr* [abridged *Kāmarūpañčāśikā*], and a treatise on *jafr*; this copy is entitled *Ḥawaṣṣ al-hayāt.*, **viii**) **Bābulī**, vol. 31, p. 182. **Hyderabad**, Salar Jung, taṣawwuf 66/16, ff. 47a-61 (pp. 96-124), **viii**) Ashraf, 1983, p. 268. **London**, Wellcome Library, WMS Persian 403, pp. 32, **viii**) Keshavarz 1986, pp. 619-20. **Azamgarh**, Shibli Academy, 297/06/11, ff. 8, **viii**) Bārzigār 2012, pp. 93-94, no. 211. **Ahmedabad**, Pir Muhammad Shah Library, no. 2364(h). **Tehran**, Dā'irat al-Ma`ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī, 1176/3, ff. 149a-157b, **vii**) entitled *Ḥawaṣṣ al-hayāt*.

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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Carl W. Ernst  
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**Carl W. Ernst**

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