
“The Islamization of Yoga in the

Amrtakunda *Translations*”¹

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Orientalist views of yoga and Sufism

From the beginning of Orientalist studies of the Muslim world, it was axiomatic to define certain religious phenomena in terms of their origins. Because of the tendency to view all Eastern doctrines as essentially alike, Orientalist scholars of the Romantic period invariably defined Sufism as a mysticism that was Indian in origin; from the first appearance of the term in European languages, “Sufism” was characterised as essentially different from the dry Semitic religion of Islam.² Looking back at this early scholarship today, it is surprising that this unanimous belief in the Indian origin of Sufism was almost entirely unconnected to any historical evidence. From the days of Sir William Jones and Sir John Malcolm to relatively recent times, this opinion has had a remarkable longevity, despite the ludicrous appearance of some of these claims today. As an example one may consider the outrageous claim of Max Horten, in a 1928 study that sought to explain Sufism as a pure expression of Vedanta: “No doubt can any longer remain that the teaching of Hallaj (d. 922) and his circle [in Baghdad] is identical with that of Samkara around 820”.³ Another pertinent example is found in an observation of William James in his 1902 Gifford Lectures, published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

In the Mohammedan world the Sufi sect and various dervish bodies are the possessors of the mystical tradition. The Sufis have existed in Persia from the earliest times, and as their pantheism is so at variance with the hot and rigid monotheism of the Arab mind, it has been suggested that Sufism must have been inoculated into Islam by Hindu influences.⁴

James’s remark illustrates, innocently enough, how widely this opinion was shared at the time by the academic world in Europe and America. It is easier to see from the perspective

¹ This article is part of a forthcoming study, *The Pool of Nectar: Muslim Interpreters of Yoga*. It is based on part of the monographic introduction to my translation of the Arabic text. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Tantra-Muslim Esotericism-Kabbalah Conference, New York University, April 5–6, 1998.

² See my *Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston, 1997), Chapter 1, for a discussion of the early Orientalist linkage of Sufism with India. Similar observations are made by Victor Pallegà de Bustinza, ‘Le Soufisme: les débuts de son étude en Occident’, in *Horizons Maghrébins* 30: *La Wâlâya, Étude sur le Soufisme de l’école d’Ibn ‘Arabi, Hommage à Michel Chodkiewicz* (Winter, 1995), pp. 97–107. Thanks to Zamyat Kirby for drawing the latter reference to my attention.

³ [Max] Horten, *Indische Strömungen in der islamischen Mystik*, Materialien zur Kunde des Buddhismus, 12–13 (2 vols., Heidelberg, 1927–28), vol. II, p. iii.

⁴ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York, 1958), Lectures XVI–XVII, pp. 308–309.

of the later twentieth century that this opinion was conditioned by nineteenth-century racial attitudes as well as assumptions about the unchanging nature of religions.

Most specialists in Islamic studies today would find the explanation of Sufi mysticism cited by James to be quaint or objectionable, since the preponderance of evidence permits us to understand the Sufi tradition perfectly well without the slightest reference to the literary and religious traditions of India. There is really no reason to maintain, as did Eduard Sachau in 1888, that "in the Arabian Sufism the Indian Vedānta reappears".⁵ The question then arises, if there is no intrinsic reference to India or Hindu texts in Sufism, what led scholars to seek such an external explanation?

Theories of cultural diffusion from a single source (like Pan-Babylonianism) had a certain logical appeal, doubtless because of their simplicity. This kind of reductionism inevitably attracted criticism. Louis Massignon's classic study of the vocabulary of Sufism contained a major section devoted to "The Role of Foreign Influences", which he rejected, on the whole.⁶ In a critical review of theories of Indian "influence" on Islamic mysticism, Moreno rightly characterised approaches like Horten's as "Indophile or Indomaniac zeal".⁷ In a similar vein, Dermenghem maintained that

The surprising thing would be if we did not find in Moslem countries something analogous to Hindu Yoga, since here are two traditions claiming the authenticity of primordial tradition. Nor is it any more surprising that, severally, these methods present a whole gamut ranging from pure intellectual contemplation to orgies of rhythm and sound. Modern Europe is almost alone in having renounced, out of bourgeois respectability and Gallican purism, the participation of body in the pursuits of the spirit. In India as in Islam, music, poetry, and the dance are spiritual exercises.⁸

He went on to observe, "This does not mean that Hindu Yoga is at the source of Moslem Sufism".⁹ Thus it has been possible for scholars such as Gardet and Eliade to entertain a comparative study of mysticism that was not historically reductive, but phenomenological (and occasionally theological) in approach.¹⁰

But part of the genetic view of Asian religions was the habit of viewing non-Christian cultures primarily in terms of their difference from European Christianity. This

⁵ Edward C. Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India* (London, 1888; reprint ed., Delhi, 1964), vol. I, p. xxxiii; cf. vol. I, p. xliii, where Sachau speaks of "the essential identity of the systems of the Greek Neo-Pythagoreans, the Hindu Vedānta philosophers, and the Sūfis of the Muslim world."

⁶ Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (new ed., Paris, 1968), pp. 63–98, where the case of India is discussed on pp. 81–98.

⁷ Martino Mario Moreno, 'Mistica musulmana e mistica indiana', *Annali Lateranensi* X (1949), pp. 103–219, esp. p. 198, and p. 210, where the case against influence is summarized.

⁸ Emile Dermenghem, 'Yoga and Sufism: Ecstasy Techniques in Islam', in *Forms and Techniques of Altruistic and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Pitirim A. Sorokin (Boston, 1954), pp. 109–116, quoting p. 109.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ L. Gardet, 'Dhikr', *Et*, vol. II, pp. 223–227; *id.*, 'Un Problème de mystique comparée: la mention du nom divin (*dhikr*) dans la mystique musulmane', *Revue Thomiste* LII (1952), pp. 642–679, LIII (1953), pp. 197–216; G.-C. Anawati and Louis Gardet, *Mystique musulmane, Aspects et tendances – Expériences et techniques*, Études Musulmanes, 8 (4th ed., Paris, 1986), esp. pp. 90–94, 244–245; Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series LVI (2nd ed., 1969), pp. 216–219, 408. In the end, though, Eliade could not resist the temptation of influences, which he states "were definitely exerted after the twelfth century" (p. 217). Likewise, Gardet succumbed to asserting "Indo-Iranian influence among the Mawlawiyya ('Whirling Dervishes') of Konya, and Indian through Turko-Mongol influence" for which he cites Simmani ('Dhikr', p. 224a).

was particularly prominent in the intellectual climate of nineteenth-century colonialism. Theories of evolution and race were freely applied in the comparative study of religion, originally understood as a disingenuous comparison intended to reveal which religion was superior.¹¹ The study of religion in Christian theological faculties initially exempted Christianity from this kind of historical investigation, since Christianity (in whatever form the theorist professed) was assumed to be still pure and integral, despite such arguably revolutionary events as the Protestant Reformation. If, however, other religions could be shown to be hybrids composed of various "Oriental" influences, that was a testimony to their dependent and inferior nature. In Zaehner's words, "Muslim mysticism is entirely derivative".¹² Regardless of the later progress of historical research into the relation of Christianity to the cultural and religious world into which it was born, the colonial legacy of condescension toward "Oriental religions" still lingers.

This is not to say that Sufis, particularly in India, were unaware of the ascetic and meditative practices of yogis.¹³ But it is almost impossible to find any Indian textual sources on yoga that were widely known in the Muslim world. Nevertheless, in observing that the thesis of the Indian origins of Sufism was almost entirely unconnected to any historical evidence, it is important to note the single piece of evidence that forms the exception to this rule. It was Alfred von Kremer, in a wide-ranging 1873 study of Islamic civilisation, who first drew attention to a short passage in a fourteenth-century Persian encyclopedia (the *Nafa'is al-funun* of Amuli) that described yogic techniques of breath control on the basis of an obviously Indian text. From this observation, which he linked with breathing practices found in Central Asian Sufi groups, von Kremer leapt to the familiar Orientalist conclusion: "We are, indeed, constrained to ascribe to Indian influences the rise of that Muslim mysticism which appears so much later and bears such a close external and internal resemblance to the teachings of the Vedanta school".¹⁴ What von Kremer neglected to point out, in his enthusiasm, was that the passage on breath control occurred in the section on natural and occult sciences; the author of this encyclopedia had separately categorised Sufism as one of the Islamic sciences along with literature, law, theology, and history.¹⁵ The connection between Indian breath control and Sufi practice was not recognised by Muslim authors, who classified the two items under different categories (this question of categorisation will be raised again below). The European Orientalist assumed a genetic relationship between the two on the basis of modern prejudices extrinsic to the text. But the important thing was that von Kremer

¹¹ Eric Sharp ('Comparative Religion', *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. III, pp. 578–580) links the term "influence" to evolutionistic schemes that rank religions, and he optimistically considers the term to be now "seldom used".

¹² R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry into some Varieties of Pnaeternatural Experience* (London, 1961), p. 160. For a critique of Zaehner's arguments for Indian "influence" on Sufism, see my *Islam and Yoga*, Chapter One.

¹³ A survey of contacts between Sufis and yogis is provided in Chapter Two of *The Pool of Nectar*. See also my article 'Chishti Meditation Techniques in the Later Mughal Period', in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. III, *Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501–1750): The Safavid and Mughal Period* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 344–357.

¹⁴ Alfred von Kremer, *Culturesgeschichtliche Streifzüge auf dem Gebiete des Islams* (Leipzig, 1873); English trans., S. Khuda Bakhsh, *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilization* (1904; reprint ed., Lahore, 1976), p. 119.

¹⁵ The section on breath occurs in Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Mahmud Amuli, *Nafa'is al-funun fi 'ara'is al-suyun*, ed. Mirza Abu al-Hasan Sha'rani (Tehran, 1379/1960), vol. II, pp. 360–365. The separate description on Sufism (vol. II, pp. 2–42) leans heavily on its Islamic credentials, beginning (vol. II, p. 4) with emphasis on the condition of "not deviating from the rule of Islam and the path of the shari'at." On Amuli, see C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, vol. II, part 3 (London, 1977), pp. 355–357.

noticed a distinctively yogic text being circulated in learned Islamic circles. This can now be identified as a version of *The Kamanpa Seed Syllables*, which is described below.

Again, as von Kremer shows, the automatic assumption of the purely Indian origin of Sufism was axiomatic in Orientalist scholarship. In a similar case, Hartmann in 1915 noticed a report in a late Arabic text stating that one of the early founders of the Naqshbandi order in Central Asia, 'Abd al-Khaliq Ghijduwani (d. 1220), was inspired by the immortal prophet Khidr to introduce the practice of breath control into Sufism. Hartmann could not resist speculating that this report concealed an Indian origin for this practice. The claim of inspiration masked the more prosaic point that Ghijduwani's native city of Bukhara was "the point of communication with Buddhist and Brahmanic Asia", and that at this formative period in the development of the Sufi orders, they necessarily passed on the influences of their Indian environment to the rest of the Islamic world.¹⁶ One must simply pass over with astonishment the European parochialism that places Bukhara in the same neighbourhood as India (it is roughly 1,000 miles from Lahore and 2,000 miles from Bengal). Here too, the argument for influence was ultimately meant to demonstrate which system is original and authentic, and which is derivative. Such a tendentious motivation is also apparent in a late nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox text, which treats both yogis and Sufis as having borrowed (and bungled) the meditative techniques of the church fathers as outlined in the *Philokalia*: "It was from them [the Greek Orthodox saints] that the monks of India and Bokhara took over the 'heart method' of interior prayer, only they quite spoiled and garbled it in doing so".¹⁷

From the point of view of the study of religion, it is disappointing enough to see lack of historical rigour that too often accompanied Orientalist speculations about the Indian origins of Sufism. Even more problematic was the pervasive positivism and condescending Eurocentrism that increasingly replaced Romantic enthusiasm as the colonialist mentality intensified in the late-nineteenth century. Von Kremer concluded his review of Islamic civilisation with a heavy indictment of the errors of the Oriental:

The more the Muslim is constrained to learn to adapt himself to the needs of the age and indeed learn them from the Europeans, whose powerful superiority he no longer fails to recognize, the more will he be induced to take the right and proper course, that of a practical life from which he has been estranged by superstitious, mystic visions and theological speculations.¹⁸

Here I would like to take a different point of view, one that takes seriously the views of those who are engaged with the religious questions under discussion. If there was a text on yogic practice that was transmitted and studied in Muslim countries, how was it in fact understood? The remarks that follow are based on the study of the highly complex history of a text known by the Sanskrit title *Amrtakunda* or *The Pool of Nectar*, which survives in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu translations in multiple recensions (see Chart 1). Evidence has recently come to light of a Judaeo-Arabic version produced in Yemen. This textual history indicates that the readers of this text engaged it in a process of Islamisation, involving

¹⁶ Cf. Moreno, p. 143, citing R. Hartmann, 'Zur Frage nach der Herkunft und den Anfängen des Sûfismus', *Der Islam* (1915), pp. 31–70.

¹⁷ *The Way of a Pilgrim, and The Pilgrim Continues his Way*, trans. R. M. French (San Francisco, 1991), p. 71.

¹⁸ von Kremer, p. 123.

scriptural Islamic themes, philosophical vocabulary, and the terminology and concepts of Sufism. What remained was a very narrow window onto the world of Indian religions, and one that to many readers was hardly distinguishable from the standard occult and mystical practices found in Islamicate society. In short, the history of the single textual source for yogic practice in the Muslim world tells us a great deal more about its Muslim readers than it does about yoga.

Chart 1
Manuscript Symbols for the Translations of *The Pool of Nectar*

I. Arabic

The edition of Yusuf Husain: *A*.
Family *a*, the earlier and fuller existing recension: B-J (9 MSS).
Family *b*, the later, revised recension: K-Y (15 MSS).
Fragments: Z¹-Z², based on *a*, containing only the beginning of the "Hymn of the Soul" passage.
Other known manuscripts not used in this study: MSS AA-UU.
Total: 49 copies.

II. Persian (Per¹ and Per² are based on a lost recension of the Arabic predating both *a* and *b*, while Per³ is the source of the Arabic text)

Per¹, the translation of Muhammad Ghawth: Per¹A-Per¹W (21 MSS plus two lithographed editions).
Per², the translation of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Razzaq: Per²A-Per²C (3 MSS, each a separate recension).
Per³, *The Kamanupa Seed Syllables* (anonymous), incorporating *The 32 [or 84] Verses of Kamakhyā* (2 complete MSS plus one abridgement).
Total: 29 copies.

III. Turkish

Tur¹, based on family *a*: Tur¹A-Tur¹D (3 MSS plus the printed version).
Tur², based on family *b*, translated by Salah al-Din: Tur²A-Tur²D (4 MSS).
Total: 8 copies.

IV. Urdu: Only one copy (Urd), based on Per¹.

The textual transmission of *The Pool of Nectar*

The *Amrtakunda* or *The Pool of Nectar* was the name of a Sanskrit or Hindi work, the original text of which is now lost. *The Pool of Nectar* was also known by the title *Kamrubijaksa* or *The Kamanupa Seed Syllables*, which circulated in an independent Persian translation that seems to represent the earliest stage of transmission of this text by Muslim authors (see below).¹⁹ *The Pool of Nectar* was ostensibly translated into Persian, and then Arabic, according to the introduction, in 1210 in Bengal, under the title *Hawd ma' al-hayat*, or *The Pool of the*

¹⁹ I have discussed this text in 'A Persian Text on Yoga: Pietro della Valle and *The Kamanupa Seed Syllables*', paper presented at Association for Asian Studies conference, (Honolulu, April 1996). Textual references are to the MS in the Vatican library, described by Ettore Rosse, *Elenco dei manoscritti persiani della biblioteca Vaticana*, Studi e Testi, 136 (Vatican City, 1948), pp. 47-49.

Water of Life. The initial translation was accomplished by a Muslim scholar, Rukn al-Din al-Samarqandi, aided by a yogi who converted to Islam after losing a disputation. At an unspecified later date, the text was redacted in Arabic by an unknown author, with the aid of another yogi who converted to Islam.²⁰

For reasons too complex to discuss here, I suggest that this account is fictitious. The earliest phase of the text (perhaps going back to the early thirteenth century) is probably represented by *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*. This eclectic Persian text contained breath control practices relating to magic and divination, rites of the yogini temple cult associated with Kaula tantrism, and the teachings of hatha yoga according to the tradition of the Nath yogis (popularly called *jogis*). All of this was placed in a context of the supremacy of the goddess Kamakhya, with frequent reference to her main temple in Assam (Kamarupa). This text was adapted by an anonymous Arabic translator, who was trained in the Illuminationist (Ishraqi) school of philosophy in Iran, probably in the fifteenth century. This anonymous Arabic translator completely rewrote the Persian text, incorporating into his introduction two symbolic narratives, one deriving ultimately from the "Hymn of the Pearl" from the Gnostic *Acts of Thomas*, the other being a partial translation from a Persian treatise, *On the Reality of Love*, originally written by the Illuminationist philosopher Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul.²¹ From the dissemination of the manuscript copies of the Arabic text, it is clear that *Hawd al-hayat* was fairly well known in the Islamic world; at least forty-five copies are found in libraries in European and Arab countries, the majority being in Istanbul. None of the manuscripts is older than the late sixteenth century. The content of the text was so unusual that, almost by default, it has been frequently assigned to the authorship of the Andalusian Sufi master Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi; this attribution is clearly erroneous, but it served to give the text a certain canonical authority, particularly in Ottoman lands.²² The vocabulary of the text is mostly formed on the Arabic technical terminology of Hellenistic philosophy, with some Islamic overtones derived from the Qur'an and Sufism. The translator worked strenuously to render the yogic practices in a way that was understandable to a philosophically oriented reader of Arabic. The oldest recension of the Arabic version no longer exists, and the two existing later recensions show an increasing amount of Islamisation of the text.

The Pool of the Water of Life stands out from other Arabic and Persian translations from the Sanskrit, by emphasising Indian spiritual practices rather than doctrines. Although al-Biruni (d. 1010) had translated Patañjali's *Yogasutra* into Arabic, he had focused on philosophical questions and omitted the topic of mantra altogether, and his Indological works were not widely read.²³ Most of the Sanskrit texts translated into Persian during the Mughal period

²⁰ The text was first edited from 5 MSS by Yusuf Husain, 'Hawd al-hayat, la version arabe de l'Amratkund', *Journal Asiatique* CCXIII (1928), pp. 291-344. Unfortunately this edition contains numerous errors and omissions. My forthcoming translation is based on a superior text established by comparison of 25 MSS. I plan to publish my diplomatic edition of the Arabic text separately.

²¹ Typically, the only scholar to notice these Gnostic and Illuminationist elements in the *Amratkund* translation was Henry Corbin, in 'Pour une morphologie de la spiritualité shi'ite', *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1960, XXIX (Zürich, 1961), esp. pp. 102-107, repeated with some variations in his *En Islam iranien, Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. II, *Suhrawardi et les Platoniciens de Perse* (Paris, 1971), pp. 328-334.

²² Osman Yahia, *Histoire et classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi, étude critique* (2 vols., Damascus, 1964), vol. I, pp. 287-288, no. 230.

²³ Hellmut Ritter, ed., 'Al-Biruni's Übersetzung des Yoga-sutra des Patañjali', *Oriens* IX (1956), pp. 165-200; Bruce B. Lawrence, 'The Use of Hindu Religious Texts in al-Biruni's *India* with Special Reference to Patañjali's

were likewise chosen either for political or philosophical interest and had little relevance to religious practice.²⁴ The Arabic text of *The Pool of the Water of Life* was known to various Muslim mystics of India, some of whom had watched with interest the breathing exercises and chants of the yogis, and noticed similarities with their own meditative practices.²⁵ A Chishti master, Shaykh 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), who was familiar with the yoga of the Naths and wrote Hindi verses on the subject, taught *The Pool* to a disciple.²⁶ Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth Gwaliyari (d. 1563), an Indian Sufi master of the Shattari order, translated *The Pool* from the oldest Arabic version into Persian under the title *Bahr al-hayat* (*The Ocean of Life*).²⁷ Sufis from the Qadiri, Mevlevi, and Sanusi orders in Sind, Turkey, and North Africa continued to refer to *The Pool* well into the nineteenth century. The Arabic text was twice translated into Ottoman Turkish, and Muhammad Ghawth's Persian translation was itself rendered into Dakhani Urdu (see Chart 2). The Arabic version is still in use today; a Damascene Sufi shaykh who is an expert on the works of Ibn al-Arabi regards it as a very important treatise.

A document such as *The Pool of Nectar*, the only known Arabic translation of a work on hatha yoga, would seem to offer an ideal case study for determining how yoga was construed in relation to Islamic mysticism, and what relation it had with Sufi practice. It is a concrete example of how a Muslim writer interpreted a characteristically Indian set of religious practices. A quick glance at the text is enough to indicate that it was definitely prepared for a Muslim readership; the text opens with an invocation of God and the Prophet Muhammad, and it is sprinkled with terms and phrases from the Islamic religious vocabulary. The translator has carefully attempted to describe practices that include Sanskrit chants or mantras, breathing techniques, postures for meditation, a version of kundalini meditation with depictions of the seven cakras or psychic centres, invocation of feminine deities, and other specific practices. My analysis of the relationship between Islamicate and Indic features of this text indicates, however, that generalities about Hinduism and Islam are relatively useless for shedding light on the significance of the text, nor does the text provide any insight into overarching questions of inter-religious exchange. Many different strands of meaning have been interwoven by the translator, who eclectically drew together practices of yoga and divination from different sources that cannot be identified with any particular surviving text on hatha yoga, providing in any case a very limited picture of hatha yoga practice.

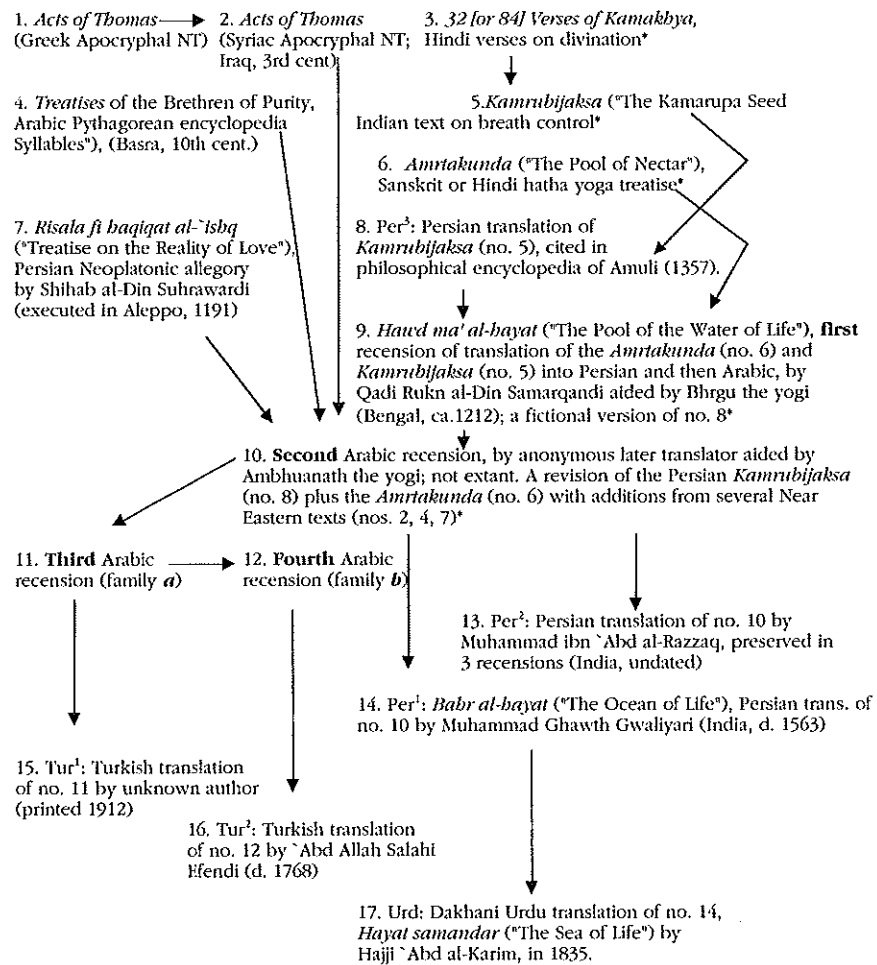
Yoga-Sutras', in *The Scholar and the Saint: Studies in Commemoration of Abu'l Rayhan al-Biruni and Jalal al-Din al-Rumi*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (New York, 1975), pp. 29-48, esp. p. 33. Both al-Biruni's translation of Patañjali and his description of India exist in unique manuscripts, indicating a limited circulation.

²⁴ See the analysis and description of Arabic and Persian translations from Indian languages in *The Pool of Nectar*.

²⁵ E.g., Nasir al-Din Mahmud "Chiragh-i Dihli" (d. 1356), *Khayr al-Majalis*, comp. Hamid Qalandar, ed. K. A. Nizami (Aligarh, 1956), p. 60; my translation is found in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Princeton Readings in Religions, 1 (Princeton, 1995), p. 517.

²⁶ For bibliographic references see S. A. A. Rizvi, 'Sufis and Nātha Yogis in Mediaeval Northern India (XII to XVI Centuries)', p. 132, quoting Rukn al-Din's *Lata'if-i Quddusi* (Delhi, 1894), p. 41; *id.*, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I; *Early Sufism and its History in India to 1600 A.D.* (Delhi, 1978), p. 335. Gangohi's knowledge of yoga is fully discussed by Simon Digby in 'Abd Al-Quddus Gangohi (1456-1537 A.D.): The Personality and Attitudes of a Medieval Indian Sufi', *Medieval India, A Miscellany* III (1975), pp. 1-66.

²⁷ See my 'Sufism and Yoga according to Muhammad Ghawth', *Sufi* XXIX (Spring, 1996), pp. 9-13.

Chart 2. Putative Literary Transmission of *The Pool of Nectar*

*Not extant

Nevertheless, the different translations of *The Pool of Nectar* are unanimous in affirming that this is the most famous and respected scripture of India, despite the fact that no trace of it can be found today in any Indological literature. The anonymous Arabic translator concealed his identity behind a highly suspicious account of the circumstances surrounding the translation of the text, in which a leading role is played by yogis who convert to Islam and announce that their teachings are fundamentally identical with the Qur'an. The translation is prefaced with a narrative framework that adapted materials from Christian Gnosticism and Islamicate Neoplatonism, producing a complex interpretation of the religious significance and goal of yogic practice that avoids mentioning any of the principal categories of Indian metaphysics. In addition, the translator inserted into the text materials that clearly derive from standard Islamic sources. The different redactions of the Arabic text, and the subsequent translations into Persian, Turkish, and Urdu contain further interpretive differences, which

mostly transform Greco-Arabic philosophical concepts in the direction of Sufism. All these symbolic strategies tended to remove any sense of otherness from the yogic teachings for Muslim readers. *The Pool of Nectar* does not attempt to describe Hinduism as an autonomous religious system beyond the boundaries of Islam. In late interpretations of it, such as the description of Sufi orders by Muhammad al-Sanusi (d. 1859), yogis ended up being described as a subset of a Sufi order. In this respect, the Muslim understanding of yoga resembled the case of the enigmatic group called *Barahima* in Islamic heresiographies, whom some commentators have identified as Indian Brahmins. But a recent analysis has concluded that “there is not a single dogmatic item in the agenda of Barahima beliefs that evokes the beliefs of Hinduism . . . the Barahima were a sect completely explicable in terms of the Islamic environment and its Judaeo-Christian heritage, and not Indians at all”.²⁸ When translators and interpreters overuse the technique of familiarisation, no trace of otherness remains, and readers see only what their training and education have prepared them to see. This over-familiarisation seems to have happened with the Arabic version of *The Pool of Nectar*.

On a less sophisticated level, the Persian text of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* also demonstrates an unselfconscious domestication of yogic practices in an Islamicate society. Among the breath prognostications, one learns that one should only approach “the *qadi* [Islamic judge] or the *amir* [Arabic term for ruler]” for judgement or litigation when the breath from the right nostril is favourable. Casual references mention Muslim magicians, and practices that may be performed either in a Muslim or a Hindu graveyard (47b), or else in an empty temple or mosque (49b), and occasionally one is told to recite a Qur’anic passage such as the Throne Verse, or to perform a certain action after evening prayer. We even hear of a Muslim from Broach who successfully summoned a yogini goddess and participated in the rites of her devotees (37a). The text is provided with an overall Islamic frame, through a standard invocation of God and praise of the Prophet at the beginning:

Praise and adoration to that God who brought so many thousands of arts and wonders from the secrecy of non-existence into the courtyard of existence, and who adorned the sublime court with luminous bodies, who made the abodes of spiritual beings, and who commanded the manifestation of the sublunar world with varieties of plants and minerals, and who made the residence and resort of animals, and who chose from all the animals humanity, creating it in the best of forms, giving the cry: “We have created humanity in the finest of stations” (Qur. 95:4), “so bless God, the finest of creators” (Qur. 23:14). Many blessings and countless salutations on the pure and holy essence of the leader of the world [i.e., the Prophet Muhammad], the best of the children of Adam, the blessings of God and peace be upon him, and upon them all.

Likewise at the end, a quotation of a *hadith* saying of the Prophet and some mystical allusions furnish a religious colouring for magical practices (55a). These practices remain fundamentally ambiguous, however. “If one to whom this door is opened makes the claim, he will be a prophet; if he is good, he will be a saint; and if he is evil, he will be a magician” (55a). As a generalization, I would like to observe that for the average Persian reader, the contents of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* probably fell into the category of the occult sciences, and its Indic origin would have only enhanced its esoteric allure. The text employs standard

²⁸ Norman Calder, ‘The Barahima: Literary Construct and Historical Reality’, BSOAS LVII (1994), pp. 41–50, quoting p. 46.

Arabic terms for astral magic (*tanjim*), the summoning of spirits (*ihdar*) (30b, 37b), and the subjugation (*taskhir*) of demons, fairies, and magicians. Thus there would be a familiar quality about the text, even when these techniques are employed for summoning the spirits known in India as yoginis. The chants or mantras of the yogis are repeatedly referred to as spells (*afsum*), a Persian term of magical significance. We also read of recognizably magical techniques such as one using a nail made from bone (51a), which is employed nefariously with a voodoo-type doll (51b). Another recipe uses a comb made from the right paw of a mad dog killed with iron, in rituals performed at a cremation ground (48b–49a).

Chart 3

Planets, Cakras, Mantras, Dhikrs, and Yoginis in *The Pool of Nectar*

Chapter VII		Chapter IX				
Planet	Name	Cakra	Mantra	Dhikr	Name	Yogini
1. Saturn	<i>Sanicar</i> * / Zuhal	seat	<i>hum</i> +	ya rabb	Zuhal	<i>Kali</i>
2. Mars	<i>Mangal</i> / Mirrikh	genitals	<i>aum</i> +	ya qadir	Mirrikh	<i>Tira</i>
3. Jupiter	<i>Bhaspati</i> * / Mushtari	navel	<i>hrim</i> +	ya khaliq	Mushtari	<i>Kalkala</i>
4. Sun	<i>Bhanu</i> * / Shams	heart	<i>brinsrin</i>	ya karim	Shams	<i>Badamta</i>
5. Venus	<i>Sukr</i> / Zahra	throat	<i>bray</i>	ya musakhhir	<i>Sukr</i>	<i>Sarasfwjati</i>
6. Mercury	<i>Budh</i> * / Utarid	eyebrows	<i>yum</i>	ya 'alim	Utarid	<i>Nari</i>
7. Moon	<i>Candra</i> / Qamar	brain	<i>hansamausa</i>	ya muhyi	<i>Candra</i>	<i>Tuqla</i>

N.B.: The spelling of Indic names and terms in Arabic script offered formidable difficulties to copyists, and as a result frequently they are corrupted or omitted from manuscripts. Indic terms are *italic* while Arabic terms are in **bold**. Common Hindi planet names marked with an asterisk (*) have been restored from the Persian translation, and mantras marked with a plus sign (+) are reconstructed according to Sanskrit parallels.

Although the planets in ch. VII are given both Indian and Arab names (the former sometimes garbled), in ch. IX two planets (Venus and the moon) are given Indian names while the other five planets have just Arabic names; presumably this is due to the inconsistency of copyists. The names of the yogini goddesses in Chapter IX are mostly unrecognizable, except for Kali and Saraswati.

Chart 4

Indian Names and Terms in *The Pool of Nectar* with Arabic Translations (terms in brackets are speculative reconstructions)

Sanskrit	Arabic
<i>brahman</i>	'alim (Int.2): "scholar"
<i>yogi</i>	murtad (Int.2): "ascetic, person of discipline"
<i>Brahma & Visnu</i>	Ibrahim & Musa (Int.3): Abraham and Moses
<i>alakh</i> : unconditioned	Allah (II.5): God
[<i>yoga</i>]	riyada (IV, title): "exercise, discipline"
<i>Gorakh</i> (yogi)	Khidr (V.4): deathless prophet
<i>Matsyendra</i> (yogi)	Yunus (V.4): Jonah
<i>Chaurangi</i> (yogi)	Ilyas (V.4): Elijah
[<i>mantra</i>]	dhikr (V.4): "recollection, chant"
[<i>yantra</i>]	shakl, pl. ashkal (VII.1–15): "diagram"
[<i>mantra</i>]	al-ism al-a'zam (VII.2): "the Greatest Name" of God
<i>mandala</i>	mandala (IX.2): "magic circle"
<i>homa</i> : oblation, sacrifice	du'a (IX.10): "prayer"
<i>japa</i> : counted prayer	'azima (IX.10): "invocation"

Chart 5

Islamicate Elements in the Arabic Translation of *The Pool of Nectar** (text references marked *b* are found only in the later recension)

Qur'anic references

The spirit "is from the command of my Lord" (17:85)	Int.3
"a single soul" (4:1, etc.)	I.3
"lotus tree of the boundary" (53:14)	III.1
"farthest mosque" (17:1)	III.1
"companions of the right hand" (56:27, etc.)	III.3
"companions of the left hand" (56:41)	III.3
"right-hand valley" (28:30)	III.4
God "does what he wants" (Qur. 3:40)	IV.8(<i>b</i>)
God "orders what he wishes" (Qur. 5:1)	IV.8(<i>b</i>)

Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*)

"He who knows himself knows his lord"	I.3
"Hearts are between two fingers of the Merciful one"	III.1-2

Islamic law and theology

obligatory (<i>mafnda</i>)	IV.3
Greatest Name of God	IV.4(<i>b</i>), VII.2
names of God	VII.1
prayer (<i>du'a</i>)	IX.10
invocation (<i>azima</i>)	IX.10

Pious phrases

praise of God and the Prophet	Int.1, X.11
God's mercy upon him	Int.4
The weakest of the servants of God most high	Int.5
God willing	Int.6, VII.12
the creator (may his majesty be exalted)	I.2
the creator (there is no god but he)	I.2
God, who is great and mighty	II.5, IV.4
blessings of God on saints and prophets	III.4
blessings of God on Sufis	III.4(<i>b</i>)
God knows best	IV.9(<i>b</i>), VII.15(<i>b</i>), VIII.5(<i>b</i>)
by the command of God	VI.1
taking refuge with God from the accursed Satan	III.3, VI.4(<i>b</i>)
knowledge or power from God	VII.6

Islamic cosmological terms

throne	I.2
canopy	I.2
jinn	IV.7, VII.6-8, VII.11
angel	Int.10.4, III.3, IV.6, VII.6, VII.11
devil	Int.10, III.2-3
spirit	I.3, IV.8, VI.3, VI.5, VII.11, IX.1, IX.9, X.4
hidden world	Int.3, II.5, IV.5, V.4, VII.3, VII.6, VII.14
water of life	Int.14, II.7, V.4, VI.5

*References are to chapter and section of the text. References followed by (*b*) indicate manuscripts from the last recension of the Arabic text.

Chart 5 continued

Philosophical terms and concepts†

contraries (<i>diddan</i>)	III.4, V.2, X.2
creator (<i>bari</i>)	I.2, I.3
four qualities (hot, cold, wet, dry)	VI.2-3, X.2
four humours	VI.1, VI.3
five elements	II.2, VI.1
moderation (<i>al-amr al-awsat</i>)	IV.1, VIII.1
rational soul (<i>al-nafs al-natiqa</i>)	Int.13, I.3, IV.1, V.2, VI.2, X.4
universal intellect (<i>'aql al-kull</i>)	I.2, I.3
<i>omne animalis post coitum triste</i>	VI.4

Sufi terms

gnosis of reality (<i>ma'rifat al-haqiqa</i>)	Int.5
disciple (<i>murid</i>)	Int.6, III.4
annihilated (<i>mumahhaq</i>)	Int.8
spiritual state (<i>hal</i>)	II.5, IV.8(b)
constellations of the heart	III.1
unveiling (<i>mukashafa</i>)	III.4
discipline (<i>riyada</i>)	III.4
striving (<i>mujahada</i>)	III.4
station (<i>maqam</i>)	III.4, IV.8
little food, little speech, little sleep	IV.4
path (<i>tariq</i>)	IV.8(b)
"taste" or experience (<i>dhawq</i>)	V.4
recollection or chant (<i>dhikr</i>)	V.4, VII.2
meditative practice (<i>ishtighal</i>)	IX.2

†It should be added that excerpts from two philosophical texts are contained in the Arabic *Pool of Nectar*: a fragmentary Arabic version of the Gnostic Hymn of the Soul (Int.7-8, 13-14, X.11), and an Arabic translation of the central section of Suhrawardi's Persian allegory, *On the Reality of Love* (Int.9-12). There are also quotations from the Arabic *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (I.2, VI.2).

Islamic elements in the text

The Pool of Nectar contains numerous Arabic formulas and references that locate the text in reference to standard Islamic religious themes (see Chart 5). There are six clear quotations from the Qur'an in the earlier extant Arabic recension, to which the later recension adds two more. One *hadith* saying of the Prophet Muhammad is quoted, and another is implicitly referred to. Terms from the vocabulary of religious practice, particularly those relating to the names of God and prayer, are prominent. The text is, in addition, studded with pious phrases and blessings, which occur in over half of the chapters. Cosmological terms relating to standard Qur'anic sources appear with remarkable frequency. And there are at least a dozen places where specific Sufi terms and themes are invoked. All these are instances of deliberate Islamisation, in which the translator decided to use familiar terms and conventions to normalize the foreignness of the Indian text. Three chapters (I, III, and X) contain no Indic material whatever. When combined with the quotations from Islamicate philosophical texts in the preface (see below), the net result is that over one third of the Arabic version of *The Pool of Nectar* consists of the translator's additions to the text.

The process of Islamisation was a cumulative one. The earlier extant version of the Arabic text (manuscript family *a*) represents a stage in this process, which is clearly accelerated by

the later version (family *b*). Not only does family *b* add more Islamic scriptural passages and themes, it also strips away, truncates, and distorts many Indian references. Indian names for the planets have been garbled or omitted in both Arabic recensions, though they are clearly preserved in the Persian translations, perhaps because Indo-Persian scribes were familiar with the Hindi terms (see Chart 3). The later recension (family *b*) omits altogether the identification of Brahma and Vishnu with Abraham and Moses (Int.3), the yogic term *alakh* and its translation as Allah (IV.4), the three yogis identified with esoteric Islamic figures (V.4), the description of urethral suction (VI.5), and most of the description of the seventh yogini (IX.9). The manuscripts of family *b* also add further extraneous textual materials, including an Arabic verse, inserted at the beginning of the preface, and a treatise on the heart according to Sufi psychology, added as an appendix after Chapter X. The Islamisation of the text even proceeded on the visual level. The Arabic translation includes fourteen diagrams for visualisation during meditation, of which nine relate to the cakras. Comparison of manuscripts indicates a subtle but unmistakable process of grammatisation, in which diagrams increasingly turn into Arabic letters or the cabalistic figures common to Arabic works on occultism.

The insertion of Islamic materials into the translation of *The Pool of Nectar* was accompanied by another technique, in which Indic names and themes were given Islamic equivalents (see Chart 4). The Sanskrit term *alakh*, “the unconditioned”, is translated as Allah, doubtless because of the tempting similarity of sound, and their nearly identical appearance in Arabic script.²⁹ Brahma and Vishnu are translated as Abraham and Moses, and three legendary yogis are equated with Islamic prophets. This last identification is made in the context of a discussion of attaining complete control over the breath:

When you have reached this station, and this condition becomes characteristic of you, closely examine three things with thought and discrimination: 1) the embryo, how it breathes while it is in the placenta, though its mother’s womb does not respire; 2) the fish, how it breathes in the water, and the water does not enter it; 3) and the tree, how it attracts water in its veins and causes it to reach its heights. The embryo is Shaykh Gorakh, who is Khidr (peace be upon him), the fish is Shaykh Minanath [Matsyendranath], who is Jonah, and the tree is Shaykh Chaurangi, who is Ilyas, and they are the ones who have reached the water of life (V.4).

Several technical terms are given in their Sanskrit forms along with Arabic translations: *homa* or “sacrifice” is translated as *du‘a* or “prayer”, *japa* or “counted prayers” becomes *‘azima* or “invocation”, and the key term *yogi* (in its north Indian form *jogi*) is *murtad* or “person of discipline”. *Brahman*, the term for the priestly caste, is translated as *‘alim* or “scholar”. But as noted above, several of these equivalences have evaporated from the later recension of the Arabic text. The very attempt to translate an Indian name or term with an Islamic one has been abandoned in these instances. In later recensions, or in quotations of the text, we find that the passage identifying the Sanskrit word *alakh* with Allah has a radically different appearance. A mid-nineteenth-century Arabic treatise on Sufi orders by the North African author Muhammad al-Sanusi (d. 1859) includes a section on the yogis (*al-jujiyya*) as a subset

²⁹ The identification of Allah with *alakh* is also found in an eighteenth-century Dakani Urdu text by a Sufi writer named Shah Turab Chishti; see his *Man sanj’hanan*, ed. Sayyida Ja‘far, *Silsila-i Matbu‘at-i Abu al-Kalam Azad*, Oriental Research Institute, 5 (Hyderabad, 1964), p. 1: *alakh nam allah naranjan hari he*.

of the Ghawthiyya branch of the Shattariyya Sufi order; for this he clearly draws both on the writings of Muhammad Ghawth and on the Arabic text of *The Pool of Nectar*.³⁰ When he reaches the passage in question, he states, "If one wishes to witness the hidden world, it is incumbent on him to cross his eyes over his nose, and imagine in his heart the word Allah, Allah, without moving his tongue. If he reaches the level of perfection in this practice, then magic and poison will have no influence on him, disease will not affect him, the hidden worlds will be unveiled, his prayer will be answered, and he will be famous among men for deeds of piety". At this point it is no longer possible to see any Indian "influence" in a portrait of a practice that is indistinguishable from standard Sufi technique.

Philosophical formations

It is evident that the Arabic version of *The Pool of Nectar* was composed by an Iranian philosopher familiar with the Illuminationist school, because of the characteristic Illuminationist vocabulary in the treatise. The most persuasive evidence in this regard is the extensive revised Arabic version (Int.9–12) of an extract from Suhrawardi's Persian treatise *On the Reality of Love*, which is integrated with the fragmentary "Hymn of the Pearl" frame story.³¹ We also find a distinctive term from Avicennan-Illuminationist psychology, "the cognising and distinguishing rational soul for the managing of states" (Int.14), or more briefly, "the managing rational soul" (IV.1). The prominent location of this passage in the preface is clearly meant to exercise a dominant role in determining the significance of the yogic teachings of the main text. This has the distinct effect of proleptically assimilating the psychophysiology of yoga to the basic categories of Aristotelian and Avicennan psychology, even though this assimilation is not actually carried out in the text. Specifically, the text in the preface enumerates the standard Greco-Arabic list of the five internal senses, the five external senses, the seven vegetal faculties, and the two animal motor-sensory faculties, which would be familiar to any reader of later Aristotelian texts in Arabic. At the same time, the narrative suggests an overall framework for interpreting yogic practices as a means of discovering the true self through discipline of the body and mind. But there is no indication of any familiarity with philosophical anthropologies that might be found in other Sanskrit materials connected to the yogic tradition.

In addition to these explicit references to the Illuminationist school of philosophy, the Arabic version as a whole calls on a more diffuse kind of Arabic philosophical vocabulary, which was shared and recognised by many schools. The philosophical terms in the treatise are primarily of a cosmological significance, and they include such items as the four qualities (hot, cold, wet, dry) (VI.2–3, X.2), moderation (*al-amr al-awsat*) (IV.1, VIII.1), contraries (*diddan*) (III.4, V.2, X.2), the rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqa*) (I.3, V.2, VI.2, X.4), the universal intellect (*'aql al-kull*) (I.2, I.3), and the creator (*al-bari*) (I.2, I.3).

³⁰ Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Sanusi al-Khattabi al-Hasani al-Idrisi, *al-Silsabil al-ma'in fil-taw'iq al-aba'in* (Cairo, 1989), pp. 84–87.

³¹ These narratives are discussed in detail in *The Pool of Nectar*.

Intellectuals trained in the Arabic scientific curriculum would have recognised in *The Pool of Nectar* some explicit references to commonplace themes from the tenth-century encyclopedia known as *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*. The theme of the correspondence of the human body as microcosm and the larger cosmos as macrocosm had been well developed in Greek thought from an early period.³² The Brethren of Purity gave an early expression to this doctrine in their encyclopedia, with strong leanings toward Pythagorean teachings. From the prominent first chapter of *The Pool of Nectar* (I.2), we can glean the following list of microcosmic-macrocosmic correspondences:

1. nostrils, eyes, ears, and mouth	seven planets
2. senses	stars
3. head	sky
4. body (<i>juththa</i>)	earth
5. bone	mountains
6. nerves	oceans
7. veins	rivers
8. hair	trees (<i>ashjar</i>)
9. skin, blood, flesh, ligaments, muscle, bone, and brain	seven climes
10. waking	day
11. sleep	night
12. happiness	spring
13. sadness	winter
14. hunger	summer
15. satiety	fall
16. weeping	water
17. laughing	lightning
18. heart	throne
19. brain	canopy
20. soul	universal intellect
21. intellect	creator
To this list some manuscripts from family <i>b</i> add the following items:	
22. arteries	springs
23. chief limbs	mountains
24. brain	mine
25. limbs	animals

This list may be compared with a similar series of microcosmic-macrocosmic equivalences found in *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (repeated or similar terms are marked in bold,

³² On the history of this motif in the West, see George Boas, 'Macrocosm and Microcosm', *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (5 vols., New York, 1973-74), vol. III, pp. 126-131.

with reference to the numbers in the list just given):

body (<i>jasad</i>)	earth (variant of no. 4)
bones	mountains (variant no. 5)
brain	mines (variant of no. 24)
belly	ocean (partial; no. 6)
intestines	rivers (partial; no. 7)
veins	streams (partial; no. 7)
flesh	dust
hair	plants (<i>nabat</i>) (variant of no. 8)
head to foot	civilization
back	desert
front	east
back	west
right	south
left	north
breathing	herbs
speech	thunder
cries	thunderbolts
laughing	lightning (variant of no. 17)
weeping	rain (variant of no. 16)
misery and sorrow	dark of night
sleep	death
waking	life
childhood	spring (partial; no. 12)
youth	summer (partial; no. 14)
maturity	fall (partial; no. 15)
old age	winter (partial; no. 13) ³³

The list of the Brethren of Purity continues with an additional twelve equivalences between the human condition and planetary movements, of particular relevance to astrology. The series of twenty-five microcosmic-macrocosmic correspondences in *The Pool of Nectar* is introduced primarily in the context of the yogic teaching regarding the sun and moon (I.1), and their association with the two opposed breaths of the right and left nostrils. As shown by the items marked in bold above, six of these correspondences are variations on correspondences given by the Brethren of Purity, and another seven give correspondences that include one of the terms in the list of the Brethren of Purity. Items 18 to 21 contain terms deriving from standard Islamic cosmology. Manuscripts from the later recension of family *b* add four more items, one from the list of the Brethren of Purity, indicating a further stage in the domestication of the text. The Persian translation of Muhammad Ghawth (which differs widely from the Arabic text at this point) contains another four equivalences from the list of the Brethren of Purity that do not occur in any of the Arabic manuscripts

³³*Rasa'il ikhwan al-safa'*, vol. II, pp. 466-467.

of *The Pool of Nectar*, but which probably reflect the earlier Arabic recension from which his Persian translation derives.

This passage is then followed (I.3) by further reflection on the microcosm and the macrocosm, joining the language of Islamicate philosophy to citations from the Qur'an and *hadith*. Speculations on the microcosm and the macrocosm have certainly played an important role in Indian thought, and they are frequently found in yogic writings, but the material in this Arabic version (I.2–3) appears to be wholly unrelated to Indian sources. In Indian texts one would normally expect specific references to correspondences between sections of the body and multiple worlds, specific geographical sites in India, etc.³⁴ It is hard to avoid concluding that the translator of *The Pool of Nectar*, perhaps inspired by something comparable in the yogic teaching, at this point eliminated the Indic narrative and substituted materials from exclusively Arabic sources to make the yogic teachings more comprehensible. This is not the only place in the treatise where the Brethren of Purity are invoked. A description in *The Pool of Nectar* (VI.2) regarding the prediction of the sex of the embryo in the womb, according to which direction it is facing, appears to draw directly on a passage in the writings of the Brethren of Purity.³⁵

Chart 6

Sample Variations in Arabic Transcription of Mantras in *The Pool of Nectar*

The following mantras, transliterated in Arabic script, occur in chapter IX, "On the Knowledge of the Subjugation of Spirits," where they invoke seven chief yogini goddesses who are assimilated to the seven planets. Notable variations occur in all MSS. Some Indic terms can be distinguished, including standard seed syllables (*aum*, *hum*), the concluding phrase *bodhi svaha*, and references to divinities, demons and spirits (*devata*, *devi*, *rakshasa*, *bhut pret*)^{*}.

1. Saturn

Husain: **malka tuni sandar sandar varbha rabi wakna mas dajaraha rabi aum kalfar yadin fum but svaha**

Paris: **awwam kalka wamui nam nam but svaha**

Paris marg.: **dafalalakak adiri sidi sil wadihawwas raktabas sanhaha uli aum kalfa didas**

2. Mars

Husain: **trira devi tazkar mari bhuskafa sakfihar fi deva devata nari humum trira devi tarkar nari nam nam but svaha**

Paris: **hum trira deva tarkaz marani bhusankah safkaharni devad devatha arni hum trira devi nam nam but svaha**

3. Jupiter

Husain: **aum rhin kal kala dev 'ind munh nam ham but svaha bwani kahir kahran hum rhin**

Paris: **aum rhin kalka devi nam nam but svaha**

4. Sun

Husain: **narayan bawayn aum tashrin hum badamiya devi nam nam but svaha**

Paris: **aum hasrin brin hum badmah evi mark lujani hans kuni tasrin brin**

³⁴ Kalyani Mallik, *Siddha-Siddhanta-Paddhati and Other Works of the Natha Yogis* (Poona, 1954), p. 39.

³⁵ *Rasa'il Ikhsan al-safi'*, vol. II, p. 425.

Chart 6 continued

5. Venus

Husain: aum aum sarasati devi aum nam nam but svaha

Paris: aum a iyi sarasati devi aum nam nam thumm but svaha

6. Mercury

Husain: aum yum tari hu tala devi ithua rabi des des tara fi makash bhut pret tarani adam hum tara devi adam nam nam but svaha

Paris: aum yum tara devi mara tanari das des marani rak'hes bhut pret aum baram nara devi aum nam tam but svaha

7. Moon

Husain: aum tum tawa natari des des tara fi rak'hash bhut pret tawani adam yum adu adi adam nam nam svaha aum huwayna tutla devi nam nam svaha

Paris: aum hansa tutla devi nam nam but svaha

*Sources: Yusuf Husain, "Haud al-hayat, la version arabe de l'Amratkund," *Journal Asiatique* 213 (1928), pp. 291-344; and MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ar. 1699.

Chart 7

Yogic Elements in the Arabic Translation of *The Pool of Nectar*

sun and moon breaths	I.1-2, II.1
five breaths	II.2
prognostication by breath	I.3-4
sex practices from divinatory and magical texts	II.4
retention of semen	II.5, VI.5
<i>khecari mudri</i> , drinking nectar	II.5
prevention of disease	II.6-8
asana postures	IV.2-9
eighty-four siddhas	IV.2
kundalini (?)	V.1
three breaths	V.2
measuring breath, breath control	V.3-4
celibacy	VI.3-4, VII.13
vajroli mudra, urethral suction	VI.5
mantras	VII.1-9
seven cakras	VII.2-9
occult powers (siddhis)	VII.10-15
predicting time of death (pre-hatha yoga kriya tantra)	VIII.2-5
yoginis	IX.1-10
mandala	IX.2
homa	IX.10
japa	IX.10

Yogic elements in the text

The Arabic version of *The Pool of Nectar* contains a variety of practices. Some are not distinctively Indian or restricted to yoga, but are widely found in other traditions. This is the case with the recommendation of fasting (IV.3), vegetarian diet (V.3), and sexual abstinence (VI.3, VII.11). But other practices are clearly associated with hatha yoga (see Chart 7). Very prominent is the description of breath control, with reference to the sun and moon breaths as associated with the left and right nostrils (I, II). The concepts of breath underlying these passages are not clearly related to standard Indian cosmologies, however.

Later Indian texts such as the *Yoga Upanisads* often employ the time unit of the *matra* to count the duration of breaths.³⁶ In contrast, *The Pool of Nectar* measures breaths by fingers, in two passages using a spatial measurement rather than a temporal one. The first passage gives a list of five breaths associated with the elements, and it describes the directional orientation of four: “The breaths are five: fiery, watery, airy, earthy, and heavenly. The fiery rises up, the airy spreads out, the watery descends the extent of four fingers, the earthy descends the extent of eight fingers” (II.2). Although the number five is characteristic of Indian medical and yogic approaches to the breaths, and while some of the breaths are associated with upward and downward movement, it is otherwise hard to recognise any resemblance to the Indian traditions on the breaths in this brief list.³⁷ The association with the elements is not found in standard Indian texts, and may be an Aristotelian touch added by the translator. The second passage details the effects of exhalation and inhalation, and recommends the increase of the latter in order to prolong life: “You will find it [breath] rising in exhalation the amount of about twelve fingers with power, and in inhalation it descends the amount of four fingers. It decreases at every breath by the power of eight fingers. So see how much it decreases every day. That is the decrease of one’s life. It is appropriate that you reverse that by kindness, sympathy, and gradual approach. That is, you should inhale the breath with power and exhale it with gentleness and mildness, to the point where you inhale twelve fingers, and exhale four” (V.3). In the Persian translation of Muhammad Ghawth, this passage reads: “Twelve fingers of breath enter, then eight fingers return, four fingers of cold wind (*sarsar*), and four of cold (*sard*) When walking on foot, breath of twelve fingers enters, and two warm and two cold ones return. When exerting effort, running, or having sex, twenty-four fingers go out, and four return to place”. Oddly, the spatial measurements are missing from the account of breath in the oldest Persian translation, the portions of the *Kamrubijsaksa* preserved in the fourteenth-century encyclopedia of Amuli. In any case, the basic idea is apparently control of the quantity of breath in order to maximise inhalation for long life. There are occasional references to the finger as a spatial measure of length related to breath control in the *Yoga Upanisads*, but these do not correspond with the life preservation technique mentioned here.³⁸

Physiological techniques mentioned in the text include the purification of body by postures recognisable as yogic *asanas* (IV.4–8). The Arabic text acknowledges the traditional number of 84 postures, but describes only five (although the Persian translation of Muhammad Ghawth, relying on an earlier version of the Arabic, describes twenty-one postures). These are difficult to match with the descriptions of *asanas* in standard hatha yoga texts, but from the descriptions we may recognize the Virasana, Kukkutasana, and Uttana Kurmasana among these five. The Arabic text emphasises the physical and psychic health benefits of these postures. It is notable that the yogic word *alakh* is repeated in each position; this reinforces the association with the Nath or Kanphata yogis, for whom this is a

³⁶ *Darsanopanisad* VI:3-6, in *The Yoga Upanisads*, trans. T. R. Srinivasa Ayyangar, ed. G. Srinivasa Murti (Adyar, 1952), p. 137; *Yogatattvopanisad* 40-43, in *ibid.*, p. 308.

³⁷ Kenneth G. Zysk, ‘The Science of Respiration and the Doctrine of the Bodily Winds in Ancient India’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* CXIII (1993), pp. 198–213.

³⁸ In the *Trisikhibrahmanopanisad*, 53–55 (*ibid.*, p. 100), the vital breath is described as being twelve “digit-lengths” longer than the body, which is ninety-six “digit-lengths”, evidently meaning a unit the size of the fingertip. The recommendation in this case, however, is to shorten the air to the length of the body in order to know Brahman.

characteristic utterance. Among these physiological techniques appears to be a version of the *khecari mudra*, described as staring at the tip of the nose and drinking the “nectar” of saliva (II.5, II.7). Unlike standard hatha yoga accounts of this practice, this description emphasises the crossing of the eyes (vividly illustrated in some manuscripts) as the chief element, which permits the retention of semen during sexual intercourse; the swallowing of nectar is also modestly credited with curing sores and headache.³⁹ Another yogic technique that occurs here is a variation of the *vajrolī mudra*, which makes possible return of the semen by urethral suction (VI.5). Curiously, the discussion of retention of semen is embedded in a lengthy section on procreation and embryology according to Galenic medical principles, leading to the equivalent of the philosophical proverb, “Every animal is sad after sex” (VI.4).

Visualization is another prominent feature of *The Pool of Nectar*, particularly in the lengthy Chapter VII on the magical imagination (*wahm*), treated as a generic term for mental and magical powers. Normal Islamic discourse gives *wahm* the pejorative meaning of “illusion” or “prejudice”, and *wahm* also has various technical meanings in Aristotelian philosophy as the “estimative faculty” (Lat. *aestimatio*, Gk. *sunesis*, *phronesis*) and “compositive imagination” (Gk. *phantasia logistike*). But *wahm* in the sense of “magical imagination” seems to presuppose a correspondence with some unstated Indic term, possibly *dharana* or *kalpana*. It is defined in *The Kamanupa Seed Syllables* as “the knowledge of breaths” (16a), and in the translator’s introduction magical imagination is also linked with the term “discipline” (*riyadat*), which is the standard Arabic-Persian translation for yoga (below, p.). I am open to suggestions about other interpretations of this term. At any rate, this practice takes the form of the visualization in sequence of seven locations corresponding to the standard yogic cakras, from the seat to the crown of the head. Each cakra is described in terms of a colour and a diagram, but instead of being linked to Hindu gods and letters of the devanagari alphabet, the cakras are connected with the planets. While some of the *bija-mantras* contain phonemes recognisable to Indologists, others are beyond retrieval, doubtless due to the difficulties of preserving the chants in Arabic script (see Chart 3). The demythologisation of the cakras, and their planetary placement, has the effect of likening the cakra meditation and the implicit upward movement of the kundalini to the ascension of the the soul through the planetary spheres, a major theme in Islamic, Iranian, and Jewish traditions.

The seven Sanskrit mantras or chants associated with the seven cakras are all boldly declared to be translations of the Arabic invocations of the names of God. Thus the Sanskrit syllable *hum* is translated as “O Lord” (*ya rabb*), and *aum* is translated as “O Ancient One” (*ya qadim*). In introducing these seven great mantras, the Arabic translator remarks that “they are like the greatest names [of God] among us”. Muhammad Ghawth goes one better, however, in his Persian translation, providing two Arabic phrases for each Sanskrit term; he translates *hum* as *ya rabb ya hafiz*, “O Lord, O Protector”, and *aum* as *ya qahir ya qadir*, “O Wrathful, O All-powerful”.⁴⁰ In a discussion of breathing techniques that does not appear in the Arabic version, Muhammad Ghawth also finds equivalents for the yogic terms *hams* and *so ham*, which are pronounced during the two phases of exhalation and inhalation; the

³⁹ Cf. Eliade, *Yōga*, pp. 247–248, for accounts of the *khecari mudra* which describe the swallowing of nectar as responsible for the retention of semen.

⁴⁰ *Bahr al-hayat*, India Office Library MS, pp. 91, 94; Ganj Bakhsh MS, pp. 82, 84.

first is “an expression for the spiritual lord (*rabb ruhi*)”, while the second stands for “the lord of lords (*rabb al-arbab*)”.⁴¹ There are many other examples of this kind. Semantically, such “translations” make no sense whatever; they are, rather, functional equivalents between the yogic words of power and the names of God as used by the Sufis; this is especially evident in the case of the seven great mantras, for which the Arabic equivalents are presented in a vocative form used in the Sufi *dhikr* repetitions of the names of God.

Chapter IX of *The Pool of Nectar* amplifies on the cakra meditations in Chapter VII with elaborate instructions for summoning seven female deities or “spiritual beings” (*Ar. ruhaniyyat*) who are evidently the chief yoginis (there are a total of 64 of these entities). These seven are usually called Mother Goddesses in yogic circles.⁴² In this text, however, they are assimilated to the seven planets, as in Chapter VII. Here as well, it seems that the planetary organization is a deliberate attempt by the translator to familiarise the subject, in this case by likening the summoning of Indian goddesses to well-known Middle Eastern occult practices involving planetary spirits. The phrase “subjugation of spirits” (*taskhir al-arwah*) in the title of Chapter IX is the normal Arabic name for this kind of occultism. The yoginis are summoned with incense and mandalas. Instructions here call on the practitioner to act like a son and a brother with the goddesses, in order to obtain the numerous favours they can bestow. Lengthy Sanskrit mantras addressed to these beings must be repeated thousands of times (see Chart 6).

The worship of the female deities known as yoginis seems to have been at its height in India from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, but it continued in various places until at least the eighteenth century. Vidya Dehejia has described at length the open-air yogini temples found at remote sites where these deities were honoured.⁴³ While the description of the yoginis in *The Pool of Nectar* is brief, *The Kamanupa Seed Syllables* describes them at length as the key to knowledge of all things. At the beginning of the section on breath, we are told,

So say those sixty-four women, “By the command of God (who is great and majestic), who one day gave us this science, we shall not speak of this science. By the God by whose command the 18,000 worlds exist, this is an oath, that this is the science of magical imagination, for whatever is in the earth and heaven is in the grasp of the children of Adam. We tell everything, for everything that goes on in all the world is all known and made clear by the science of magical imagination” (16a).

Furthermore, they say,

By the command of God most high, and the masterful teaching they have taught us, between the moon and the sun one can know whatever goes on in all the world. We teach a science of who comes, and from where, and what he asks. Also know that this science lengthens life and makes one near immortal (17a).

The knowledge the yoginis confer makes poison harmless, cures the sick, removes desire, and enables one to control all persons and things in the world. These “spiritual beings” are

⁴¹ *Bahr al-hayat*, ch. 4, India Office Library MS, pp. 45–46; Ganj Bakhsh MS, p. 55; ch. 7, Ganj Bakhsh MS, p. 93.

⁴² W. W. Karambelkar, ‘Matsyendranatha and his Yogini Cult’, *Indian Historical Quarterly* XXXI (1955), p. 367.

⁴³ Vidya Dehejia, *Yogini Cult and Temples: A Tantric Tradition* (New Delhi, 1986).

invulnerable to injury by sword or fire, their hair and nails cannot be cut, they hear from a distance and travel anywhere in an instant (23b). Each of the sixty-four yoginis has a particular spot in India, and they go to delightful places to enjoy themselves at feasts, dressed in gold and jewels, wearing crowns and wreaths, revered by the *devs*; they will never die, grow old, or get sick before the day of judgment, but all appear to be twenty years of age (30b–31a). These beings are in fact the principal objects of worship among the Hindus, who carve idols of them. “Just as we have prophets, saints, and miracle workers, so the Hindus have faith in them” (31a). Many of their names are given, though the Persian script leaves many ambiguities: Tutla, Karkala, Tara, Chalab, Kamak, Kalika, Diba, Darbu (31b), Antarakati (44b, 46b), Chitraki (56a), Ganga Mati (45a), Sri Manohar (45a), Katiri (30a), Parvati (49b), Suramati (44b), Susandari (44b), Talu (30a). Of course, as Vidya Dehejia has pointed out, no two lists of names of yoginis are the same. Sometimes adepts may have sexual relations with the yoginis (39a), but at other times they regard them as sister and mother (46b). “She is the yogini and you are the yogi” (48a). Benefits of association with them include money (44b) and food (48b).

As a comprehensive description of Indian religious practices, a narrative limited to Kamakhya and the yoginis might seem a bit eccentric. Brahmins are mentioned, but only as occasional sources of information about *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* and its interpretation. This is clearly a narrow sample, but what is it based on? In terms of the categories that are available today, we could probably say that this text reflects practices of the yogini temple cult that are associated with Kaula tantrism.⁴⁴ There is also some connection with the Nath or Kanphata yogis, as indeed Matsyendranath is usually considered the introducer of the yogini cult among the Kaulas, and the name of Gorakhnath is invoked once (51a) in the text.⁴⁵ Beyond that general indication, we find multiple strands of Hindu tradition popping up in an incidental fashion. This text assumes a system of nine cakras rather than the seven cakras current in most Nath yoga writings (19b, 20a, 25a). Meditative exercises are given that concentrate on raising the Sakti from the navel up the spinal column (17b, 18a, 28a). A standard list of supernormal powers (*siddhis*) is provided (54a).⁴⁶ Occasional mantras appear to contain the phrase “Krsna avatar” (48b, 53a). We are told of the temple of Mahakala in Ujjain where many *siddhas* or magicians are said to live (24b, 37a). The story of Siva (Mahadev) and the churning of the ocean is told at length (31b–32b). While long accounts are given of the temple of the goddess Kamakhya, nothing is said about the animal sacrifices associated with that site today. The basic teachings of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*, however, are the use of breath for divination and the summoning of yoginis to obtain various goals; hatha yoga meditation is certainly linked to these practices.

The representation of yogic practices in *The Pool of Nectar* and *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* was highly selective, to say the least. In one sense, this is not surprising, if these texts are the result of the adventitious contact of one or two enterprising Muslim scholars with a mixture of esoteric Indian teachings. It includes unusual practices not attested elsewhere, such as a combined visualisation into of all seven cakras into a composite diagram (VII.14,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 36.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

⁴⁶ See Eliade, *Yoga*, p. 88, n.

VIII.5). Among the benefits of the practices mentioned in *The Pool of Nectar* are familiar yogic powers (*siddhis*), such as taking on an animal form or another human body, whether living or dead (*parakaya-pravesa*) (VII.12–15). At the same time, there are non-yogic powers, such as the prediction of the time of death by visual meditation, a practice common in early tantric works on sorcery (*kriya tantra*) that predate hatha yoga (VIII.1–5). There are also sexual practices that use breathing techniques derived from early Indian magical and divinatory texts (II.4). There are two different accounts of the breaths that are pretty much incompatible (five breaths in II.2; three breaths in V.3). The Arabic version of *The Pool of Nectar* has an otherwise unattested selection of five *asana* postures, while the Persian translation of Muhammad Ghawth provides twenty-one, the names of which do not overlap with any known work on hatha yoga.⁴⁷ It is difficult to identify the *bija-mantras* in Chapter VII, though here, as with the longer mantras of Chapter IX, the problem may lie in part in the inherent difficulty of representing Sanskrit (especially short vowels) in Arabic script. In any case, despite the translators' claims regarding the scriptural authority of their texts, the representation of yogic practices that they provided was arbitrary and selective, and it was heavily coloured both in context and in interpretation by a strongly established set of Islamic conventions.

Translation as Hermeneutics

What is the function of a translation such as *The Pool of Nectar*? The account of the origin of the text domesticates it in an Islamic context through the conversion of yogis to Islam. The two frame stories invoke particular interpretive approaches linked to the Gnostic myth of the soul and the Illuminist allegory of the senses and psychic faculties. The actual mechanism of translation is applied unevenly throughout the text. Sometimes purely Islamic terms and symbols are unselfconsciously placed in the text as adequate descriptions of Indian originals. This has the result that many of the original Indian terms and symbols can only be recovered by the use of resources of modern Indology outside of this text. The Islamising tendency is most evident in the later stages of manuscript production; there, the most common recension of the Arabic dispenses with most of the Indian elements of the text. Sanskrit originals are also dropped when techniques are being introduced that would be new to Arabic readers, particularly in the sections on chanting, visualisation, and postures. In an intermediate stage of translation, Indic names and terms are retained alongside their Islamic "translations". Yet there is a certain residue that remains untranslatable, particularly in the Sanskrit mantras that are transmitted in Arabic script. In short, *The Pool of Nectar* exhibits conflicting tendencies in its modes of translation, which are never fully resolved.

In approaching his task, the Arabic translator seems only to have felt the limitations imposed by the audience's unfamiliarity with technical terminology; he was not limited by social and religious constraints. A glance at the Indian names and terms that are transmitted in the text along with their Arabic translations (Chart 5) shows that major theological

⁴⁷ Several manuscripts of the Persian translation contain miniature illustrations of the twenty-one *asanas*. One of these MSS is in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, another is in the Salar Jung Library in Hyderabad, a third is in the private collection of Simon Digby, and the fourth has recently been acquired by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

translations relating to God and the prophets are entertained without hesitation. It must be repeated, however, that some of the Indic terms can only be recovered with difficulty through recourse to modern Indological sources. Given the almost exclusively extra-Indian distribution of manuscripts (only one of forty-five is found in India), it is hard to believe that any readers of the Arabic text would have been in a position to recognise that the text contained Sanskrit terms.

In other cases, the translator evidently felt that it was pointless to retain the Indian originals for a cluster of other important terms. "Mantra" is almost certainly the term underlying the Arabic term *dhikr* or "recollection", referring to the seven powerful "words" or "names" in chapter VII, which consist of seed-syllables like *aum*. "Yantra" is probably the Indic original translated as *shakl* or "diagram". Curiously, the term "yoga" is only mentioned by implication once in the text, in the title to Chapter IV on yogic postures; there it is represented by the Arabic term *riyada* or "exercise", which is from the same root as found in the Arabic word (*murtad*) used as a translation of "yogi". The unstated Indian term with the most theological baggage is probably *yogini*, "female yogi", which in the text refers to semi-divine beings rather than humans. The translator renders this as *ruhaniyya* or "spiritual being", which might seem equivocally to conceal polytheistic goddesses behind an innocuous looking front. Still, it is worth noting that earlier Arabic translators of Greek authors such as Plotinus used the same Arabic term *ruhaniyya* to translate the Greek term *theos* or "god".⁴⁸

Jan Assmann has proposed a model of translation with respect to the Hellenistic age that is suggestive for the Islamicate translations of Indic texts.⁴⁹ The complete and self-conscious translations of divinities from one culture to another was a common feature of ancient near eastern societies. The best known such case was Herodotus' translation of the Egyptian gods into familiar Greek ones: Amun was Zeus, Re was Helios, etc. Where there is easy translation from one pantheon to another, Assmann argues, conversion is not an issue. As long as there is the possibility of translation there is no need of conversion. If all religions basically worship the same gods there is no need to give up one religion and to enter another one. This possibility only occurs if there is one religion claiming knowledge of a superior truth. It is precisely this claim that excludes translatability. If one religion is wrong and the other is right, there can be no question of translating the gods of the one into those of the other. Obviously they are about different gods.⁵⁰ It is only when one insists on the untranslatability of key religious figures that "the cosmotheistic link between god and world, and god and gods, is categorically broken". Thus Jewish and Christian views of the incomparability of God precluded identification with the interchangeable "pagan" deities of the Hellenistic world. Following an idea put forward by G. W. Bowersock, Assmann maintains that the Greek culture of Hellenism was a vehicle through which many non-Greek cultures forcefully expressed their own distinctiveness. From the Jewish or Christian perspective, however, differences between Hellenistic religions were so trifling as to be meaningless. Hellenism,

⁴⁸ Abd al-Rahman Badawi, *Plotinus 'inda al-'Arab [Plotinus Among the Arabs]* (2nd ed., Kuwait, 1977), index, p. 248.

⁴⁹ Jan Assmann, 'Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability', in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford, 1996), pp. 25-36. Assmann unfortunately includes in his model an account of "syncretistic translation" that is far from clear.

⁵⁰ Assmann, p. 31.

by furnishing an overarching system of equivalences, created a cosmopolitan consciousness of a fairly unified pagan world.

A number of the features described by Assman in the Hellenistic case have parallels in the Islamicate cultures where *The Pool of Nectar* was produced and read. As with the Hellenistic age, the Arabic culture of the high caliphate and the Persianate culture of the middle periods of Islamic history were characterised by the creation of vast ecumenic imperial structures, in which minorities of many kinds expressed themselves through the dominant language. The ethnic identities of non-Arab peoples found expression through the Arabic language in the Shu'ubiyya movement, and non-Muslims made use of Persian for both religious and historical purposes. In Islamicate societies the legal authority of the Islamic religion continually existed in tension with universalising tendencies of Hellenistic origin embodied in the philosophical tradition. As a consequence, there were always significant aspects of the Islamicate cosmos that were not exclusively Islamic; this is the justification for Hodgson's term "Islamicate". Indeed, from the perspective of the most thoroughgoing exponents of philosophy (e.g., Ibn Sina), all religions (including Islam) were special modifications of the universal truths of philosophy, intended for mass consumption. The standard minimalist concept of Islam current in the mass media today identifies it with authoritarianism, legalism, and violent iconoclasm. The Muslim equivalents of Tertullian would doubtless be horrified by the contents of *The Pool of Nectar* and would reject out of hand any consideration of murmuring Sanskrit mantras to feminine deities. Yet the sophisticated Neoplatonism of the Muslim Illuminationists (like that of, say, the Christian Platonist Marsilio Ficino in Renaissance Italy) permitted the translation and assimilation of "pagan" themes, deities, and practices, without a sense of radical difference.⁵¹ Still, the text makes a kind of concession to the absolute demands of Islamic religious authority, by making sure that the bearers of foreign knowledge (the yogis) become converted Muslims, and even authorities on Islamic law.

In a way the fortunes of *The Pool of Nectar* resemble the important texts that Robert E. Buswell has called Chinese Buddhist apocrypha. These were often original texts composed in China, but presented as translations of important and authentic Buddhist scriptures from India. "Such texts were sometimes written in association with a revelatory experience, but often were intentionally forged using false ascriptions as a literary device both to enhance their authority as well as to strengthen their chances of being accepted as canonical".⁵² They took a strategy of making Buddhism intelligible by explaining it in terms that would be familiar to Chinese readers, even to the extent of creating new scriptures out of whole cloth. The analogy with *The Pool of Nectar* is not exact; there was some kind of textual basis for the translations of *The Pool of Nectar*, even if it may have been primarily an esoteric teaching restricted to oral transmission. But the Arabic translator clearly wanted to establish the canonical authority of his work, and part of his technique consisted of adding enough

⁵¹ The Persian scholar Mulla Zayn al-Din of Lar, from whom Pietro della Valle obtained a manuscript of *The Kamaniya Seed Syllables* in 1622, belonged to a sect "which attributed intelligences to the sun, moon and stars, and venerated them as angels of a superior order who would intercede with God and seek his protection" (J. D. Gurney, 'Pietro della Valle: The Limits of Perception', BSOAS XLIX [1986], p. 113).

⁵² Robert E. Buswell, Jr., 'Introduction: Prolegomenon to the Study of Buddhist Apocryphal Scriptures', in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu, 1990). Thanks to Charles Orzech of UNC-Greensboro for drawing this reference to my attention.

of the familiar Islamicate structures of authority to convince his readers to pay attention. He opened his translation with the following sentence: "Now in the land of India there is a respected book, known to its religious scholars (*ulama*) and philosophers (*hukama*), called *Amrtakunda*, that is, *The Pool of the Water of Life* (Int.2)". The primary task was to draw attention to the book's credentials. The Chinese Buddhist apocrypha sometimes adopted another technique found in *The Pool of Nectar*, that is, overcoming the distance between Buddhism and Chinese thought by declaring that Lao Tzu and Confucius were theophanies of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.⁵³ This is precisely the hermeneutic of equivalence adopted by the translator of *The Pool of Nectar*, when he has the yogi announce that Brahma and Vishnu are Abraham and Moses, or when he identifies major yogis with Islamic prophets. In each case, this approach permits the use of a dominant discourse (Chinese or Islamicate) to render the foreign Indian teachings.

A similar translation strategy can be seen in the remarks of the earlier Persian translator of the related *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*:

Thus says the translator of the book: In India I saw many books with complete information about every science. Most of their books are in verse, because they memorize verse better, and one's nature inclines to it more. I found a book which they call *Kannubijaksa*, which is one of their choicest books; they have great faith in this. It contains two types of science.

One is the science of magical imagination (*wahm*) and discipline (*riyadat*); they have no kind of science that is greater or more powerful than this. On the basis of this science they affirm things that intellect does not accept, but they believe in it, and among them it is customary. For each of these things they adduce and show a thousand proofs and demonstrations. Regarding the subject of this science, this is a summary, which they have affirmed.

The other is a science that they call *s[ʋ]aroda* [i.e., divination]. Their scholars and sages observe their breath; if their breath goes well, they perform their tasks, but if the breath goes ill, they do no work, but strenuously avoid it. They have taken this subject to the height of perfection. The common people of India know nothing of this, and they are not privy to this secret, nor do they know anything. They call this the science of [reading] thought (Arabic *damir*) (fols. 2a–2b).

As with the Arabic version of *The Pool of Nectar*, here we are confronted with a powerful book, alleged to be of the highest authority in India, though in the same breath we are told that it is secret and known only to a few. The Persian translator frequently returns to both the themes of the book's scriptural authority and its hidden esoteric character. Thus in another passage he writes,

This book is known throughout India, and among the Hindus no book is nobler than this. Whoever learns this book and knows its explanation is counted as a great scholar and wise man. They serve him, and whoever is occupied with the theory and practice of this they call a jogi and respect him greatly. They serve him just like we respect the saints and the masters of struggle and discipline (15b).

The translator speaks of information gathered from Brahmin informants, regarding practices such as employing the "greatest name" of God (40b) and summoning the goddess Lakshmi for sexual relations (43b), and he testifies to his own success in employing these techniques.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

In addition, on several occasions the translator cites another text, which he calls “the thirty-two verses of Kamak Dev”, which may have been a separately circulating text with similar contents.⁵⁴ He frequently emphasizes the verse character of the original, and several Hindi *doha* verses are quoted in Persian script (26b, 27a, 29a). The translator stresses the difficulty of the task of translation. “Then I rendered it from the Indian language to the Persian language, taking many pains, and it was read to a group of brahmins and scholars, and it was compared, corrected, and clarified (16a)”. Despite this advertisement of scholarly authority, which makes suspicious use of the terminology of Arabic literary production, on other occasions the translator confesses that the material he is dealing with is more than obscure. After giving a lengthy Hindi passage in Arabic script, he remarks, “I presented these verses to a group of the scholars of India, brahmins, and jogis, and they could not explain it, but were incapable of understanding it, for the words are strange and difficult” (27a). Thus it is not clear to what extent this represents a single text or a selection from yogic verses available from oral sources but represented as scripture.

A comparable case of translation and scriptural authority can be found in the sixth-century Persian physician Burzoy, who travelled to India in search of wonderful plants that can restore the dead to life. He eventually learned from Indian sages that the miraculous plant was really an allegory for wisdom. He returned to Persia with a strongly ascetic inclination and an aversion to religious dogma, bringing with him a selection of Indian literature (Pāñcatantra, Hitopadesa) that he translated into Middle Persian. This was later translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffā under the title *Kalila wa Dimna*, eventually becoming one of the greatest popular transmissions of literature prior to the invention of print.⁵⁵ It is striking to see how the Arabic version of this text preserves the strategies of treating this book of wisdom as divinely inspired and a source of great benefit: “The cause of the copying of this book and its transmission from the land of India to the kingdom of Persia was an inspiration from God Most High, by which he inspired Chosroes Anushirvan [the Persian king]”.⁵⁶ Or again: “Regarding his desire for knowledge and devotion to it, he heard of one of the books of the philosophers of India, among their kings and scholars, rare and highly prized by them. It was the root of all their culture and the head of all their knowledge, the guide to every benefit and the key to the search for the hereafter and the work of salvation”.⁵⁷ This highly charged religious language, and the frequent reference to the philosophers and sages of India in other passages, became a well-known literary pattern in Islamic literature (including the account of Burzoy in the Persian *Book of Kings* by Firdawsi); this popular book was several times translated into Persian and many other languages. This is the same language and the same geographic trajectory employed by the Arabic translator of *The Pool of Nectar*, when he announced that “in the land of India there is a respected book, known to its religious

⁵⁴ In one place (26a) the translator says, “Know that thirty-two verses in the Indian language have been transmitted from the sayings of Kamak. Now Kamak chose a certain kind from those, and added something else to it, and this poem is called *Kamak baray tafanka* (?)”. Elsewhere he adds, “This is all a commentary on the thirty-two verses, which someone has written in the Indian language, in which many practices are mentioned, and in which are strange and wonderful sciences which all the practitioners of imagination (*iwahim*) and magicians are agreed upon and pleased with” (29a). Once (15b) he says, “Now they put this book into 85 verses, and versified it in the Indian language.”

⁵⁵ François de Blois, *Burzoy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalilah wa Dimnah*, (London, 1990).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90, col. a, lines 39–41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91, col. b, lines 61–63.

scholars (*ulama*) and philosophers". The fame of *Kalila wa Dimna* in Arabic would have made the theme of the mysterious book from India a familiar echo.

Looking over the many different versions and recensions of the *Amrtakunda* translations produces a peculiar aesthetic effect, characterised by sensations of erasure and overwriting. There is a palimpsest effect when one can see the earliest versions and chart the changes that have taken place in later ones, many of them by whitewashing and then writing over their predecessors. This experience would not have been available to readers of the separate versions of this text, but remains a luxury only accessible today through retrospective scholarly researches. The Islamising tendency is the most notable overall effect in the transmission of the text, and it clearly becomes stronger in the later versions.

Early Orientalist theories of the Indian origins of Sufism have never been supported by documentation, although that lack of historical evidence hardly seems to have troubled the most ardent upholders of this view. This single historical document on hatha yoga, through its multiple translations, has indeed furnished a channel for certain Indian practices into the Islamic world. But the net result has been that the popularisation of this text has been achieved primarily by adding Islamic terms, names, and even whole chunks of texts to make the text more accessible; it has even been ascribed to the authorship of one of the great Sufi theorists, Ibn al-Arabi. Although it may have appeared that one irreducibly foreign element remained in the text, i.e., the Sanskrit mantras in Chapter IX, even these could be assimilated to the category of non-Arabic divine names or placed alongside occult talismans alleged to be in Hebrew, Syriac, or Chaldean. Thus when Mevlevi dervishes copied out the Ottoman Turkish version of this text a hundred years ago, they thought of it as a familiar genre of Sufi text with some interesting occult applications; they did not have the slightest notion that they were chanting garbled Sanskrit mantras addressed to Hindu goddesses. That conclusion would be left to foreign scholars, who alone had the resources and the motivation to re-Indianise the text. Influence is in the eye of the beholder.