BOOK REVIEWS

KHWĀN-I PUR NI‘MAT (A TABLE LADEN WITH GOOD THINGS),
TRANSLATED BY PAUL JACKSON. Idārāh-i Adabiyāt-i Dilli, Delhi 1986. 174 + xx pages; no price.

Khwān-i pur ni‘mat is an English translation of a collection of Persian excerpts from lectures delivered by the Šūfī Sharaf al-Dīn Manērī from 749/1348 to 751/1350 at Bihār Sharīf and recorded by a certain Zayn Badr ‘Arabī, his close disciple and scribe. The Persian text of the work is extant in manuscripts, preserved at Patna and Oxford, and in a rare printed version published by Firdawṣī Khānqāh, Bihār Sharīf, in 1903. The work is divided into 47 small chapters called "assemblies," each assembly reflecting the gist of a session or a series of sessions when the master instructed his disciples.

Paul Jackson, the translator, profited from the assistance of Syed Ḥasan ‘Askari and produced a polished translation of the text in modern, literate English. The translation appears to be accurate though the reader cannot judge its precise accuracy for lack of an accessible, reliable Persian text and the translator's obliteration of almost every trace of variant readings. Jackson began his studies on Sharaf al-Dīn Manērī with an English translation of Manērī's Maktūbāt-i ṣadī (The Hundred Letters, Paulist Press, New York 1980; previously translated into English by Baijnath Singh, Benares, 1909). With the present translation, Jackson continues his Manērī studies in a fortuitous way.

Makhdūm al-Mulk Sharaf al-Dīn Ahmad b. Yahyā Manērī (or Munyari, a reading attested in 878/1473), who died in Bihār Sharīf, probably in 782/1381 (or 772/1371 or 781/1380 as attested also in primary sources), is one of the lesser known Šūfīs of India. This is why it is somewhat disconcerting that the introduction to the present work fails to include basic data about Manērī, the author and his work. It is of little help to the reader when Jackson mentions in passing that he has published "a credible biography" of Manērī in a volume entitled The Way of a Šūfī: Sharafuddin Manērī, but then neither mentions the place and year of publication nor gives a reference where one may possibly find information about this biographical sketch.

It may be appropriate, therefore, to record briefly stages of historical development of the Firdawṣīyyah, Manērī’s silsilah. The...
Firdawsī's order came to India with Badr al-Dīn Samarqandi, a disciple of Sayf al-Dīn Bākhārizī (d. 658/1260), one of the many disciples of Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā (d. 618/1221). Badr al-Dīn settled in Dehli and died there during the reign of Sūltān 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī. One of Badr al-Dīn's khalīfahs was Najīb al-Dīn Firdawsī, who became Maneri's Sūfī master after the latter had first been educated by the Ḥanbalī scholar Abū Taw'ammah, a native of Bukhāra who had come to India and settled at Sunārgāon in Bengal. After years of ascetic practices in the forests of Rājgir in Bihār, Maneri took up residence in a khānqāh at Bihār Sharīf, built for him by order of Sūltān Muhammad b. Tughluq. There, until his death, he taught a number of disciples who contributed to the spread of Sūfism in Bihār and Bengal.

Although Jackson touches upon some interesting points in his comments on the text, his notes and references to the translation, cited after each "assembly", are at best explanatory of textual obscurities or factual assumptions in the text. I am sad to say, however, that they are badly in need of scholarly improvement. The point is not only documented by the misspelling of the central Sūfī concept of wahdat al-wujūd, or the consistent misreading and wrong translation of Maneri's Maṣlahat al-ma'āni, or the faulty transliteration demonstrated by every second line of the index and throughout the book. Rather, it is documented by a lack of substance, as may be shown by a few examples.

First, there is Jackson's lack of identification with regard to many Sūfī authorities quoted in the text and several of Maneri's followers cited as participants in the assemblies. Any half decent library within Jackson's reach could have offered the necessary information for the identification of Maneri's circle of followers, quoted in the text by their nondescript laqab. A quick glance at the Encyclopaedia of Islam would have identified such Sūfī authorities as Abī Yazīd al-Bistāmī, al-Junayd, Ahmad al-Ghazzālī, Abī Sa'id b. Abīl-Khayr, Mālik b. Dīnār and others.

Second, in the introduction Jackson notes "an extraordinary account of how Imām Zāhid composed his Persian commentary on the Qur'ān"—period, no reference, no proof. Now, if the text is studied a bit, the following becomes obvious. In the thirty-ninth assembly Maneri lectures on problems of interpretation with regard to some knotty verses of the Qur'ān. During the lecture Maneri reveals that he found Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Arabic commentary on the Qur'ān too difficult to manage as a reference work despite the admiration he had for it. Maneri goes on to profess his preference for the four volume set of a Persian Qur'ān commentary, written by a certain Imām Zāhid, to which he turned on the suggestion of a student of Shams al-Dīn Yahyā, a disciple and khalīfah of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (d. 725/1325). The Imām Zāhid is no other than Abū Naṣr Ahmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Darwājikī (d. 549/1154), known as al-shaykh al-imām al-zāhid, who wrote his Persian commentary on...
the Qur‘ān—entitled *Laṭā‘īf al-tafsīr* or, in short, *Tafsīr-i Zāhidī*—at Bukhārā in 519/1125. A manuscript of this Qur‘ān commentary is preserved in the Bankipore Library, Patna, right next to the main manuscripts underlying the present translation. The teaching story, related in this assembly by Maneri about Khidr and the miraculous preservation of the Qur‘ān commentary in the waters of the river, simply illustrates and underscores the sublime authority Maneri attached to Darwāji’s Persian commentary. In other words, one learns something here about the way in which Maneri used Darwāji’s work as a reference, not about the way in which the work was compiled. One also gathers a piece of evidence for the preferred use of Persian over Arabic that is symptomatic for fourteenth century Indian Šūfism.

Third, symptomatic for the integration of Indian customs into the Islamic way of life in India is a series of accounts that, if analyzed properly, could shed light on typical forms of Šūfī life and practice in India. Jackson perceives this line of research but does not follow through with the analysis of, e.g., Maneri’s discussion about the lawfulness of eating betel leaves laced with lime produced with the help of burned shells of shellfish, or the magical practice of using tiny Qur‘āns as amulets attached to necklaces, or the controversy about wearing silk and plaiting one’s hair with silk ribbons. Jackson’s comment on the third assembly concerning "the influence of Hindu ascetical practices on the Šūfis" with respect to the namāz-i ma’kus sanctioned by Maneri on the Prophet’s authority would need further study. The Indian origin of the chillah-i ma’kusah is by no means established since its practice is attested in Iran and Turkey as well (see my article in Encyclopaedia Iranica I, 379). Actually, the practice can be traced back to Abū Sa‘īd b. Abi’l-Khayr (d. 440/1049) in the *Asrār al-tawḥīd* of Ibn Munawwar. It is then cited in Chishti Šūfī sources, such as the *Fawā‘id al-bu‘ād*, and described in detail with regard to Chishti ritual in the Ma‘ārīj al-wilāyat of Abū Allāh Khwāshgī Qasūrī (d. shortly after 1130/1720). It may be useful as well to compare Maneri’s observations on Firdawsī family relations, indicated in the thirty-sixth and fortieth assemblies, with the Kubrawī-Chishti tensions apparent in Maneri’s Šūfī thought and practice.

In summary, this translation in excellent English is based on a Persian text that includes some gems of reference to fourteenth century Muslim India. With a bit of scholarly analysis it could convey insights into Šūfī developments of Bihār and illustrate facets of Muslim acculturation in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent.
In the course of this century significant changes have occurred all over the Muslim world in the application of the Shar'ah. Two ideas have acquired prominence in the context of these changes, namely: "reform" of the Shar'ah and "restoration" of the Shar'ah. Both ideas have played an important role in the Sudan's political and social life.

Fluehr-Lobban's book deals mainly with the reform of the Sudan's Islamic law of personal status, the area to which the Shar'ah was contained by the Anglo-Egyptian colonial authority. She found the Sudan to have played pioneering role among Muslim countries not only in the scope and depth of the reforms, but also in the method by which they were promulgated.

The result of these reforms was a far-reaching modification of the rules of Ḥanafī law originally applied, by replacing them with new rules very often taken from the Mālikī school. The instrument of effecting these changes was judicial circulars issued by the Grand Qadi. This device was first put into effect by the colonial authority, and subsequently maintained after independence by Sudanese governments, until 1980 when the distinction between the Shar'ah and civil courts was abolished and the two court systems were unified.

Substantive changes in the law were started in 1915 when the Sudan became the first country to replace the Ḥanafī law of divorce by the Mālikī law which gave women the right of judicial divorce on the ground of lack of support or desertion by the husband or cruelty. Subsequent circulars enhanced these provisions on divorce, and reformed many other aspects of the law relating to a wide range of subjects such as maintenance, consent in marriage, custody of children, protection of property of minors, waqf and inheritance.
Discussing the motivations for these reforms the author takes the position that they were largely of internal origin and inspiration. She has little sympathy for the view taken by some western writers who are too apt to ascribe the inspiration for such reforms in Muslim countries to westernization and secularization.

"An important point to make is that the perspective of this study is that the development of the Sharia in the contemporary Sudan has been, for the most part, a matter of internal evolution. The greater number of European scholars of Islamic law hold the view that various changes in the applied law are the direct result of positive, secularizing, progressive, modernist contact with the West."

She considers it important to emphasize that even though they have taken place during the period of foreign rule, "these developments have taken place within the confines of a dialogue that is basically internal to Islam" and "the motivation for reform has been inspired as much by internal developments as by Western influence."

To support her position the author searches for and finds sufficient motivations for these reforms in the internal social and political circumstances of the Sudan. One of such circumstances was the agitation of political groups such as the women's movement, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Communist party. There is again the increasing economic difficulties in the country, the problems relating to family maintenance created by migrant labour, the growth of a capitalist economy, the weakening of the extended family, and the trend towards according a more central role to the nuclear family.

Not only does the author see the motivations for reform as internal to the Sudan, but she also considers the methods of reform to be "for the most part Islamic", because "legitimate means" were employed such as takhayyur, Ijtihād, Siyāsah shari'iyah, tahlīq and maslahah.

The point which the author is making in this respect is a significant one. It is so easy and natural to see a connection between contemporary reforms of Islamic law and the atmosphere of foreign domination, westernization and secularization in which they were effected. There is a clear desire by the author to downplay the significance of such connection, at least in the case of the Sudan. She proceeds on the assumption that her purpose may be achieved by showing that situations internal to the Sudan necessitated, or at least motivated such reforms, and at any rate methods "legitimate: in Islam were used.

It is not a wholly satisfactory argument though, since it still leaves open the question whether "Westernization" may not be the
factor behind those very "internal circumstances" which motivated the reforms. As to the use of legitimate Islamic means to effect the reforms, there is no doubt that there is a difference between the existence of legitimate means of effecting reforms and the correct employment of those means.

All this of course means that the point will remain debatable for a long time. But by unveiling the social, economic and political conditions under which the Sudan effected its own reforms the author has certainly made a valuable contribution to that debate.

This particular feature of this book, rare in the available literature on the subject, of presenting the details of how the Islamic law operated in practice in the Sudan and the condition under which it operated is one of the book's valuable assets. Not only are the detailed rules of the Shari'ah, according to the traditional Schools presented, but the author has enlivened her discussion of the dry details of the laws and their reformed version by her account of the practical application of these laws in the Shafi'ah courts in cases and proceedings which she observed herself.

In this book the author has fairly succeeded in her aim of presenting a study which rises above the prejudices and ethnocentricism for which much orientalist writing is criticised. It is a study which is less judgemental of Muslim society and more sympathetic to internal development in Muslim countries. It is written in a language which is likely to be more acceptable to Muslims.

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