The Shif#’ al-‘Al#l of Āzād Bilgrāmī (d.1200/1786): Introducing an Eighteenth-century Indian Work on al-Mutanabbi’s Poetry

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Available online: 10 Sep 2008

To cite this article: Shawkat M. Toorawa (2008): The Shif#’ al-‘Al#l of Āzād Bilgrāmī (d.1200/1786): Introducing an Eighteenth-century Indian Work on al-Mutanabbi’s Poetry, Middle Eastern Literatures, 11:2, 249-264

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14752620802223863

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The *Shifa’* al-‘Alīl of Āzād Bilgrāmī (d.1200/1786): Introducing an Eighteenth-century Indian Work on al-Mutanabbi’s Poetry

SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA

Abstract

Arabic belletristic literature outside the time frame c.1500 to c.1800 is relatively unstudied and, in many cases, unknown; the same is true of Arabic belletristic literature outside Arabic-speaking lands. By presenting and describing the *Shifa’* al-‘Alīl (1196/1782), this article endeavours to bring to light a work in which Ghulām ‘Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī (d.1200/1786)—hailed in India as Ḥassān-i Hind for his superior panegyrics of the Prophet Muḥammad—engages with 180 of al-Mutanabbi’s verses. Although he is relatively well known to Persianists and to historians of India, Āzād Bilgrāmī belongs also to Arabic literature, as his engagement and dialogue with al-Mutanabbi’s poetry shows.

Arabic Literature and the ‘Period of Decadence’

In 1999, it was possible for Robert Irwin to aver, in his splendid anthology of classical Arabic literature in translation, as follows:

> Although it is conceivable that the decline of Arabic literature in what European historians call the ‘early modern period’ is more apparent than real, there does appear to have been a decline both in quantity and quality of original writing in that period. We find no poet who can bear comparison with Mutanabbi (…). In time Arabic literature would revive. That revival should be seen as beginning in the late eighteenth century. (emphases added)

Evidently, the ‘*aṣr al-inḥīṭāt* (age of decline, period of decadence) remains a persistent category, a period when Arabic literature is said to have gone into decline after a golden age that can never be equalled. For some, the disintegration of ‘Abbāsid power marks the beginning of this decline; for others, it is the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258; for yet others, it coincides with the ascendance of the Ottomans (mid-fifteenth to early
The end of the ‘age of decline’ is usually held to have been heralded by Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798, when European literature began to exert its (considerable) revivifying influence on Arabic, ushering in the Nahda (‘awakening’), and, by the end of the late nineteenth century, reversing the ‘decline’. No longer was Arabic literature lacking in originality, imitative, derivative, or needlessly ornate, and uncreatively focused on the production of commentaries and super-commentaries. As Devin Stewart has observed, ‘Implicit is the notion that authors of the classical period had said everything that needed saying, and had said it best’, leaving pre-moderns to quibble over inconsequential details, or merely to pass on the Arabo-Islamic cultural patrimony, ‘adding next to nothing of value’.5

The state of affairs is rapidly changing, however. The overwhelming majority of materials from the period 1517 to 1798—to adopt the narrowest range for the so-called ‘period of decadence’—are in manuscripts, but literary scholars and historians are increasingly devoting their efforts and energies to this material. In 1989, ‘Umar Músá Bāshā published Tārikh al-adab al-‘arabī: al-‘asr al-‘Uthmānī. The multi-volume Arabic literature of Africa under the direction of John Hunwick and R. S. O’Fahey, begun in 1994, is an on-going project.7 In 2006, Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period appeared, edited by Roger Allen and D. S. Richards.8 And later this year, Essays in Arabic Biography, 1350–1850 will appear, edited by Joseph Lowry and Devin Stewart, one of several periodized volumes under the general editorship of Roger Allen.9 The latter forcefully takes up the notion of the ‘asr al-inhītāt and features many important Arabī litterateurs who have not hitherto figured in histories of Arabic literature. In particular, increasing attention is being paid to Arabic literature produced at the so-called margins.10

In their magisterial history of Arabic literature from 1800 to 1945, Boutros Hallaq, Heidi Toelle and their co-editors and contributors show an acute awareness of the need to understand better the period preceding the Nahda.11 In her introductory remarks to an opening chapter titled ‘The State of Affairs in the Arab World at the end of the 18th century’, Hilary Kilpatrick briefly surveys the largely dismissive prevailing view of pre-modern Arabic literary output, and goes on to note:12

To begin with, let us point out that the geographical extent of Arabic literature in the 18th century does not correspond exactly to the borders of the modern Arab world. Thus, the Indian scholar, poet and historian, Āzād Bilgrāmī (1116/1704–1200/1786) left an extensive diwān and a short autobiography which he included in his biographical dictionary of the ‘ulamā’ in his lands.

The volume Kilpatrick cites for her information about Āzād constituted my first engagement with this scholar (Brustad et al. 2001).13

Āzād Bilgrāmī14

Although he is well-known to Indian Arabists and Indianists who use Arabic, Arabists generally have shown little awareness of Āzād or other Arabic litterateurs.15 Al-Sayyid Mīr Ghiyām ‘Ali “Āzād” b. al-Sayyid Nūḥ al-Husaynī al-Wāṣīṭī (al-) Bilgrāmī was born in 1116/1704 into a respected family of scholars and civil servants in Maydanpura, Bilgram, an area about fifty miles north-west of Lucknow.16 Much
information about Āzād’s life he himself supplies in notices in the Subhāt al-majrān, and the Persian Maʿāṣir al-kirām and Sarv-i Āzād. He studied Arabic and religion with the renowned Mir Tufayl Muhammad Atrauli (d.1151/1738), prosody and the literary arts with his maternal uncle, Mir Muhammad Bilgrāmī (d.1185/1771), and Hadith, Sira and Arabic and Persian poetry with his paternal grandfather, Mir ‘Abd al-Jalīl Bilgrāmī (d.1137/1725), whom he followed to Delhi in 1134/1721–1122. Though he would not write the Shifāʾ al-ʿālī till late in his life, the foundations for a deep knowledge of Arabic poetry, rhetoric and lexicography were laid in this early period.

Āzād returned to Maydanpura in 1136/1724 and became a disciple of the Chishti Sufi Mir Sayyid Lutf Allāh (d.1142/1730). In 1141/1729, Āzād’s uncle summoned him to Siwstān where he substituted for him as Pay-Master General, a post he then assumed. While there, he began a work in Persian that he continued in Allahabad (having resigned his post) between 1147/1734 and 1150/1737. In Rajab 1150/October 1737, he left home and family with the intention of performing the Ḥājah. He left in secret, fearing his family’s opposition to his departure in troubled times. He walked south and when he reached the Deccan was introduced to Āṣaf Jāh, who granted his wish, expressed in Persian verse, for help in performing the pilgrimage.

Āzād reached Arabia in Muḥarram 1151/May 1738, where he was received by his compatriot, the poet Muhammad Fākhīr “Zāʾir” Ilḥābādī (d.1163/1750). Having missed that year’s annual pilgrimage, he studied Hadith with al-Shaykh Muhammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī (d. after 1163/1750) in Medina, and with the Egyptian Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Tanṭāwī (d.1157/1744) in Mecca; the latter greatly admired Āzād’s poetic talents. Āzād probably began (but did not complete) his first Arabic prose work at this time, Dawʾ al-dārārī fi Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (“The light of abundant lamps: a commentary on the Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī”), which Āzād modelled somewhat on a commentary by al-Qastallānī (d.923/1517).

Āzād returned to India in Jumādā II 1152/September 1739, having visited Sufi shrines in Ṭāʾif and Mukhā along the way. In Dhū l-Qaʿda 1152/February 1740 he left for the Deccan at the invitation of Āṣaf Jāh but, finding a library of great interest at Aurangabad, instead took up residence there, near the shrine of Bābā Shāh “Musāfīr” Naqshbandī (d.1126/1714). Naṣīr Jang summoned Āzād to his court in Hyderabad in 1158/1745, but when Naṣīr Jang died in 1164/1750, Āzād returned to Aurangabad, travelling only once to Hyderabad in 1168/1754 for a year. Thereafter, he remained in Aurangabad, studying, teaching and writing, and steadfastly refusing any official patronage. He is buried in Khuldabad.

A highly regarded poet, Āzād’s widely known panegyrics of the Prophet Muḥammad also earned him the honorific, ‘Ḥassān-i Hind’ (Ar. Ḥassān al-Hind), likening him to the Prophet own panegyrist, Ḥassān b. Thābit. His poetry found its way into curricula in Arabic education in India. One qaṣida appears in Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Yamanī al-Shirwānī’s (d.1256/1840) Naḥḥat al-Yamān fīmā yazīlu bi-dhikrihi al-shajān. The Naḥḥa, ‘for close on a century a text-book for the ‘Higher Standard and High Proficiency, Arabic, was first published in 1811’; and in 1857, the Naḥḥat al-Yaman joined four other works as part of the Indian Arabic ‘Literature’ curriculum, namely the Sabʿ Muṭallaqāt, the Diwān of al-Mutanabbi, the Maqāmāt of al-Ḥarīrī and the Hamāsa of Abu Tammām. Noteworthy is the fact that the first printed edition of al-Mutanabbi’s Diwān in its entirety was published in Calcutta in 1230/1815, and edited by this same al-Shirwānī.
Azād Bilgāmī’s Arabic Works

Azād Arabic works consist of the following (in alphabetical order):

* Araj al-sabā fi madh al-Mustafā
  In manuscript: Salar Jung Museum

* Da’w’ al-darārī fi sharḥ Sahih al-Bukhārī
  In manuscript: Nadwat al-‘Ulam’

Diwān Azād

- al-Diwān al-awwal, Hyderabad, Deccan: Maṭba’at Kanz al-‘Ullum, n.d.;
- al-Diwān al-thānī, Hyderabad, Deccan: Maṭba’at Lawḥ Maḥfūz, n.d.;
- al-Diwān al-thālith, Hyderabad, Deccan: Maṭba’at Kanz al-‘Ullum, n.d.;
- al-Diwān al-rābi’ī; In manuscript: Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’;
- al-Diwān al-khābāniṣ: In manuscript: Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’;
- al-Diwān al-sādīs: In manuscript: Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’;
- al-Diwān al-sābī', Hyderabad, Deccan: Maṭba’at Kanz al-‘Ullum, n.d.;
- Mukhtār Diwān Azād al-ma’rūf bi-l-Sab‘a al-sayyāra, lith., Lucknow: Maṭba’at Āsī, 1900;
- al-Diwān al-thāmin: In manuscript: Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’; ‘Ārif Beg Library, Medina;
- al-Diwān al-tāṣi’ [= Tuhfat al-thaqalayn]: In manuscript: British Library;
- al-Diwān al-arshir: In manuscript: Khuda Bakhsh Library, Patna; Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’;
- Diwān Azād: In manuscript: OMLRI, Hyderabad;

Kashkul

In manuscript: OMLRI, Hyderabad

Mazhar al-barakāt


Mir’at al-jamāl

Included in: Nawwāb Siddiq Khān (d. 1890), Nashwat al-sakrān

al-Sab‘a al-sayyāra

See Diwān earlier

Shamāmat al-‘anbar fimā warada fi l-Hind min Sayyid al-Bashar

[= part 1 of the Subḥat al-marjān: see later]

Shifā’ al-‘alīl


On the manuscripts, see later.
The Shīfāʾ al-‘alil of Aẓād Bīlgrāmī (d.1200/1786)

Subḥat al-marjān fi aṯār Hindūstān


Tasliyat al-fuʿād fi qasāʿid Āẓād


[=Part 3 of *Subḥat al-marjān*: see earlier]

Āẓād’s first complete Arabic work was the four-part *Subḥat al-marjān fi aṯār Hindūstān* (‘The coral rosary on Indian antiquities [lit. traditions]’). Its date of final collation was 1177/1763–1764, but parts were written earlier. Part one, *Shamāmat al-‘anbar fī mā warada fī l-Hind min Sayyid al-bashar* (‘The scent of ambergris on everything the leader of humanity [Prophet Muhammad] said about India’), a disquisition on the eminence and pre-eminence of India, was completed in 1164/1750. The second section consists of forty-five biographies of Arabic scholars in India, and was intended to introduce eminent Indian scholars writing in Arabic to scholars outside India. The third section of the *Subḥat al-marjān* concerns rhetorical figures in Sanskrit and Arabic poetry. This is significant as few Indian scholars of Arabic evince knowledge of Sanskrit or of Indian poetics. This section was earlier written for the *Tasliyat al-fuʿād fi qasāʿid Āẓād* (‘The heart’s solace: Āẓād’s poems’). The fourth section describes types of lovers and beloveds. The *Mīrʿat al-jamāl* (‘The mirror of beauty’), which dates from 1187/1773, takes up the same themes in one hundred and five verses.

Āẓād wrote ten collections of poetry, seven of which form *al-Sabʿa al-sayyārā* (‘The orbiting seven’), eight of which date from between 1194/1779 and 1198/1783. For these poems, many of which are panegyrics of the Prophet Muhammad, Āẓād uses several verse forms, some traditional Arabic ones, such as the *qaṣīda* (ode) and *ghazal* (love lyric) but also others from Persian, such as the *rubāʿi* (quatrain). Al-Sīwānī numbers Āẓād’s verses at 12,500. In the 3700-couplet ethico-mystical (but also humorous and satirical) *Māzhār al-barakāt* (‘The repository of blessings’), which can be dated to 1194–1196/1780–1782, namely the same period, Āẓād uses the Persian *masnawi* form.

The Shīfāʾ al-‘alil

The manuscripts

I am aware of four manuscripts of the Shīfāʾ al-‘alil.

(1) OMLRI (ʿAṣāfiyya) *Dawwāwīn* MS 1113 (Figure 1). This bound manuscript of the Shīfāʾ al-ʿalil, preserved in the Government of Andhra Pradesh Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute in Hyderabad, is the one commonly referred
to as the Āṣafiyya manuscript. It consists of seventy-two folios (143 pages), each 20 cm × 13 cm. Each page has eleven lines in a clear Nasta’līq script, in black and red ink. The manuscript dates from no later than the early nineteenth century but the colophon bears no date, and the copyist is unidentified. It may be that it is in Āzād’s own hand; certainly, the hand in this manuscript, and in Salar Jung MS Arabic 29 (see later), are very close. The difficulty is that the heading on the first page identifies the work as Āzād’s and follows his name with rahimahu llah, ‘May God show him mercy’. It may be that the heading is by another hand: this requires further investigation. This is the manuscript reproduced in facsimile, and thus the only one to make the Shifa’ al-‘alî available in its entirety.

(2) Salar Jung Museum MS Arabic 29 (Figure 2). This manuscript, in the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, is seventy-nine folios, 19.4 cm × 11.8 cm, eleven lines per page, in clear black Nasta’līq. There are numerous corrections that suggest it is in the author’s own hand. The manuscript bears the seal ‘Munir al-Mulk, 1206’. Munir al-Mulk was Prime Minister to Sikander Jah, the Nizam of Hyderabad from 1808 to 1832, and the grandfather of Salar Jung (d.1949), Prime Minister to the seventh Nizam of Hyderabad and founder of the Salar Jung Museum. The Hijri year 1206 corresponds to 1791 AD.

(3) Salar Jung Museum MS Arabic 30 (Figure 3). This manuscript is forty folios, 25.2 cm × 15.2 cm, nineteen lines per page, in clear black Nasta’līq. It has very few corrections, bears the author’s own seal, ‘al-Faqir Āzād’, and its hand is very similar to that of MS 29. It is almost certainly the author’s own hand.

(4) Nadwat-ul-‘Ulamā’ al-Adab al-‘Arabi MS 40 (Figure 4). This manuscript is fifty folios, 55 cm × 28.5 cm, twenty-five lines per page, in black and red Nasta’līq. It was copied by Sayyid Nūr al-Ḥasan Qannawjī (d.1336/1917).
I have not been able to locate the manuscript described by Suhrawardy and Ahmad as part of the M. ‘Alı Husain Library, Kuchah-i Madrasah-i A’izza, Hyderabad, and consequently cited by Husain and Abbas both, but since Suhrawardy describes it as having ‘copious marginal notes’, it may well be that the Salar Jung Museum acquired it and that it is identical to MS 29.36

The title

Scholars have almost invariably made reference to the the Shifā’ al-‘ālīl by an expanded title. There is, however, no evidence (or consensus37) on this longer title. M. G. Zubaid Ahmed calls the work Shifā’ al-‘ālīl fi ḫalām al-Mutanabbī, perhaps following the identification provided by Suhrawardy.38 Al-Farūqi calls the work Shifā’ al-‘ālīl fi ʿallahāt ‘alā aḥyā Abī l-Tayyib al-Mutanabbī;39 this is an extrapolation, apparently inspired by the entries in the Salar Jung catalogue, which read Shifā’ al-‘ālīl fi ʿālīhāt kalām al-Mutanabbī al-dīlīl. The use of ḫalām is preferable to ʿālīhāt, both in meaning and in that it corresponds to Āzād’s procedure in the work, to improve/emend/correct/repair/remedy al-Mutanabbī’s lines, which, as he puts it, yumkin an yushah wá-yuqāl, ‘It is possible for it to be remedied and have it say’.40 In the introduction to the work, Āzād writes, wa-jama’tu ḥādīhi
al-risālah allāti sammayruhā Shīfāʾ al-ʿalī . . ., ‘I put together this treatise which I have titled Shīfāʾ al-ʿalī . . . ’ tout court.

The title Shīfāʾ al-ʿalī is not unique to Āzād,41 though he appears to be the only scholar to apply this title to a work about al-Mutanabbi. The Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute itself has two other works bearing this exact title: a seventeenth-century Persian work on medicine (MS Ayurveda 79) and a nineteenth-century Urdu translation of Shāh Wāli Allāh’s al-Qawl al-jamīl (MS Urdu 1845). Āzād would have no doubt been aware of works with the title Shīfāʾ al-ʿalī. Of particular interest, however, is the fact that the title appears in works by contemporaries: (1) Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Jarrāḥī (d.1162/1749), Shīfāʾ al-ʿalī fi dawāʾ al-kalīm;42 (2) Diyāʾ al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Rāfīʾī (d.1815), Shīfāʾ al-ʿalī fi madīḥ Ṭāḥā al-jālī;43 (3) Muḥammad Amin b. ʿUmar Ibn Abīdīn (d.1836 or 1842), Shīfāʾ al-ʿalī wa-ball al-ghalīl fi ḥukm al-waṣiyya bi-l-khātamāt wa-l-tahālīl.44 The copy of the anonymous sixteenth century Shīfāʾ al-ʿalī wa-siqāʾ al-ghalīl, in the Khuda Bakhsh Library [which is a commentary on al-Maqsād al-jamīl fi ʿilm al-Khalīl of Ibn al-Ḥājīb (d.1248)], was copied ca.1737, and may, therefore, also have been known to Āzād.45

Figure 3. Folio 40 of Salar Jung MS 30.
The content

The Shifā’ al-ʻalīl comprises Āzād’s suggested improvements to one hundred and eighty of the poet al-Mutanabbi’s linguistic and rhetorical choices.47 Abū l-Ţāyyib Aḥmad b. al-Husayn al-Mutanabbi (d.354/965) is widely regarded as (one of) the greatest of all Arabic poets.48 He was born in Kufa (Iraq) in 303/915, where he also received his early education, and where his precociousness as a poet was already noticed. He practised his poetry in Kufa and Baghdad but met with little success. In c.320/932 he led a rebellion, which earned him imprisonment and also the name al-Mutanabbi, meaning ‘he who professes to be a prophet’. Upon his release, al-Mutanabbi decided to try his hand as a panegyrist again. He travelled to Antioch, Damascus and Aleppo, choosing now to write poetry characterized by more inventiveness. In 337/948, al-Mutanabbi attached himself to the Ḥamdānid ruler of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla. At that prince’s court, al-Mutanabbi made friends and foes, but the latter in time prevailed and al-Mutanabbi fled to Egypt in 347/957, where he was patronized by the Ikhshīdīd ruler, Kafūr. Their relations soured and two years later, after satirizing his patron, al-Mutanabbi fled east. His next patron was ‘Adud al-Dawla in Shiraz. In 354/965, while travelling to Kufa, al-Mutanabbi was attacked and killed, possibly by someone he had insulted.
Al-Mutanabbi had no shortage of enemies, but he had his champions too, both during his life and after his death. Inevitably, then, critics have fallen into two camps, those that praise his verse and those that denounce it, those that approve of his verse or who disapprove of it. What is more, critics have often had difficulty separating al-Mutanabbi’s personality and political views from his poetry. Consequently, one of Arabic literature’s greatest poets is also one of the most polemicized. In writing the Shīfā’ al-ʿalīl, then, Azād inscribed himself into a particularly charged history. Azād is, of course, fully aware of this, citing Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿārī as a supporter, and al-Ṣāhib Ibn ʿAbbād (author of the Kitāb Kashf ʿan masāwi shīʿ al-Mutanabbi) and al-Ḥātimī (author of al-Risāla al-Mudīḥa) as detractors.

In his introduction Azād acknowledges al-Mutanabbi’s greatness (amīr ʿalā umarāʾ al-kalām) but acknowledges also that the poet sometimes overdoes (ifrāt) and is negligent (tafrīt).49 All in all, Azād has a balanced view of al-Mutanabbi’s poetry, noting that some of his expressions rise to the heights and others sink to the lowest of the low.50 Azād goes on to explain his decision to write a work suggesting emendations to al-Mutanabbi’s ‘bad’ choices by invoking the Qur’anic dictum, Inna l-hasanat yudhibna al-sayyiʿat, ‘Good deeds eliminate bad deeds’ (Q HUD 11:114).51 Like a knowledgeable physician (al-tabiʿib al-ʿarif), Azād opts for cure (šlāj) over remonstrance (iʿtirād), observing that it occurred to him to emend what is defective in al-Mutanabbi’s verses (an usliḥa fi kalāmihi min al-fasād), in the hope that the bad will give way to the good.52 Much of Azād’s time is also consumed correcting the commentator al-Wahīdī.53 Sometimes, Azād is ironic (suggesting al-Mutanabbi is nāʿim, ‘asleep’ while writing, for instance) and harsh (describing the bashaʿa, ‘ugliness’ of a verse, for instance).54 But Azād is also perfectly willing to be mistaken.55 He is also willing to cite his own poetry, and quote it at length, to illustrate a point.56 This is something he also does in the Subhāt al-marjān, listing, for example, thirty-eight figures of speech from Indian rhetoric and then providing a list of thirty-six that he has himself invented.57

Azād opens the work with a short introduction, which I translate later. I have opted to replicate the sajʿ that characterizes much of Azād’s prose, so the translation is not literal; paragraph breaks are mine.

In the name of God, Full of Compassion, Ever Compassionate.

All praise to God, Who illuminated our hearts with acuity, and burnished our breasts with clarity. And blessings and peace upon the Arab prophet who guided us on the roads of the humane, and who showed us to the paths of the germane; and blessings on his family, who benefited us with the dearest of demeanours, and taught us the clearest of matters.

To continue: The traveller on the scholarly path, Azād al-Ḥusaynī al-Wāṣiti al-Bilgrāmī, asserts that Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbi is the pre-eminent standard-bearer of the pen, a prince among writers and men, whose rank is elevated in unusual meaning inventions, and whose strength is celebrated in the gleaning of elusive intentions, except that he also displays negligence and immoderation, and disturbance and convolution, when some of his expressions rise as high as they can go, and when they then sink to the lowest of the low. All the while, his unusual excellences overwhelm to the point that the blemishes in his language

Literary critics of his expressions, and authors describing his fashions, have contented themselves with recording what prattle they found, and confined themselves to commentating on the imperfections that abound, without turning their energies to correcting what was defective, and attempting to make the unsaleable more effective, only correcting a few of the stumbles, as I try to do within these pages most humble. It is well-known that the able physician undertakes to cure the ailing, and that the virtue of curing is greater and nobler than pointing out failings. It therefore occurred to me to correct what was defective in his art, and to cure the very sickness in his heart, and to smooth out all the complexity I could, and to change, to the extent possible, the bad into the good. Consequently I exerted strong effort and good striving, and put together this epistle which I have titled ‘Cure for the Ailing’, in this year 1196. I ask God, may He be exalted, to grant me victorious success, and to keep me on the straight path of righteousness; He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing, and shows his worshippers mercy befitting.

Know that there are numerous commentaries on the Divān of al-Mutanabbi and that I was only able to get access to al-Wāhidi’s in its entirety, and to Ibn Jinnī’s up to the rhyme letter ṛa’. It is evident from a comparison of the two that al-Wāhidi takes some of his reproaches of al-Mutanabbi from Ibn Jinnī, and it may well be that he takes from others too. I attribute what I cite from al-Wāhidi to him: if it originates with another, then may attribution to him be excused.

Al-Mutanabbi says, in the opening line of a poem in praise of Muḥammad b. ‘Ubayd Allāh al-‘Alawī . . .

The ‘ailing’ lines by al-Mutanabbi chosen by Āzād and for which he suggests ‘remedy’ then follow.

Envoi

Given that Arabic and Muslim culture were losing ground in the late 1190s/1770s, Āzād’s decision to write the Shifā’ al-‘āhil at an advanced age—he was eighty at the time—must be seen as his attempt to contribute to a revival of Arabic letters in India and perhaps also, as I have suggested elsewhere, as a plea for strong remedies all around. 58

A full evaluation of this fascinating late twelfth/eighteenth century Indian work will accompany the critical edition I am currently preparing. It is true that it is a commentary on al-Mutanabbi, and a super-commentary on al-Wāhidi (and Ibn Jinnī and others), but it is, I believe, more than a backward glance from the ‘age of decline’ to a ‘golden age’. It
is, rather, evidence of an accomplished and inventive poet in dialogue with one of his illustrious predecessors, someone who is a predecessor precisely because Àzâd sees himself as part of the very same Arabic literary tradition.

Acknowledgements

I offer Roger Allen, an inspiring teacher and mentor, this preliminary article on the Shifâ’ al-‘alîl as an addendum to the response I gave to the question, ‘How decadent was “the period of decadence”?’ which he set as part of my Master’s examination in Arabic literature twenty years ago.

My work on Àzâd has benefited from a Mellon Foundation New Directions Fellowship, and an American Institute of Indian Studies Fellowship funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities through Fellowship Programs at Independent Research Institutions; from the generosity and good will of many scholars in India, in particular Professor Thirumal Rao at the Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute, Hyderabad; and, as always, from the patience and indulgence of Parvine, Maryam and Asiya.

Notes

10. Several decades ago, Carl Brockelmann, Geschichte der arabischen Literatur, rev. ed., 2 vols, 3 suppls (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1943–49) [hereafter GAL], recognised the need to acknowledge the geographical (and temporal expanse) of the Arabic and Arabophone world: for the period up to 1258, he divided the material by literary genre, but for the period after he did so by region.


17. On the Bilgrāmis, see al-Swani, ‘Introduction’, 3, and Zarqani, Gulam ‘Ali, 28–31. Bilgrām and neighbouring areas, e.g. Qannwāj, were home to numerous important Arabic scholars.


21. Azad is also a highly regarded Persian poet. For some lines translated into English, see Simon Digby, Sufis and Soldiers in Awrangzeb’s Deccan, Malfuzat-i Naqshbandiyya (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 172–3.


30. The closing discourse of the Subḥat al-marjān’s third section summarizes the entire preceding discussion in a hundred-couplet poem modelled, he says, on those of Saft al-Dīn al-Hilli (d. 750/1349), Ibn Hīja al-Ḥamawī (d. 837/1434), and others.


32. There is some analysis of A¯z’s poetry in Zarqānī, Ghulām ‘Alī, 90–133. For the Maẓhar al-barakāt, see the introduction to Maẓhar al-barakāt, ed. Muḥammad Fadl al-Dīn, doctoral thesis, Osmania University, 1980.

33. For access to these manuscripts, I am indebted to Prof. Jayadhir Thirumal Rao, Dr Rafat Rizwana and K. Shridhar at the OMLRI; to Dr A. N. Reddy, Dr Unyal and Dr Syeda Aṣfia Kauser at the Salar Jung Museum; to Prof. A. R. Kidwai (Aligarh) and Dr Naem Urrahman Siddiqi at Nadwat-ul-Ulama; and to Dr D. K. Rana and Dr N. C. Kar at the National Manuscript Mission.

34. Shīfā’ al-‘alī, MS Dāvwāwī 1113, folio 2r, line 2.


36. Suhrawardy and Ahmad, ‘Notes’, cxxii.

37. E.g. GAL Suppl. 1, 941, cites Suhrawardy and Ahmad, ‘Notes’, for ʾiṣlāḥ, but GAL Suppl., vol. 2, 600, cites it for ʾištīlāḥ.

38. Ahmad, Contribution, 473; Suhrawardy and Ahmad, ‘Notes’, 101.


40. E.g. Shīfā’, 57, line 2; cf. 67, line 2 (for ʾiṣlāḥ).

41. E.g. al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Shīfā’ al-ʾalī ṣahīl al-fiqh; Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Mahālī (d. 674/1275), Shīfā’ al-ʾalī ṣahīl al-fiqh; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), Shīfā’ al-ʾalī ṣahīl al-taqdīr wa-l-ṣaḥl.

42. See GAL Suppl. 2, 422.

43. Published in Beirut, 1972–73.

44. Published in Cairo, 1895–96.

45. Shīfā’ al-ʾalī ṣahīl al-taqdīr wa-l-ṣaḥl, Daiber Collection II, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, MS 115; cf. GAL Suppl. 2, 773.


47. See ʿĀzād, Subḥat al-marjān, vol. 2, 32, for an early comment on an error in a line by al-Mutanabbī. On al-Mutanabbī, see Larkin, Al-Mutanabbī, and the bibliography cited there (131–4).

49. Shīfā’, 2, line 9; 2, line 11.

50. Shīfā’, 3, line 2.

51. Shīfā’, 3, line 3.

52. Shīfā’, 3, line 10 to 4, line 3.


54. Shīfā’, 13, line 4; 44, line 2.

55. Shīfā’, 40, line 8.

56. Shīfā’, 92, line 2; 122, line 8 to 124, line 10 (with commentary to 125, line 11); 132, line 8 to 134, line 2.


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