

Organizing, Presenting, and Reading Sexual Knowledge: The Abbasid Context of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*

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Abstract

The oldest surviving erotic manual in Arabic, *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, is characterised by a mix of medical and technical advice, interspersed with entertaining stories, hadith, poetry and historical anecdotes. In this article, I survey the organization of information in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* and discuss its contribution to Arab-Islamic scholarship. I argue that the author and his intended readers lived in the second half of the fourth/tenth century. The organization of sexual knowledge was part of the scholarly pursuit to organize the massive amount of pre-Islamic scholarship translated into Arabic during the Abbasid caliphate as well as the growing body of Arabic-Islamic scholarship. Although the presentation of this knowledge varies in the extant manuscript copies of the book, which were written for later audiences, all manuscripts share some basic tools for navigating the content, which suggests that the author made efforts to make it accessible for readers.

Keywords

Adab – Buyids – erotic literature – encyclopaedias – *ʿilm al-bāh* – medicine – sexuality

Introduction

The oldest surviving erotic compendium in Arabic, *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* (Compendium of Pleasure) contains citations from late antique and early Islamic literature on sexuality written in Greek, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit, which, apparently, circulated in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries in the Abbasid Empire. It relies on several, otherwise lost, Abbasid sources mentioned in the *Kitāb al-fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm, some of which are not mentioned in later erotic works. There are also several references to, and citations from, texts translated from Greek and Persian, which are not found elsewhere.¹ The content of the compendium indicates that it was part of the scholarly pursuit to organize the massive amount of pre-Islamic scholarship translated into Arabic during the Abbasid caliphate, as well as the growing body of Arabic-Islamic scholarship, with the intention of making it accessible for non-specialist (but elite) readers.² The compendium is available today only in a few extant manuscript copies, despite the fact that it was considered an important book for centuries and had a significant impact on later sex manuals and erotic literature.³

1 For example, the compendium cites medical texts attributed (most probably falsely) to Aretaeus of Cappadocia and Galen not found elsewhere; see Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, and eadem, *Discussing Ghayra*.

2 This scholarly pursuit was characteristic for the fourth/tenth century; see Weaver, Osti and Rudolph, *Putting the House of Wisdom in Order*.

3 Rowson points out that it contains “almost all the themes and particular concerns of the entire erotic tradition” and that several later works are indebted to it (Arabic, 49). I am aware of seven pre-eighteenth century manuscript copies, four of them complete. There are also at least three manuscripts copied in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and a few that I only know from catalogue listings and cannot confirm at this moment. There is an unscholarly but useful translation of the whole compendium (although with omissions and abbreviations). There is also an edition of a single manuscript, attributed to ‘Alī b. ‘Umar al-Qazwīnī who died in 675/1277. The editor seems unaware of the fact the manuscript only covers the second half of the book and that (extant) manuscripts were copied a century or so before the life of this author. There are two other editions that I have not been able to see yet, both attributed incorrectly to the same author. As this is the name given as author of two manuscript copies of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo, I assume that the editions are based on one or both these manuscripts. One of them, MS L ‘Arabī 9435, covers the second half of the book and was copied in 1925; the other, MS L Ṭibb ‘Arabī 3156 is a modern copy of MS Chester Beatty 4635 (a beautiful but corrupt manuscript). The same name is written on a new title page of MS Chester Beatty 4635 (the original title page is lost), which was located in Cairo before it was brought to Dublin (see below). However, the name given in Arberry, *A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts* [in the Chester Beatty Library], 6, 42, is Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib (fl. fourth/tenth century).

Except for the name written on most manuscripts, the identity of its author is not known and the compendium itself is not mentioned in bibliographies or other works (as far as we know) before the sixth/twelfth century. However, as I will argue in this article, there are good grounds for assuming that the work was composed in Baghdad under Būyid rule, that is from the middle of the fourth/tenth century to the beginning of fifth/eleventh century, when other similarly voluminous and well-organized works were composed in Arabic. Although there is not enough evidence to determine the origin of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* with certainty, there are strong indications that it was written in the middle or towards the end of the fourth/tenth century. In addition to the work's content, one indication is the peculiar and measured organization of the material, and the deliberate synthesizing of information from various disciplines and languages. Another is the attempt to guide the readers through the content with the help of tools that assure near "random access."⁴ The layout and presentation of the content vary somewhat between the extant manuscript copies, and, as the oldest preserved manuscript was written in the early sixth/twelfth century, it is not possible to establish with certainty how the book looked at the time of the author.

Jawāmiʿ al-Ladhdha: Author and Audience

The Compendium and Its Sources

Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha is sometimes given the English translation "Encyclopedia of Pleasure." While the use of the classification "encyclopaedia" in the title is probably unintentional, *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* could in fact be classified as an encyclopaedia in the sense of a comprehensive inventory of a single subject, sexuality, as it is described and explained in different disciplines.⁵ The restriction to a single subject sets it apart from the *adab* encyclopaedia, as defined by Hilary Kilpatrick. It aims at presenting knowledge for cultured men, but unlike

4 I use the metaphor of "random access" as suggested by Johannes Thomann in his contribution to this Special Issue. The metaphor comes from computer science, as in Random Access Memory. The point is not that one accesses information at random, but that one can find desired information without (much) sequential reading, thanks to the presence of finding devices. The access is random from the point of view of the memory itself, or, in this case, the book.

5 The first to use this title, I believe, is Salah Addin Khawwam, who wrote an introduction to the book, and, together with Adnan Jarkas, made an abridged translation in 1977. For the different understandings of the concept of encyclopaedia, see Weaver, *What Wasn't an Encyclopaedia in the Fourth Islamic Century?*

the adab compendium, the knowledge presented is not necessarily “the basic knowledge” that cultured men were expected to possess.⁶

The title *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* is not mentioned in any bibliographical work (to my knowledge) before Ḥajjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1657). He catalogues one work called *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*, without giving the author or any further description, and another work called *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhāt*, attributed to “the well-known” Abū Naṣr Maṣṣūr b. ‘Alī al-Kātib al-Samānī.⁷ The latter is a large book, according to Ḥajjī Khalīfa, with “polished style and fine organization” (*ḥasan al-sabak wa-l-tartīb*).⁸ The two titles most probably refer to the same book, as they are both used on the extant manuscripts, even though *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* is the more common.⁹ This is quite puzzling, considering that the work was copied at least from the twelfth century onwards — as evidenced by the extant copies themselves. It is mentioned by later authors of works on sex and/or love, some of whom quote it extensively.

One of the earliest references to *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* is by the rather obscure but prolific ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Naṣr al-Shayzarī (fl. sixth/twelfth century), who apparently lived in Syria.¹⁰ He occasionally refers to *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* in his book on love, *Rawḍat al-qulūb wa-nuzhat al-muḥibb wa-l-maḥbūb*, as well as his book on sexual medicine and aphrodisiacs, *al-Īḍāḥ fī asrār al-nikāḥ*. A contemporary scholar, the physician and mathematician al-Samaw’al b. Yaḥyā al-Maghribī (d 570/1175), maintained that *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* is one of the most efficient books for recovering men’s sexual desire in his sex manual *Nuzhat al-asbāb fī mu’āsharat al-aḥbāb*.

In any case, *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* seems to have been part of the fourth/tenth-century pursuit to gather and organize information taken from a wide range of sources. These sources were presumably shorter treatises on sex from various genres (such as medicine and *adab*, as well as translated texts from various disciplines). The word *ladhdha* in the title sets the tone: sexuality is something entirely positive, the main source of pleasure, and “sexual pleasure” is perhaps the most prominent theme. There is no classical Arabic word that correspond exactly to the term “sexuality”; the closest term would be *bāh*, meaning coitus

6 Cf. Kilpatrick, *The Adab Encyclopaedia*.

7 Ḥajjī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 1, 611 and 1, 571.

8 Ibid., 1, 571.

9 All Istanbul manuscripts have the title *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* on their title pages as well as in the main text, whereas the two premodern copies that have been kept in Cairo (including Chester Beatty ar4635), have *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdha* on the title page. The title page of Chester Beatty ar4635 is new; in the colophon, the title is rendered *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhāt*. Both *Jāmi‘ al-ladhdhāt* and *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdhāt* are found in T.S. 259, in and next to the colophon.

10 Biesterfeldt, ‘Abd-Al-Rahman Ṣayzari.

(and, sometimes, sexual potency).¹¹ The work has therefore been classified as belonging to the discipline of *ʿilm al-bāh*, “science of coitus.”¹² This classification is too limited however, as only parts of the content of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* can be defined as belonging to *ʿilm al-bāh*, in its strict sense as a medical discipline.

In the third/ninth century, *ʿilm al-bāh* emerged as a subfield of medicine, based on Greek sources and in medical literature from the third/ninth century onwards, books on sexual medicine were called *kutub al-bāh*. The primary model for this field was a monograph on sexual intercourse by Rufus of Ephesus (fl. C. 100), translated into Arabic under the title *Kitāb al-Bāh* (Book on coitus).¹³ The earliest texts written within this discipline dealt primarily with the effect of sexual intercourse on health and provided remedies for sexual dysfunctions. Already, the second/eighth century alchemist Jābir b. Ḥayyān is credited with a book on coitus, and several later medical treatises with similar titles were written by physicians and authors close to the Abbasid ruling elite: Jibrīl b. Bukhtishūʿ, Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, al-Kindī and Qusṭā b. Lūqā.¹⁴ Although he does not cite these authors, it is obvious that the author of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* collected the medical content from these or similar works on *bāh* that circulated in the ninth/third and early ninth/fourth centuries, most of which are lost.

In addition to medicine, the compendium relies on *adab* works with erotic content that circulated in this period but are now lost (except for the citations or paraphrases in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*). Several such works are mentioned in the *Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm, for example by Abū l-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī (213-275/828-888), a court astrologer, poet and drinking companion of the caliphs al-Mutawakkil and al-Muʿtamid.¹⁵ Among the titles attributed to him in the *Fihrist*, there are works on tribades and passive sodomites, *Kitāb al-Saḥḥaqāt wa-l-baghghāʾin*, and masturbation, *al-Khaḍkhaḍa fī jald ʿumayra*. Abū Ḥassān al-Namlī, also a drinking companion of Caliph al-Mutawakkil, wrote a treatise on tribadism (*Kitāb al-Saḥq*) and passive sodomy (*Kitāb al-Bighāʾ*), as well as

11 It seems to denote “sexual potency” rather than “coitus” in chapters on pharmacology in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* (see below).

12 For example, by Ḥājji Khalifa, *Kashf al-zunūn*, I, 218-219.

13 For Rufus’ lost book on coitus in Arabic, see Ullmann, *Medizin*, 75. For the genre, see ibid., 193-198, and Bos, *Ibn al-Jazzār on Sexual Diseases*, 250-253. Ullmann treats this genre together with later erotic handbooks and compendia, however, which are not the same (although ideas from the genre of *ʿilm al-bāh* normally were included in erotic handbooks).

14 Sezgin, *GAS*, III, 223 (Jābir), 226-7 (Jibrīl); Ullmann, *Medizin*, 123 (al-Kindī) and 194 (Qusṭā).

15 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, I, 467-469; see also Pellat, Abū l-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī.

a book named after the two (female) protagonists, Burjān and Ḥabāḥib, on “women and coitus.”¹⁶ The latter belong to what Ibn al-Nadīm classifies as “titillating stories” on coitus, in a section in the *Fihrist* listing thirteen book titles. Among others, we find the stories about *Bunyāndukht* and *al-Alfiyya* (one large and one small book) which are both mentioned in *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*, the former cited extensively.¹⁷

The author of *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* also compiles sources, translated from Greek, Persian and Sanskrit that are not mentioned in the *Fihrist*, such as the paraphrases of *Kāmāsūtra* attributed to al-Hindī. Typically, material from diverse sources is assembled within single chapters, probably with the intention to absorb them into a single discourse, and the chapters are arranged according to topic, not discipline (as shall be explored below). The author’s voice is occasionally heard, giving the compendium a personal touch.

Much of the knowledge provided by *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* is complex, such as the descriptions of physiological processes taken from Greek, Arabic and Indian medicine. There are also several chapters on pharmacology, with complex recipes that probably required some medical knowledge, as well as financial means, as many of the ingredients seem to have been rare and expensive. The author shows familiarity with the Islamic sciences, quoting hadith and *āthār* and referring to Sunni as well as Shi‘i authorities, which suggests the Būyid period as time of composition. Part of a chapter on heterosexual relations is devoted to temporary marriage (*mut‘a*) and relies on Shi‘i sources.¹⁸ The author has obvious knowledge of the Arabic lexicographical, historical and poetic traditions, and quotes numerous anecdotes and poems that we also find in *adab* compilations. Much of the poetry belongs to the genre of *mujūn*,

16 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, I, 469; Rowson, Arabic, 47-48. The names are vocalized as *Bardān wa-Ḥabāḥib* in Fu‘ād Sayyid’s edition of *Fihrist*. In *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*, which contains the oldest surviving citations from this story, the most common way of spelling these names are *Burjān* and *Ḥabāḥib*.

17 *Bunyāndukht*, vocalized *Banyān dakht* in Fu‘ād Sayyid’s edition of *Fihrist*, II, 345, is cited frequently in *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*. *Al-Alfiyya* is spelt *al-Akfiyya* in the same edition, based on two manuscripts. In a third manuscript, however, the name is spelt *al-Alfiyya*, noted by the editor in a footnote, and which must be correct. I thank the anonymous reviewer for making me aware of this point. In the fifth/eleventh century, the book was known as *Alfiyya wa-Shalfiyya*; see Khaleghi Motlagh, Azraqī Heravī; also Tašköprüzade, *Miftāḥ al-sa‘āda*, I, 326.

18 He refers explicitly to the followers (*shī‘at*) of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; ms Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 51b and cites mainly, but not exclusively, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth imam according to Twelver Shi‘a. Although influential Islamic scholars (such as Ibn Jurayj, d. 150/767) permitted *mut‘a*, all Sunni Schools of Law considered it forbidden. By the third/ninth century, it had become a dividing line between Sunnis and Shi‘is (Heffening, *Mut‘a*).

which was popular under the Būyids (as well as before). He is also acquainted with the Greek, Persian and Indian writings that were translated into Arabic during the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, not least medicine and erotology. Some of the medical and philosophical citations appear to be misunderstandings, if not corrupted during transmission, which indicates that the author was not a trained physician or natural philosopher. Towards the end of the chapter on marriage, his main argument in favour of temporary marriage turns out to be that the marriage procedure is easy and quick and that it is safer than illicit relationships, revealing his pragmatic attitude to religion. He warns men not to take mistresses other than *qiyān* (female singers and musicians), who were slaves or freed slaves, as free women have fathers, husbands or brothers who can pose real dangers to lovers; he provides some gruesome examples.

The Author and His Readers

The author alternates bawdy, and often blasphemous, poetry and prose, with complex philosophical and medical theories and religious verdicts. The ease with which he does this, together with the pragmatism described above, seems to be due to the intellectual environment of the Būyid period.¹⁹ It is noteworthy, however, that the poet Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (330-391/941-1001) is not quoted, although some of his obscene poetry (called *sukhf*) would fit well into the Chapter on the Virtues of the Penis and the Vagina, which is replete with descriptions of the genital organs, taken from Umayyad and Abbasid poetry.²⁰ Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, who was popular, albeit controversial, during his own lifetime, socialized with the ruling elite; if the author of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* was his contemporary, he should have been familiar with his poetry.²¹ Ibn al-Ḥajjāj is quoted in contemporary and later anthologies; anecdotes about him and his poetry are mentioned by the famous Buyid writers Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (315-411/927-1023) and al-Thaʿālibī (350-429/961-1038).²² This suggests that *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* was composed before *sukhf* became generally popular among the cultural elite.

19 Cf. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*.

20 This chapter includes poetic descriptions of the male and female genital organs by, among many others, the early Abbasid poets Bashshār b. Burd, Abū Nuwās, Abū Ḥukayma (d. 240/854, famous for his *ayrīyyāt*), and the somewhat later Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 283/896), as well as the philologist al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898).

21 Antoon, *The Poetics of the Obscene*.

22 Ibid., 7-8.

In most extant manuscripts, the name of the author is rendered Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib.²³ Ibn al-Nadīm mentions an author with this name in the *Fihrist*. His father was a Christian physician and he died 377/987.²⁴ This author seems to have been a secretary in the Būyid administration, as indicated by the title *kātib*, and he wrote books addressed to people who wanted to make a career close to the ruling elite, as indicated by the titles: *Iṣlāḥ al-akhlāq* (Improvement of Character), *Adab al-sulṭān* (The Etiquette of the Sovereign), *Kitāb al-barā’a* (The Book of Excellence or The Book on Eloquence), and *Suḥbat al-sulṭān* (The Book of Keeping Company with the Ruler). In addition to these titles, he wrote other books that he probably did not finish, according to Ibn al-Nadīm. In the Arabic version of *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Carl Brockelmann suggests that Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib was the son of Naṣr b. Ya‘qūb al-Dīnawārī who lived in the first half of the fourth century AH and wrote a book on gemstones in Persian that is quoted by al-Bīrūnī.²⁵ Naṣr b. Ya‘qūb al-Dīnawārī also wrote a book on sexual intercourse (*Kitāb al-Jimā’*), according to the Cairo-based scholar al-Mughulṭāy (d. 762/1360), who quotes him in his book on martyrs of love.²⁶ If al-Mughulṭāy was right, ‘Alī b. Naṣr must have relied on his father Naṣr b. Ya‘qūb to a certain degree, but added newer material, as the latest person quoted in *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* is Ibrāhīm b. Hilāl al-Ṣābi’, director of the palace chancery at Baghdad from 349/960, who died 384/994.²⁷ Interestingly, Ibrāhīm’s grandson, the bureaucrat and historian Hilāl al-Ṣābi’, mentions another Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Naṣr who was a *shāhid* (reliable for his Arabic), and died on the East Side of Baghdad in 391/1001.²⁸

In the introduction, the author explicitly addresses the intelligent (*labīb*) and fashionable man (*ẓarīf*), who will use the knowledge conveyed in this

23 This is the name written on five of the seven premodern manuscripts available to me; two give a slightly different name. In the Cairo MS Ṭibb ‘Arabī 556, the author’s name is rendered on the title page as Abū Naṣr b. ‘Alī al-Kātib. Chester Beatty 4635 has the name ‘Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib in the text (fol. 65a) but Abū Naṣr ‘Alī al-Kātib al-Qazwīnī written on the title page, probably added in the nineteenth century CE.

24 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, I, 406. This author is suggested by Rosenthal (From Arabic Books and Manuscripts, 31, and Fiction and Reality). Rowson (Arabic, 48) also suggests that the author lived in the fourth/tenth century.

25 Brockelmann, *Ta’rikh al-adab al-‘Arabī*, III, 142-143.

26 Al-Mughulṭāy, al-Wādiḥ al-mubīn, 29, 33, 69. I owe this reference to Everett Rowson, personal communication.

27 Osti, Hilāl al-Ṣābi. See Khawwam’s introduction to his translation of *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, 39. The author of *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha* claims that Ibrāhīm b. Hilāl al-Ṣābi’ participated in a debate on the merits of girls and boys as sex partners; MS Aya Sofya 3836, fols. 69a-b.

28 Ṣābi’, *Ta’rikh*, 439. I owe this reference to Everett Rowson.

work in order to distinguish himself from common people (*al-‘amma*), as they are overcome by their animal nature (*al-ṭab‘ al-bahūmī*).²⁹ The reader here is explicitly addressed as a *ẓarīf*, a polished man of the world, but the meaning of *ẓarīf* naturally changed over time and between different social groups. Al-Washshā’ (d. ca. 325/936-7), proposed that a *ẓarīf* should be chaste, which was obviously not the case with the readers of *Jawāmi‘ al-laddha*.³⁰ Considering the often provocative content, the compendium is possibly written for a subgroup of cultured men, not cultured men in general. This exclusive subgroup was supposed to use the knowledge conveyed by the book in order to distinguish themselves from “common people.” The provocative content is certainly meant to be humorous, but there is also an edifying ambition through the book, as it teaches sexual technique and etiquette. The author frequently emphasizes the importance of mutual satisfaction, while at the same time accentuating men’s privilege to choose sexual partners. The basis of its sexual ethics is male superiority, but the author is careful to point out that polite sexual behaviour is part of that superiority and a necessary ingredient of refined male identity. Male readers are taught how to focus on women’s pleasure without abstaining from their right to sexual promiscuity.

The Manuscript Copies of *Jawāmi‘ al-laddha*

The extant manuscripts of *Jawāmi‘ al-laddha* produced before 1800 that I have consulted are the following (in chronological order): Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, MS Aya Sofya [AS] 3836 (copied 533/1139); MS Fatih 3729 (582/1186), MS Aya Sofya [AS] 3837 (634/1236), Chester Beatty Library [CB], MS ar4635 (copied 724/1324), Dār al-Kutub, Cairo, Ṭibb ‘arabī [ṬA] 556 (copied 771/1369), Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Turhan v Sultan [T.S] 259 (copied 881/1476) and UCLA, Arabic Medical Manuscript Collection, MS UCLA 83 (copied 1051/1641).³¹ Of these manuscripts, only Fatih 3729, CB ar4635, TS 259 and UCLA 83 contain the whole book; AS 3836 covers the first half while AS

29 *Jawāmi‘ al-laddha*, MS Aya Sofya 3836, 1b-2a. For a translation of (part of) the introduction, see Myrne, *Beloved*, 222-223.

30 Washshā’, *Muwashshā*, 42. See Montgomery, *Ẓarīf*; Myrne, *Of Ladies and Lesbians*.

31 I have only been able to see the physical copies of some of these manuscripts, but the digital copies are, mostly, of good quality. In addition to these manuscripts, there are a few copies from the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Cairo (I have found three copied between 1858 and 1925). There is (or was) also a manuscript copied in 1310/1892 in al-Awqāf Library, Baghdad, that was looted and burnt in 2003. There are also at least two copies in Iran, one a copy of Ṭibb ‘Arabī 556, and another nineteenth-century copy; Dirāyatī, *FANKHA*, 10, 980.

3837 and ṬA 556 cover the second half. The places where these manuscripts were copied are not known (although there are suggestions written on some of the title pages), but we know something about their circulation. Four of the manuscripts were owned by Ottoman sultans and are now kept in Istanbul, at the Süleymaniye library (MSS AS 3836 and 3837, Fatih 3729 and TS 259). Two manuscripts, ṬA 556 and CB ar4635 were in Cairo in the early twentieth century. MS CB ar4635 was bought by Chester Beatty in 1935 and eventually brought to Dublin, and ṬA 556 is now in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo, together with some modern copies.³² The last manuscript, UCLA 83, was copied at a much later date than the others and circulated in Iran (probably Isfahan) in the early twentieth century under a different title.³³ It is likely that there are more extant manuscripts, as *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* evidently circulated with different names.³⁴

MS AS 3836 is the oldest known extant manuscript copy of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, copied in Shaʿban 533 (April 1139) by a certain Ibrahīm b. Muḥammad b. Ibrahīm al-Karbādhakānī, according to the colophon at the end of the manuscript. It contains the first volume of the book.³⁵ The copyist's *nisba* Karbādhakānī is an alternative spelling of Jarbādhqānī, the Arabic name of the town Golpayegan, in today's Isfahan Province.³⁶ The title page mentions "the Ḥakīmiyya hermitage (*ṣawmaʿa*) in Kāshān (Qāsān)," which is also located in today's Isfahan province and according to a later note, it was the place

32 MS CB ar4635, a very interesting copy, was sold to Chester Beatty by Aslan Sarkissian, trader in antiquities in Cairo; I thank Hyder Abbas for this information. One of the modern manuscripts in Cairo, Ṭibb ʿarabī L 3156, is a copy of CB ar4635, copied in 1274/1858.

33 The manuscript contains the book stamp of Dr. Caro Owen Minasian, who sold it to UCLA in 1968. The text of the stamp reads Isfahan 1935, but that is the date when the stamp was made, and the book could have been bought any date after that; <http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/brisman/item/8256>. Presumably, there are more extant copies with other titles in libraries in the Middle East.

34 The library of Paul Sbath, for example, contained an anthology copied 973/1565 with "obscene" works. The third of these works, with the title *Kitāb al-Nafāʾis fī ʿilm al-nikāḥ wa-l-ʿarāʾis*, is based on *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* (and two other erotic works) and attributed to Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Naṣr al-Kātib al-Baghdādī al-Nuʿmānī; Sbath, *Bibliothèque*, 111, 110 (no 1322). The manuscript is now lost (whereas Sbath's other manuscripts were either donated to the Vatican library or to Fondation Georges et Mathilde Salem in Aleppo; del Rio Sanchez, *Catalogue*, 336). Also listed by Brockelmann (*GAL*, II, 1032). The *nisba* al-Nuʿmānī is interesting, as one of the titles of "titillating" stories mentioned in the *Fihrist* is attributed to Ibn Ḥājib al-Nuʿmān. This book seems to have survived for some centuries, and was perhaps conflated with *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*. For this work, see also Rowson, Arabic, 48.

35 The copyist writes that he divided the book in two volumes (f. 122b). The table of contents at the beginning of the book includes the whole book, but the second volume is not extant.

36 Yāqūt describes it as a big and famous town close to Hamadhān; *Muʿjam al-buldān*, II, 46-47.

where the book was written.³⁷ The question is whether Kāshān is intended to specify the place where ‘Alī b. Naṣr wrote *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*, the place of transcription, or a place where the manuscript copy was collated. Kāshān was, like Baghdad, governed by the Būyids in the fourth/tenth century, and it is not impossible (although not likely) that the author wrote the compendium there. It is more likely that the location is where the work was copied. Kāshān was still a centre for Shiism under the Sunni Seljuqs and it was also known as a centre for learning in Arabic, famous for its scholars and calligraphers.³⁸

The same information — “composed in the Ḥakimiyya hermitage in Qāsān by Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib” — is written with gold ink on the title page of MS TS 259, which is similar to AS 3836, and could even be a copy of the latter. They contain the same tree diagrams, and the table of contents in MS AS 3836, which includes the chapters of the second half (missing in the text) — written with a later hand — reflects the chapter division of TS 259. TS 259 has a Persian origin, considering the name of the copyist and the marginal notes in Persian, some (at least) seem to have been added by the copyist.

Another manuscript that circulated in Iran is now in Los Angeles, MS UCLA 83. The book is attributed to Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib but the title is *al-Munākaha wa-l-ashyā’ allatī tuqawwī al-bāh wa-tuḍ’ifuhu*, a title that highlights the medical and pharmacological content of the book. In accordance with this perspective, an additional chapter is added with exclusively medical content — a second chapter on the harms of excessive coitus. A third Istanbul manuscript, AS 3837 is professionally executed albeit not as elegant as the other two and covers only the second half. The fourth Istanbul manuscript, Fatih 3729, which is the oldest extant complete copy, is less skilfully done, perhaps by an amateur copyist; the margins are often uneven and the number of lines irregular.

In addition to these copies, the final two manuscripts described here were copied in the eight/fourteenth century and circulated in Egypt, although the places of origin remain unknown. MS CB ar4635 is beautiful and professionally executed but relies on a corrupt copy. The chapter on heterosexual relations is missing and the chapter on lesbian love has been downgraded to a subchapter in the chapter on male homosexuality. This chapter, here called “the sodomite and the fornicator,” has been given a more prominent place. In contrast to the other manuscript copies, it is the first chapter of the second part of the book, preceded by a blank verso and recto. The Cairo manuscript TA 556 is also of

37 *Ṣawma‘a al-ḥakimiyya bi-Qāsān*; Qāsān was the Arabic name for Kāshān (cf. Calmard, Kāshān).

38 See Calmard, Kāshān. Around 1200 CE, an author describes “a community of organized Twelver Shi‘is” in Kāshān, “with distinct anti-clerical tendencies” (cf. Amanat, Kashan).

high quality and better preserved than CB ar4635. It has an illuminated title page, the name of the author in a *shamsa* and the title, highlighted in gold ink, in rectangular ornament. It is a large book (29.5×20 cm) and titles are highlighted in gold throughout the book. As the manuscript contains only the second part of the book, some of the more provocative material is omitted; the chapters on same-sex relations, for instance, and the long chapter on praising the genital organs, with its bawdy and sometime blasphemous poetry. The result is a somewhat more conservative book.

The division into chapters differs between the extant manuscripts. The four complete pre-modern manuscripts available to me contain between forty and forty-four chapters.³⁹ In a few cases, a chapter is divided in two and a section heading has become a chapter heading. There are a few additional chapters in some manuscripts, and one or two chapters are missing in others. One manuscript (AS 3837) lacks a whole quire, perhaps lost when rebound, and another (CB 4635) derives from a corrupt manuscript. MS UCLA 83, which is given a different title, still follows the basic chapter structure, but has added an extra chapter on the dangers of excessive intercourse. Overall, however, the chapter structure is relatively stable, although the exact wording of titles fluctuates. There are naturally minor variations in the texts, such as different readings of names, especially non-Arabic names. Major variations and interpolations occur especially in some pharmacological sections; it is not uncommon that copyists and readers add recipes in the margin, which become part of the main text.

Organization of Information in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha*

The following list of chapters is based on the majority of manuscripts; variants are noted in footnotes:⁴⁰

- 1) The terms for sexual intercourse (*nikāḥ*) and nicknames (*mā kuniya bihi*);
- 2) The merits (*faḍl*) and benefits (*manāfi'*) of sexual intercourse;
- 3) Discussion (*kalām*) on the causes (*'ilal*) of sexual intercourse;
- 4) The terms for the penis and the vagina;

39 MS CB ar4635 contains forty chapters, MS TS 259 forty-three and MS Fatih 3729 as well as MS UCLA 83 contain forty-four chapters. Both these manuscripts have divided a chapter in two, which explains the extra chapter. AS 3836 contains the first fourteen chapters. MS AS 3837, whose chapters are numbered, starts with chapter fourteen and ends with chapter forty-three. TA 556, whose chapters are not numbered, contains twenty-six chapters, starting with the chapter identified here as sixteen.

40 For another survey of the content of this erotic compendium, see Rowson, Arabic, 49-51.

- 5) The virtues (*manāqib*) of the penis and the vagina;
- 6) What is said about the natural constitution of the penis and the vagina;
- 7) The ways (*madhāhib*) lovers have intimate relations;
- 8) Man and woman (*al-fatā wa-l-fatāt*);⁴¹
- 9) Two men (*al-fatayayn*);⁴²
- 10) Two women (*al-fatātayn*);⁴³
- 11) Physiognomy;
- 12) Women's desirable external qualities;
- 13) Women's inner qualities (*akhlāq*) and who to choose among them;⁴⁴
- 14) What is said about women's sexual appetite (*shahwa*);
- 15) The Mālikī way (*madhab*);
- 16) Attracting women's affection;
- 17) Envois and messengers;
- 18) The rules of sexual etiquette;
- 19) Conversation and kisses;⁴⁵
- 20) The etiquette of lying in bed;⁴⁶
- 21) What strengthens sexual potency (*bāh*);
- 22) Drugs for sexual potency;⁴⁷
- 23) Foot ointments that stimulate sexual appetite;
- 24) What increases pleasure for the penis and the vagina;
- 25) The chosen times for coitus (*bāh*);
- 26) The circumstances in which sexual intercourse is pleasant;
- 27) Description of the abominable way and ugly sexual intercourse;⁴⁸
- 28) Types of sexual intercourse;
- 29) Mention of the healthy and harmful types of sexual intercourse;
- 30) The benefits of ritual ablution;
- 31) Prevention against pregnancy;⁴⁹
- 32) The harm of excessive coitus;

41 More precisely: "the young man and the young woman." This chapter is missing in MS CB ar4635.

42 MSS Fatih 3729 and UCLA 83 have divided this chapter in two, the first on two (young) men, and the second on masturbation (which is a subchapter in the other manuscripts).

43 This chapter has no rubric in MS CB ar4635, but is part of the preceding chapter.

44 In MS UCLA 83, this and the preceding chapter are merged.

45 After this chapter, MS TA 556 has a separate chapter on which inner qualities in men women prefer.

46 MS AS 3837 lacks a quire between this chapter and chapter twenty-four.

47 The following two chapters are omitted in MS TA 556.

48 The terms used here in most manuscript copies are *al-akhdh al-qabīh wa-l-nikāh al-shanī'* (except for MSS Fatih 3729 and AS 3837).

49 This chapter is not included in MS TS 2529 (and not in the table of contents in MS AS 3836).

- 33) Treatment of impotence and the disposition of the penis;
- 34) Stratagems used for coitus and its conditions;
- 35) Advice on coitus (*fatāwā l-bāh*);
- 36) Debates and answers;
- 37) Misspellings;
- 38) Jealousy;
- 39) Pimping;
- 40) The advantages of non-virgins over virgins;
- 41) Animal sexuality (*tanākuḥ* or *manākiḥ al-ḥayawānāt*);
- 42) The size of the penis and the vagina;
- 43) Miscellaneous topics.

Several chapters are devoted to topics from a single discipline. That is true of the several chapters covering topics in pharmacology. But the author's attempts to amalgamate the Arab-Islamic and pre-Islamic literature on sexuality is conspicuous in those chapters that treat topics that stretch across several disciplines. Already in the introduction, religious discourse blends with natural philosophy when providing a rationale for sexual pleasure. Simply put, the stated rationale is that God provided his creatures with sexual appetite (*shahwa*) and created sexual pleasure to make them reproduce. The aim of sexual intercourse is to populate the world, and therefore it has an elevated standing in all religions. The same idea is central in introductions to medical treatises by the four/tenth century physicians Ibn al-Jazzār and al-Majūsī, where it is expressed in a similar vein. Their source is Galen, as Gerrit Bos has shown, except that for Galen, the force behind sexuality is Nature (not God) and Ibn al-Jazzār has replaced Nature with the Creator.⁵⁰ In *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha*, in turn, the author explicitly uses the word God, giving ideas taken from Greek sources a religious frame. In the introduction, the author also explains the idea behind the mixing of genres in the compendium: "From the sexual sciences (*ʿulūm al-bāh*) we mention what the fashionable man (*ẓarīf*) needs and for which this book is required, and we embellish the chapters with beautiful prose and poetry (*maḥāsīn al-ādāb*)."⁵¹ *ʿUlūm al-bāh* is mainly, but not only sexual medicine, whereas the word *ādāb*, here translated "prose and poetry," includes all kinds of literary extracts that are found in *adab* compendia. The erotic compendium is therefore embellished with Qur'ānic quotations and traditions from early Muslim authorities, Arab and Persian sayings, historical anecdotes and, above all, poetry. In addition, *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* also contains

⁵⁰ Bos, *Ibn al-Jazzār on Sexual Diseases*.

⁵¹ MS Aya Sofya, 3836, 2a.

stories with explicit sexual content and a large amount of bawdy poetry, which are normally not found in *adab* compendia.

The first three chapters deal with sex in general from the perspective of prestigious disciplines: Arabic lexicography, Islamic tradition and Greek philosophy and medicine. The first chapter is merely a list of words without comment. Nevertheless, the long list of synonyms for sexual intercourse emphasizes its importance as a topic of study.

The second chapter summarizes the benefits of sexual intercourse according to two authoritative fields of knowledge — medicine and religious science. The title, *Faḍl al-nikāḥ wa-manāfiʿuhu*, uses two words with almost the same meaning, but from different disciplines: *faḍl* (merit) and *manāfiʿ* (benefits). It is no coincidence that these two synonyms are used; *manāfiʿ* and *faḍl* have different and distinct connotations that are in line with the project of the book. The term *faḍl*, as well as *nikāḥ*, meaning marital sexual intercourse, are connected to religious discourse, whereas *manāfiʿ* is used in medicine. The benefits of coitus is a common medical topic and treated in a separate chapter or section in medical compendia and treatises on sexual health. However, there the subject is usually accompanied by section on the “harms of coitus” (mostly caused by excessive sexual practice), whereas here it is complemented with its merits, multiplying its value and ignoring possible negative effects.⁵² The chapter contains statements from religious authorities, including the opinions of legal schools, philosophical reasoning and medical descriptions. With intriguing reasoning, the author argues that *nikāḥ* is the sixth property of the sensorial organs (the others being hearing, vision, smelling, taste and touch). In contrast to the other properties, *nikāḥ* is not essential. It is a surplus, a gift from God for the sake of enjoyment and pleasure. The pleasures of the other five properties are not complete if they do not lead to this sixth property, which gives the complete pleasure and the highest degree of happiness.⁵³ The *faḍl* of *nikāḥ* is thus underpinned by philosophical and religious evidence for the advantage of sexual activities, whereas the *manāfiʿ* are the health benefits of sex on the human body.

The third chapter, entitled *al-Kalām fī ʿilal al-nikāḥ*, begins with a philosophical discussion about pleasure and continues with a number of responses taken from the *problēmata* tradition. The word *ʿilla* (pl. *ʿilal*; cause) in the title is a philosophical Aristotelian term and was often used in early translations of

52 Compare, for example, with the title *Kitāb fī manāfiʿ al-bāḥ wa-maḍārrihi* by Abū Zakariyyāʾ Yahyā b. ʿAdī (d. 363/974); Sezgin, *GAS*, III, 303–304; see Celentano, *Due Scritti Medici di al-Kindi*, 18.

53 MS Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 4a.

Greek texts, in this case natural philosophy.⁵⁴ The word for intercourse, *nikāḥ*, provides an Islamic frame to its content, and the word *kalām*, here with the meaning discursive argument, is also commonly used for proving religious beliefs and could be translated theology.

Chapters four through six, which deal with the genital organs, incorporate the same disciplines as the three first chapters but add anecdotes and poetry. The lexicographical interest continues in Chapter four, *Asmā' al-dhakar wa-l-farj*, and its topic — the genital organs — is elaborated upon in the next chapter, *Manāqib al-dhakar wa-l-farj*. This chapter is one of the longest in the book and contains numerous short poems — most of them bawdy — humorous anecdotes and literary debates in the form of verbal duels, as well as physiological descriptions of the genitals. The title, again, alludes to more virtuous subjects, as the title *manāqib* is normally used for the virtues of the Islamic predecessors and Arab tribes. It may seem utterly provocative to use this term for praising the genitals, but it is in fact in line with the overall goal of the compendium, as we have seen in examples mentioned above.

Mujūn was indeed a beloved literary genre in Abbasid literature, but the high number of poetic descriptions of genitals and graphic erotic stories in this erotic compendium is quite unique.⁵⁵ The *mujūn* is part of the beautiful *ādāb* with which the author promises to embellish the book in the introduction (see above), possibly there to reward the readers for struggling through the many lengthy theoretical discussions. At the same time, the *mujūn* in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* is truly carnivalesque, for it subverts the dominant ideas cited in the book, especially those from Islamic and medical discourses, mocks high pretensions and exposes the vulgar and ugly aspects of human sexuality. Several humorous poems and anecdotes here and in other parts of the book are seemingly blasphemous, as when a penis is likened to a minaret or lesbian intercourse to congregational prayer.⁵⁶ In one remarkable prose poem attributed to Abū l-'Anbas al-Ṣaymarī (see above), lesbian women liken the beloved's vagina to phenomena taken from revered traditions, such as the heifer of Israel, Salomon's altar in Jerusalem and the she-camel of Thamūd.⁵⁷ The sixth chapter on the constitution of the genital organs, *Khilqat al-dhakar wa-l-farj*, comprises Greek medicine and natural philosophy.

54 Gardet, 'Illa.

55 See Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, chapter 5, for "vagina" as a poetic motif.

56 See Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, 115 and 151.

57 See *ibid.*, 156. Abū l-'Anbas started his career as a judge but later was a scholar and buffoon at the court of al-Mutawakkil.

Chapters seven through ten again contain a potentially provocative mix of Islamic legal opinions, poetry, anecdotes and medical explanations on the subject of sexual preferences (man-woman, man-man, woman-woman). The word *madhhab* is used in the title of chapter seven, *Madhāhib al-‘ushshāq fī l-mubāshara*, and again in chapter fifteen, *al-Madhhab al-mālikī*. In both these chapters, the word, meaning method or way, is also a play on the word used in the formal sense for School of law. The outcome is provocative, as some of the lovers described in chapter seven practice extra-marital sex and “the Mālikī way” is entirely devoted to heterosexual anal sex, a disputed topic among jurists.⁵⁸ Moreover, the practice of extramarital sexual relations (heterosexual or homosexual) is not condemned but presented as a possible alternative for those who wish to engage in it.

The mixing of Islamic, Persian, Indian and Greek discourses continues in the remainder of the book, also introducing Persian wisdom and erotic literature as well as Indian medicine and erotology. In chapter eleven, on physiognomy, Greek, Persian and Arab authorities are cited. Bunyāndukht, a prominent character in *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* and the protagonist of a Persian erotic story mentioned in the *Fihrist*, is introduced, as is an Indian source, called al-Hindī, who is an authority of the physiognomy of lovers.⁵⁹ Both appear again in chapter thirteen, on women’s characters (*akhlāq*), and chapter fourteen, on women’s sexual appetite, which also contains anecdotes, poetry, and erotic stories from the Abbasid period. The erotological material in this chapter is especially interesting, with an extensive paraphrase of book two of the *Kāmāsūtra* attributed to the same al-Hindī.⁶⁰ Al-Hindī returns in chapters sixteen to twenty, which make up a section on sexual etiquette derived partly from Indian erotology. Characteristically, the Indian source is accompanied by Bedouin women, famous early Arab Muslim women and men, Umayyad and Abbasid poets and Persian wise men and women, and Greek physicians, who together make up the unique body of sources of the erotic compendium.

58 Anal sex was a controversial topic and many jurists prohibited it. Ibn Naṣr defends it, arguing that it is a licit alternative to sodomy as well as something that women tend to enjoy. He claims that the Mālikī School endorses it, a belief that is not completely justified, according to Rowson, Arabic, 50.

59 For Bunyāndukht, see above. For the citations in *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*; see Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, 59-60 and 62-64.

60 Corresponding to *Kāmāsūtra* 2.1.1-9 (on perfect love couples based on the size of the genital organs). Other parts of Book 2 are cited indirectly in this chapter, especially chapter 2-9, on sexual technique. The title *Kāmāsūtra* is not mentioned in *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*, however. Instead, the paraphrases of *Kāmāsūtra* are attributed to al-Hindī in this chapter and to “Indian philosophers” in chapter 35, one of whom is named Adālaqī (?) in MS Fatih 3729 and AS 3837, corresponding to Auddalaki, in *Kāmāsūtra* 2.1.10.

Sexual technique is treated in more than one chapter, especially in chapter twenty-eight, which relies on lists of coital positions and couples by earlier authors, unfortunately anonymous, but also parts of chapters fourteen and thirty-four, among others.

Among the later chapters, chapter thirty-five, *Fatāwā l-bāh*, is particularly interesting. The term *fatwā* (pl. *fatāwā*), denoting a legal opinion in Islamic discourse, is here attributed the Persian, Indian and Greek pre-Islamic sources, that is explicitly non-Islamic knowledge. The chapter is divided into three sections, the first on Persian erotic wisdom and *mujūn*, dealing especially with the question of which genital organs are preferred by women and men, whilst the second and third sections deal with the question of female ejaculation. The second section presents a debate among Indian philosophers (quoted in *Kāmasūtra*) on whether women have semen and ejaculate or not.⁶¹ The third section contains extensive quotations attributed to the Greek physician Aretaeus of Cappadocia, who is claimed to have written on the issue of women's ejaculation and couple harmony based on the quality of the male and female sperm. The use of a legal term in the title is, again, a play with words, and the mix of serious topics with *mujūn* is typical of the book.

The amalgamation of different traditions is quite successful. For instance, medical discourse is incorporated in several chapters, such as physiological explanations of same-sex desire, and the Indian and Persian material is integrated with poetry and anecdotes from the Arab tradition. In this way, the author synthesizes ideas from Greek natural philosophy and medicine, Indian erotology and Islamic sciences to delineate a sexual ethics for the elite. The outcome is that cultured elite men (his readers) can choose to follow or not to follow legal rules concerning sexual relations, as long as they adhere to the basic principles of refinement, which are heavily inspired by Indian erotology, probably mediated by Persian texts.

Amalgamation of disciplines is also reflected in the choice of terminology. The different terms for sexual intercourse, of which the most common in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* are *jimā'*, *bāh*, *nikāh* and *nayk* are connected with specific discourses. The word *nikāh* is used extensively, especially in the chapter titles. This is the term for sexual intercourse within legal bounds (marriage and slave concubinage), whereas *jimā'* is more neutral and especially common in medical discourse. The word *nayk*, which today is definitely vulgar, is specifically, but not exclusively, used in erotic stories and bawdy poetry. The word *bāh*, which is especially employed in the medical chapters in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha*, is used in connection with medical expertise and practical experience. The

61 *Kāmasūtra* 2.1.10-30 (roughly).

author mentions “the predecessors in the science of coitus” (*al-mutaqaddimūn fī ‘ilm al-bāh*),⁶² who argued on physiological grounds that the penis is the most noble and beneficial body part. Others, called “the learned in the art of coitus” (*al-‘ulamā’ fī ṣan’at al-bāh*)⁶³ or only learned in coitus (*‘ulamā’ al-bāh*),⁶⁴ claimed that intercourse is particularly beneficial for pregnant and unwell women and therefore recommended men to have sex with their wives in these conditions. A group called “sexually experienced men” (*aṣḥāb al-bāh*) gave a similar recommendation, namely that men ought to have sexual intercourse with their wives after delivery as soon as postpartum bleeding ends, as it is extremely beneficial for female bodies.⁶⁵ It implies empirical knowledge about sex in a more general sense, as when “men with profound knowledge about sexual intercourse” (*al-buṣarā’ bi-ma’rifat al-bāh*), claim that “stealth” sex is the best, obviously not for its health effect, but because of the excitement of using a ruse.⁶⁶ The author uses a wider understanding of *bāh* when he refers to books on coitus (*kutub al-bāh*)⁶⁷ as a genre, and includes entertaining or titillating books, not only medical. He refers to Alfiyya, the female erotic character mentioned in the *Fihrist*, who is said to have written (or was the protagonist of) an “Indian book on coitus” (*Kitāb al-Bāh al-Hindī*).⁶⁸

Navigating Through *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha*

I have argued above that the organization of information in *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* is a deliberate attempt to synthesize knowledge from different disciplines and languages, intended for a fourth/tenth century reading public that defined themselves as “fashionable” and “intelligent.” These readers were not expected to read the book from cover to cover, and were aided by tools to navigate the text, so that they could, relatively quickly, find a particular topic. Quite possibly, paratextual elements, such as layout, colophons, red versus black ink, size of rubrics versus body text, and type of rubrication, were used to guide the readers. However, the oldest extant manuscripts were written in the sixth/twelfth century, so it is not possible to know how the layout was executed in the fourth/tenth century. What we can say is that the chapter-divisions are

62 *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*, MS Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 16b.

63 MS Fatih 3729, fol. 169a, on the menstruation cycle and when sexual intercourse with women is more pleasurable.

64 Ibid., fol. 156 b.

65 MS Fatih 3729, fols. 158a-b.

66 Ibid., fol. 158a.

67 One of the “books on coitus (*bāh*)” contains prescriptions for abortion; *ibid.*, 172a.

68 MS AS fol. 21b.

relatively stable and the chapter titles are concise and summarize the content well. That suggests something like this chapter division and the accompanying chapter titles were present from the beginning. In most manuscripts, they are easily detected.⁶⁹ In some manuscripts, the titles are preceded by ordinal numbers, but these seem to have been added later.⁷⁰ Most importantly, all manuscripts that contain the first half of the book have a table of contents after the introduction, neatly organized in two columns in the two sixth/twelfth-century manuscripts. It must have been present in the manuscript tradition before these copies were made and is also probably original. The table of contents extends over two pages, with the typical prolonged *bāb* highlighted in red on each line and the name of the title written below. There are no folio numbers written in the table of contents, however, and the readers would still have to leaf through the book to find the chapters. Yet, the table of contents, topical headings and visible rubrics (especially in the oldest manuscript, see below), allow close to random access to the content.⁷¹

Apart from the table of contents, the two oldest extant manuscripts represent two different models for execution of the book, which are followed, more or less, by the later manuscript copies. MS AS 3836 is an exclusive manuscript with elegant script, careful *mise-en-page* and twenty-five charts in the form of tree diagrams (*mushajjar*). The charts are simple, with only one set of branches, but are often placed after one another, which gives a striking impression. The copyist did not skimp on paper; there are plenty of blank spaces thorough the manuscript with its large, graceful section headings and indented poems, as well as plenty of space for the diagrams. It has a distinct, elegant table of contents after the introduction, in two columns and executed in red. The rubrics of the first chapters are highlighted in red lettering and therefore easily detectable. Moreover, AS 3836 has large rubrics, centred section headings and introduces poetry, statements and anecdotes (*qāla ...*) with the same, visually noticeable style, which facilitates quick serial access within the chapters. The poems are transcribed one verse per line, indented, or in two columns, often with a red dot separating the lines. The feature that catches the eyes most, however, are the tree diagrams, especially when they cover a verso and recto together, as they sometimes do. The charts highlight the erotological (and partly edifying) content of the book. Most tree diagrams are devoted to categorizing women, such as a striking section with successive

69 In the earlier manuscripts, chapter titles are centred and have bigger size.

70 The sixth/twelfth-century manuscripts, AS 3836 and Fatih 3729, do not have ordinal numbers, although numbers are added later in MS AS 3836. All other manuscripts have ordinal numbers, except for MS TA 556.

71 See Johannes Thomann's contribution to this Special Issue.

tree diagrams on a double folio spread categorizing the different types of women in respect of their sexual appetite and different ways of experiencing orgasm.⁷² Technical advice from the *Kāmāsutra* is summarized in several tree diagrams, extending over more than two double folio spreads: how to stir women's desire, and which parts of a woman's body should be kissed, (lightly) bitten, scratched, and so on.⁷³ There are also tree diagrams for the different types of men who prefer sexual relations with the same sex, as well as one of the most distinguishing features in the book, the ways people prefer to have intimate relationships (man-woman, man-boy, woman-woman). These charts are copied in MS TS 259 but absent in the rest of the manuscripts, in which the categories instead are displayed as words following each other without conjunctions. In some cases, the words are separated by dots.

The charts guide the readers to what can be considered a main interest of the book, the erotological material. It is possible they were added by its author. Most of the time, it is not possible to prove that they are part of the fourth/tenth century text. But there is one chart from the erotological section of the book, however, again in the chapter on women's sexual appetite, that is definitely original. When paraphrasing the sexual typology in book two of the *Kāmāsutra* where love couples are paired and named in accordance with the size of their genital organs, the author states that "we have illustrated this," followed by (in AS 3836) "and this is the place of the figure (*ṣūra*)."⁷⁴ The couples are then listed in three columns and two lines; the first line with matching combinations (stallion and elephant cow, bull and mare, hare and female gazelle); the second with the opposite (stallion and female gazelle, hare and elephant cow, elephant and mare).⁷⁴

Another device that is shared by several manuscripts are the lists of words with terms for sexual intercourse and genital organs. In both AS 3836 and Fatih 3729, the lists are striking and easy to find. In AS 3836, they are neatly written in four to six columns; in Fatih 3729 they are arranged in six columns with red dots between the words.

72 MS AS 3836, fols., 115b-116a.

73 *Kāmāsutra*, Book two, section two (ways of embracing), three (kissing), four (scratching with the nails), five (biting), seven (slapping) and nine (oral sex).

74 MS AS 3836, fol. 111a. The second line is corrupt, as there is no male elephant in the *Kāmāsutra*. Instead, the *Kāmāsutra* has three equal and six unequal couples, which makes sense. In order to have only three unequal couples, the author (?) had to introduce a new animal. The same in MS Fatih 3729 and MS TS 259, but in MS AS 3837, the editor/copyist has solved the error by reducing the unequal couples to two: pairs consisting of one partner with big genitals and one with small.

Compared with MS AS 3836, MS Fatih 3729 is less professionally executed, it contains more errors and the number of lines is uneven. It is more difficult to navigate in this book, there is less blank space, few section headings, and no tree diagrams. Instead, the copyist has highlighted the poetry, which is the most visible feature of the manuscript. The poetry is consistently arranged in two columns, and the poets' names, together with 'he' or 'she said' (the usual introduction to poems), are written in the margin on the recto (but in the text on the verso). These words function as bookmarks or section headings and make it possible to follow the poetry quoted in the compendium. If nothing else, this indicates that the poetry in the book was seen as a major point of interest for the readers of this particular manuscript.

Jawāmi' al-ladhdha, a Tenth Century Compendium

In this article, I have argued that the organization of the content in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* reflects the worldview of the author and his intended audience, and that this audience lived in the fourth/tenth century. The author states in the introduction that he has selected knowledge from the sexual sciences that "a fashionable man (*ẓarīf*) needs."⁷⁵ It is this knowledge that is provided in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha*, resulting in a summary of early Arab-Islamic learning and pre-Islamic intellectual traditions related to sexuality. The author apparently intended to synthesize sexual knowledge from different disciplines, Arab and translated, and present a modern sexual ethics for the elite, a pursuit that went beyond a mere presentation of "foreign" and Arab-Islamic knowledge. The chapter headings disclose what kind of erotic and sexual knowledge the sophisticated reader was supposed to be acquainted with. In some cases, they include words that are also used in the Islamic sciences, but here used for non-Islamic ideas. The result is sometimes irreverent, indeed provocative, but it is in line with an overall goal, namely to synthesize Arabic and non-Arabic traditions. The author's understanding of a *ẓarīf* is a man who is able to converse about science, philosophy and literature, Arabic-Islamic as well as ideas from translated Greek, Persian and Indian works, and who likes to spice up his conversation with burlesque, sometimes blasphemous, sexually explicit poems and anecdotes.

Furthermore, the author seems to argue that sexual knowledge is a mark of distinction, an idea that might come from early Indian erotology, to which he is indebted. As sexual appetite is an instinct that all creatures have in common,

⁷⁵ Ibn Naṣr, *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha*, MS Fatih 2a, MS Aya Sofia 3836 2a.

cultured men have to take control of it, be aware of it and refine it in order to distinguish themselves from animals and common people (*al-‘amma*), who do not have this capacity and therefore unconsciously follow their instinct. Taking control over that instinct does not mean restricting one’s sexual practice, but refining it, in order to achieve greater pleasure. When the author incorporates different fields of knowledge, the goal is not only to integrate different disciplines, “foreign” (Greek, Persian, Indian), Arab (pre- and early Islamic wisdom, poetry) and Islamic (early Muslim authorities) knowledge and make them accessible to an elite group of readers. The selection of exclusive knowledge also aims to strengthen their sense of superiority.

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