

# **"Being Careful with the Goddess: Yoginis in Persian and Arabic Texts"**

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## "Being Careful with the Goddess: Yoginis in Persian and Arabic Texts"

When the Italian traveler Pietro della Valle stopped at the western Indian city of Cambay in 1624, he took the opportunity to visit a temple outside of town which was the resort of many yogis. He was fascinated with their appearance and practices, and he continually sought them out during his tour of western and southern India. After describing them in detail in his memoirs, he added a long account of their practices:

They have spiritual Exercises after their way, and also some exercise of Learning, but (by what I gather from a Book of theirs translated into *Persian*, and intitl'd, *Damerdbigiaska*, and, as the Translator saith, a rare piece) both their exercises of wit and their Learning consist onely in Arts of Divination, Secrets of Herbs, and other natural things, and also in Magick and Inchantments, whereunto they are much addicted, and boast of doing great wonders. I include their spiritual exercises herein because, according to the aforesaid Book, they think that by the means of those exercises, Prayers, Fastings and the like superstitious things, they come to Revelations; which indeed are nothing else but correspondence with the Devil, who appears to and deludes them in sundry shapes, forewarning them sometimes of things to come. Yea sometimes they have carnal commerce with him, not believing, or at least not professing, that 'tis the Devil; but that there are certain Immortal, Spiritual, Invisible Women, to the number of forty [*sic*], known to them and distinguisht by various forms, names and operations, whom they reverence as Deities, and adore in many places with strange worship. . . . And of the Sciences of the *Gioghi* [jogi or yogi], and their spiritual exercises, especially of a curious way, rather superstitious than natural, of Divining by the breathing of a Man, wherein they have indeed many curious and subtle observations, which I upon tryal have found true, if any would know more, I refer him to the Book above mention'd, which I intend to carry with me for a Rarity into *Italy*; and, if I shall find convenience, I shall one day gratifie the Curious with a sight of it in a Translation.<sup>1</sup>

Della Valle's account of a Persian text on yoga, containing techniques for summoning feminine deities, and for divination by observation of breathing, is a striking curiosity. What Indian traditions of yoga does this book represent? Under what circumstances would books have been written in Persian on yogic techniques that include summoning female spirits? How would a translator prepare a Persian-reading audience for this kind of subject, and what kind of Islamicate categories would be used to present material such as yoga and feminine deities?

Della Valle was fluent in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, so his plan to translate the work from Persian into his native Italian might have yielded the first European study of an Islamic interpretation of yoga. It is remarkable that, despite his theological criticism of the yogis, he found their divination and breathing practices to be effective; in this respect his ambivalence matches that of several Muslim students of yoga. Unfortunately della Valle seems not to have fulfilled this translation project, for he only briefly discussed his collection of Oriental manuscripts in correspondence with European savants.<sup>2</sup> The Persian text just described was among the codices that he brought back with him to Italy; the list of his oriental manuscripts, donated to the Vatican in 1718 by della Valle's heir Rinaldo de Bufalo, it was described as "a book on magic, translated from the Indian into the Persian language."<sup>3</sup> This work is still preserved in the Vatican library.<sup>4</sup>

What was the origin of della Valle's text? The title that he gave appears to be quite garbled.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct the title of this text, from comparison of the six occurrences of the title in the manuscript with the description of another copy preserved in Islamabad: the original name must have been *Kamru bijaksa*, or *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*.<sup>6</sup> What is especially striking is that della Valle's copy appears to have been copied for his personal use in June 1622, two years **before** he arrived in India. This copy was made in the southern Persian city of Lar, where della Valle lingered for some months, engaging in scientific discussion and theological polemics with Persian Shi'i scholars.<sup>7</sup> In other words, this Persian treatise on yogic breathing and divination techniques was circulating independently in intellectual circles in Iran, from which della Valle learned of it and acquired a copy for himself. He was ready for the yogis before he arrived in India.

On the basis of content, it is more than tempting to connect this treatise to the yogic text most widely known in Islamicate circles, the *Amrtakunda* or *The Pool of Nectar*, a lost hatha yoga text known from an Arabic version which was twice translated into Persian, as well as into Ottoman Turkish and Urdu.<sup>8</sup> In fact, *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* was circulating independently in Iran, prior to the translation of *The Pool of Nectar*, since it was quoted in a fourteenth-century Persian encyclopedia (the *Nafa'is al-funun* of Amuli).<sup>9</sup> The practices described in della Valle's book, particularly divination by breath control, and the forty-odd female deities (clearly an inaccurate recollection of the sixty-four Yoginis) overlap significantly in content with chapters II and IX of *The Pool of Nectar*. An examination of della Valle's Persian manuscript bears out some of these assumptions. The text in fact contains a description of sixty-four female magicians (not forty, as he recalled in his memoirs) corresponding to the cult of sixty-four yoginis; their leader is called Kamak Dev, in whom we can recognize Kamakhya (Sanskrit Kamaksa) Devi, the fierce Tantric goddess of Assam, who is mentioned by Muhammad Ghawth Gwaliyari as a source of yogic teaching in his Persian translation of *The Pool of Nectar*. Other similarities include frequent reference to the water of life (8b, 18b, 19a, 20b, 23a, 28a), the rituals of oblation (*homa*) and mantra recitation (*japa*) (37b, 38a, 41b), the use of mandalas (38a, 40b), visualization of diagrams associated with the cakras, the sun and moon breaths (10b), five kinds of breath associated with the elements (11a), and the summoning of the yoginis, some of whose names are the same as those found in *The Pool of Nectar*. The main difference is that *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* provides at least ten times the number of examples, making it something like a large recipe-book for occultists.

An explicit link with *The Pool of Nectar* is suggested by a partial though untitled version of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*, found in a single manuscript.<sup>10</sup> This copy contains only material on divination by breath, corresponding to chapter II of the Arabic text of *The Pool of Nectar*, and it closely matches a section in della Valle's manuscript (11a-14a). It differs in being further subdivided into six sections: 1) incantations, 2) answering questioners, 3) predicting good outcomes, 4) the signs of death, 5) love and

hate, and 6) breath and positions. The first line of the manuscript begins abruptly by stating, "This is a copy of *The Ocean of Life* from the Indian (*hindawi*) language, and it was put into Persian. In the Indian language they call it *Ahrat* [i.e., *Amrtakunda*]." This comment suggests that the editor of this version recognized that *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* was closely related to *The Ocean of Life*, which was the title of the Persian translation of *The Pool of Nectar* by Muhammad Ghawth. While it is not possible at this point to be any firmer about the historical relationship between the different Persian translations, it seems likely that *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* represents some of the same yogic and divination traditions that are found in *The Pool of Nectar*, but here they are presented with considerable elaboration.

We do not, however, know the origin of this *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*. The title suggests a focus on the seed syllables, the fundamental units of the mantra, which play such an important part in yogic and tantric traditions. The allusion to Kamarupa in the title solidifies its connection with the mythical origin of esoteric knowledge, nominally associated with the region of Assam. Little information is provided by the author, except a constant refrain on the book's great importance.

Thus says the translator of the book: In India I saw many books with complete information about every science. Most of their books are in verse, because they memorize verse better, and one's nature inclines to it more. I found a book which they call *Kamru bijaksa*, which is one of their choicest books; they have great faith in this. It contains two types of science. One is the science of magical imagination (*wahm*) and discipline (*riyadat*); they have no kind of science that is greater or more powerful than this. On the basis of this science they affirm things that intellect does not accept, but they believe in it, and among them it is customary. For each of these things they adduce and show a thousand proofs and demonstrations. Regarding the subject of this science, this is a summary, which they have affirmed.

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

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

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

The translator speaks of information gathered from Brahmin informants, regarding practices such as employing the "greatest name (Persian *ism-i a`zam*)" of God (40b) and summoning the goddess Lakshmi for sexual

relations (43b), and he testifies to his own success in employing these techniques. In addition, on several occasions the translator cites another text, which he refers to "the thirty-two verses of Kamak Dev," which may have been a separately circulating text with similar contents.<sup>11</sup> He frequently emphasizes the verse character of the original, and several Hindi *doha* verses are quoted in Persian script (26b, 27a, 29a). The translator stresses the difficulty of the task of translation. "Then I rendered it from the Indian language to the Persian language, taking many pains, and it was read to a group of brahmins and scholars, and it was compared, corrected, and clarified (16a)." Despite this advertisement of scholarly authority, which makes suspicious use of the terminology of Arabic literary production, on other occasions the translator confesses that the material he is dealing with is more than obscure. After giving a lengthy Hindi passage in Arabic script, he remarks, "I presented these verses to a group of the scholars of India, brahmins, and jogis, and they could not explain it, but were incapable of understanding it, for the words are strange and difficult" (27a). Thus it is not clear to what extent *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* represents a single text or a selection from yogic verses available from oral sources but represented as scripture. The organization of the book is not entirely clear. The first part of the book is divided into four sections, on procedures for asking questions (4a), on reading thoughts (5b), on detecting the signs of death (6b), and on love and hate (8b). Then comes what appears to be a major division or iteration, a heading that reads in large letters "The Book of Magical Imagination, from the Writings of the Sages of India" (14b). Only two other section headings follow: one on breath and magical imagination (16a), and another on the yogini cult (30b), which occupies nearly the last half of the book.

How does this text relate to Islamic themes? *The Pool of Nectar* postulates that famous Indian yogis are the equivalents for Elijah, Jonah, and Khidr. *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* in contrast merely records the Hindi mantras transmitted by these three Muslim prophets, adding one more from Abraham. This text does, however, provide a new equivalence: the Sanskrit seed mantra *hrim* (invariably represented in Arabic script as *rhin*) now becomes identified with the Arabic name of God *rahim*, "the merciful." This is an interesting esoteric variant on the common pun on the Hindu and Muslim names for God, Ram and Rahim. The minor spiritual beings called "digit of the moon" (*indu-rekha*) in Hindi are rendered by the Persian term for angel (*firishta*) (53b). The text demonstrates an unselfconscious domestication of yogic practices in an Islamicate society. Among the breath prognostications, for instance, one learns to approach "the *qadi* [Islamic judge] or the *amir* [prince]" for judgment or litigation only when the breath from the right nostril is favorable. Casual references mention Muslim magicians, or practices that may be performed either in a Muslim or a Hindu graveyard (47b), or else in an empty temple or mosque (49b), and occasionally one is told to recite a Qur'anic passage such as the Throne Verse (Qur. 2:255), or to perform a certain action after the Muslim evening prayer. We even hear of a Muslim from Broach who successfully summoned a yogini and participated in the rites of her devotees (37a). The

text is provided with an overall Islamic frame, through a standard invocation of God and praise of the Prophet at the beginning:

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

Likewise at the end, a quotation of a hadith saying and some mystical allusions furnish a religious coloring for the magical practices (55a). These practices remain fundamentally ambiguous, however. "If one to whom this door is opened makes the claim, he will be a prophet; if he is good, he will be a saint; and if he is evil, he will be a magician" (55a). As a generalization I would like to observe that for the average Persian reader, the contents of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* fell into the category of the occult sciences, and its Indic origin would have only enhanced its esoteric allure. The text employs standard Arabic terms for astral magic (*tanjim*), the summoning of spirits (*ihdar*) (30b, 37b), and the subjugation (*taskhir*) of demons, fairies, and magicians.<sup>12</sup> Thus there would be a familiar quality about the text, even when these techniques are employed for summoning the spirits known in India as yoginis. The chants or mantras of the yogis are repeatedly referred to as spells (*afsun*), a term of magical significance. We also read of recognizably magical techniques such as one using a nail made from bone (51a) that is employed nefariously with a voodoo-type doll (51b). Another recipe uses a comb made from the right paw of a mad dog killed with iron, in rituals performed at a cremation ground (48b-49a).

The portrait of Indian wisdom or religion that emerges from the pages of this manuscript is eccentric. It rests first of all on the authority of Kamakhya, a goddess from Assam (Kamarupa) who is the stuff of legend. Here is an account of her:

Kamak is a spiritual woman who is long-lived, and the Hindus call spiritual beings *dev*. This Kamak Dev is in the city of Kamru, in a cave which is in the middle of the mountains. Her followers go into that cave, and some of them see her. Every day they send much food from that city, and they leave it by the door of the cave and go back. Another time when they go, they see nothing [remaining]. They say that the servants of Kamak have taken it, and this is true. I have seen many people who have gone to that place, and heard them confirm this. This much explanation is sufficient, so that this science will not be deemed worthless and viewed with contempt, because this is a great science. Now I, the expert, am engaged in clarifying it, and I will explain this whole science (10a).

Elsewhere he describes this cave as only accessible to magicians, and he gives its dimensions as one *farsang* by one *farsang*. "When someone enters that cave, he goes in darkness until he reaches the end of that cave. He sees lamps and a clean, fragrant, beautiful place (15a)." Kamru is described as a faraway land, "in an island at the end of India and in the midst of the China Sea," and it is the source of many exotic items of trade. The cave of Kamakhya is said to have a stone nearby that emits a white fluid (34b-



35a).<sup>13</sup> Kamakhya herself is cited as a source for various details of yogic practice. But the real point of her narrative is to get to the sixty-four yoginis.

The worship of the female deities known as yoginis seems to have been at its height in India from the 9th to the 12th centuries, but it continued in various places until at least the 18th century.<sup>14</sup> Vidya Dehejia has described at length the open-air yogini temples found at remote sites where these deities were honored.<sup>15</sup> *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* describes the yoginis as the key to knowledge of all things. At the beginning of the section on breath, we are told,

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

Furthermore, they say,

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

The knowledge the yoginis confer makes poison harmless, cures the sick, removes desire, and enables one to control all persons and things in the world. These "spiritual beings" (Persian *ruhaniyan*) are invulnerable to injury by sword or fire, their hair and nails cannot be cut, they hear from a distance and travel anywhere in an instant (23b). Each of the sixty-four yoginis has a particular spot in India, and they go to delightful places to enjoy themselves at feasts, dressed in gold and jewels, wearing crowns and wreaths, revered by the *devs*; they will never die, grow old, or get sick before the day of judgment, but all appear to be twenty years of age (30b-31a). These beings are in fact the principal objects of worship among the Hindus, who carve idols of them. "Just as we have prophets, saints, and miracle workers, so the Hindus have faith in them" (31a). Many of their names are given, though the Persian script leaves many ambiguities: Tutla, Karkala, Tera, Tara, Chalab, Kamak, Kalika, Diba, Darbu (31b), Antarakati (44b, 46b), Chitraki (56a), Ganga Mati (45a), Sri Manohar (45a), Katiri (30a), Parvati (49b), Suramati (44b), Susandari (44b), Talu (30a). Of course, as Vidya Dehejia has pointed out, no two lists of names of yoginis are the same. The essential thing is the canonical number of the groupings of yoginis into 7, 8, 9, or 64.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes adepts may have sexual relations with the yoginis (39a), at other times they regard them as sister and mother (46b). "She is the yogini and you are the yogi" (48a). Benefits of association with them include money (44b) and food (48b).

As a comprehensive description of Indian religious practices, a narrative limited to Kamakhya and the yoginis might seem a bit eccentric. Brahmins are mentioned, but only as occasional sources about *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* and its interpretation. This is clearly a narrow sample, but what is it based on? In terms of the categories that are available today, we could probably say that this text reflects practices of the yogini temple cult that are associated with Kaula tantrism.<sup>17</sup> There is also some connection with the Nath or Kanphata yogis, as indeed Matsyendranath is usually considered the



introducer of the yogini cult among the Kaulas, and the name of Gorakhnath is invoked once (51a) in the text.<sup>18</sup> Beyond that general indication, we find multiple strands of Hindu tradition popping up in an incidental fashion. The text assumes a system of nine cakras (yogic subtle centers) rather than the seven cakras current in many Nath yoga writings (19b, 20a, 25a).<sup>19</sup> Meditative exercises are given that concentrate on raising the *shakti* from the navel up the spinal column (17b, 18a, 28a). A standard list of supernormal powers (*siddhis*) is provided (54a).<sup>20</sup> Occasional mantras appear to contain the phrase "Krishna avatar" (48b, 53a). We are told of the temple of Mahakala in Ujjain where many *siddhas* or magicians are said to live (24b, 37a). The story of Shiva (Mahadev) and the churning of the ocean is related at length (31b-32b). Nothing is said about the animal sacrifices associated with the Assamese shrine of Kamakhya today. The basic teachings of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*, however, are use of breath for divination and the summoning of yoginis to obtain various goals; hatha yoga meditation is certainly linked to these practices.

From the point of view of the study of yoga, one of the most striking aspects of the text is the presence of numerous apparent representations of the Sanskrit alphabet, evidently made by a Persian copyist who attempted to draw these unfamiliar characters. Some of these are words and phrases that appear to be marginal notes incorporated into the main text, and by default they tend to resemble Arabic numerals in style. Others are Sanskrit letters intended for visualization, and these are painstakingly drawn in a large format. Instructions for visualization are as follows:

One takes this letter in the middle, and you draw this other letter, which they call *shakti*, up from the navel with magical imagination and thought, and bring it up, in such as a way that this letter and the first letter are in the same place. Imagine them in the center of the head and gaze at them with the heart (16b).

The copying of Indic script here stands in contrast with *The Pool of Nectar* tradition, in which Sanskrit mantras are only transliterated (with varying degrees of success) in Arabic script.

*The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* is certainly rich in the use of Indian terminology, but one term in particular presents a riddle. This is the Arabic-Persian term *wahm*, usually rendered as "imagination," which I have here translated as "magical imagination." This term is also crucial in *The Pool of Nectar*, where "magical imagination" forms the main topic of chapter VII. There it becomes a generic term for mental and magical powers. "It is called belief, certainty, opinion, magical imagination, thought, fantasy, and fancy, as a single thing is named by various words. . . Answered prayer, the influence of charms, talismans, the [divine] names, enchantment, soothsaying, and sainthood, all are [activated] by magical imagination, and that is the work of the heart" (VII.1). Normal Islamic discourse gives *wahm* the pejorative meaning of "illusion" or "prejudice," and *wahm* also has various technical meanings in Aristotelian philosophy as the "estimative faculty" (Lat. *aestimatio*, Gk. *sunesis*, *phronesis*) and "compositive imagination" (Gk. *phantasia logistike*). But *wahm* in the sense of "magical imagination" seems to presuppose a correspondence with some unstated Indic term, possibly *bhavana*, *dharana*, or *kalpana*. It is defined in *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* as "the knowledge of breaths" (16a), and in the

translator's introduction magical imagination is also linked with the term "discipline" (*riyadat*), which is the standard Arabic-Persian translation for yoga.

As for the larger question of the religious significance of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*, this remains ambiguous. The presence of Hindu goddesses in a text circulating in Muslim circles confounds one's expectations. Any acquaintance with the history of Islamic theology would lead one to conclude that spiritual practices involving goddesses would be anathema to Sufis whose religious loyalties lie with Islam. The celebrated incident of the so-called "Satanic verses," memorialized in the Salman Rushdie novel of the same name, refers to a reported incident where the Prophet Muhammad mistakenly allowed an invocation of the three principal goddesses of the Meccan pagans into the text of the Qur'an, although in the report this was later expunged. Regardless of the veracity of that account, it remains clear that multiple deities are not tolerable in any standard Islamic theology. Yet the sophisticated Neoplatonism of the Muslim Illuminationists in Iran (comparable to that of, say, the Christian Platonist Marsilio Ficino in Renaissance Italy) permitted the translation and assimilation of "pagan" themes, deities, and practices, without a sense of radical difference.<sup>21</sup> The same process of translation evidently took place among Muslims in India as well, with practical considerations being uppermost. Knowledge of divination and access to the female spirits called *joginis* (yoginis) was considered useful by Muslim rulers on military expeditions in Gujarat in the late sixteenth century.<sup>22</sup> In fact, there was probably more interest and engagement with yoga and divination on the part of Muslim rulers in any other sector of society, and in this respect the cultivation of feminine spirits held a place alongside astrology and other occult arts that might prove useful on the political and military scene.<sup>23</sup>

It is extremely difficult to make a firm line to divide religious practice from magic. The translator of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* drew freely upon Islamicate vocabularies related to magic, but for him there was no clear division between the status of the sorcerer and the saint. It is equally difficult to resolve the text into separate Hindu and Muslim elements. In this respect it may be compared with a Devanagari text on omens that Simon Digby has discussed; in his view, the text circulated in Muslim circles in western India, and was based on a Persian original, which was in turn derived from an earlier Jain work on omens. Based on the character of the omen predictions, Digby relates the text to "a non-courtly environment in which men were worried about questions of cultivation and undertaking improvements, about entering into business partnerships and circumventing the wiles of their rivals, about the pursuing of legal claims and the outcome of journeys, about whether they should enter into marriages and whether their sons would grow up and turn out well."<sup>24</sup> *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* has an equally complicated ancestry, but there is a certain overlap in terms of the kinds of concerns that it addresses. The translator of the text clearly had long experience with this ensemble of practices, which he regarded as being of great practical benefit. The divination practices by breath given here are just as terse and unpoetic as the omens in Digby's

texts, e.g., "If someone comes and says, 'I'm going to war,' or 'I'm going on a journey,' if his breath goes [from] the left [nostril], tell him to go, it is good" (4a). These practically oriented questions relate to sickness, death, war, social status, and the perennial uncertainties of life, and the text also provides practical methods to influence people and events, particularly in the first sections of the work. The methods of concentration and visualization provided particularly in the second half of the text imperceptibly move beyond generic magic to link with highly specialized esoteric traditions related to the yogini cult and hatha yoga. In this respect it could also be compared with the numerous handbooks of Arabic prayers compiled by Sufi masters and circulated among their disciples in 17th- and 18th-century India, which contained a similarly mixed array of objectives, ranging from the alleviation of illness to the attainment of advanced spiritual states. In both the yogic texts and the Sufi works, the mantric repetition of certain formulas a specific number of times is linked with the attainment of results. It would be worthwhile to translate some of these manuals, to bring out the range of practices and the particular sets of goals in different instances. In some cases, the large number of repetitions required of the practitioner indicates that one needed to make a serious commitment of long periods of time to perform these exercises. One might even suggest that this kind of meditative practice functioned for these readers much as computers and the Internet do for us today.

The translator of *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* surrounded this presentation with repeated impressive announcements about the secrecy and the supreme authority of the text. He did not, however, find that the content of the text in any way prevented him from writing in the Islamic religious conventions that permeate Persian literature. Nor, we may suppose, did the text present any ideological problems to the Shi'i scholars in southern Persia who had *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables* copied out for their Christian interlocutor Pietro della Valle. A text of this kind eludes the standard categories, perhaps because the religious concept that underlies it is practical and not concerned with doctrinal purity. The translator observed the parallelism between the function of "spiritual beings" such as the yoginis on the one hand and Sufi saints on the other. As his preface indicates, it is a larger natural theology that makes possible the science of yoga and "magical imagination" as a special revelation from God to the yoginis, for "whatever is in the earth and heaven is in the grasp of the children of Adam."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>*The Travels of Pietro della Valle in India*, from the Old English Translation of 1664 by G. Havers, ed. Edward Grey (London: Hakluyt Society, 1892), I, 106-8.

<sup>2</sup>C. Micocci, "Della Valle, Pietro," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1989), vol. 39, pp. 764-68.

<sup>3</sup>Ignazio Ciampi, *Della vita e delle opere de Pietro Della Valle il pellegrino* (Rome: Tipografia Berbèra, 1880), p. 181, no. 52.

<sup>4</sup>Ettore Rosse, *Elenco dei manoscritti persiani della biblioteca Vaticana*, Studi e Testi, 136 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1948), pp. 47-49.

<sup>5</sup>The title *Damerdbigiaska* given in the passage above is elsewhere transliterated as *Kamardinjaska*. The Italian edition of della Valle gives an alternate reading of the title as *Kamerdbigiaska*, "for thus the Persian copy has it, not being accurate in consonants or vowels" (ibid., I, 108, n. 2). The valiant effort of Lach and van Kley to see in della Valle's text a Jain treatise (*Damerdbigiaska* as a corruption of *Digambara*) is not convincing, though I am indebted to them for this reference to della Valle; see Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. III, *A Century of Advance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 658.

<sup>6</sup>Kamak Dev, *Kamar deni maka* [sic], MS 1957-1060/18-1, National Museum, Islamabad, containing six chapters, so cited by Munzawi, IV, 2178, title no. 3944, MS no. 11777. I owe the reconstruction of the term *bijaksa* to David White of the University of California at Santa Barbara. The similarity of the letters K, D, and U in a hastily scribbled Persian script helps to explain the confusion, along with the typical metathesis of S and K (*bijaska* in place of *bijaksa*) in the representation of Hindi words in Persian script.

<sup>7</sup>See Rossi, pp. 33-38, 44, 67-68, for della Valle's Persian texts on astronomy and religious disputation. These include (pp. 35-36) della Valle's own Persian translation of a Latin work on the astronomical theories of Tycho Brahe, composed by him in Goa in 1624.

<sup>8</sup>See my articles "The Islamization of Yoga in the *Amrtakunda* Translations," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 13:2 (2003), pp. 199-226; and "Situating Sufism and Yoga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 15:1 (2005), pp. 15-43.

<sup>9</sup>References are provided in Ernst, "Islamization."

<sup>10</sup>India Office, Ashburner 258, fols. 7a-10b. See E. Denison Ross and Edward G. Browne, *Catalogue of Two Collections of Persian and Arabic Manuscripts Preserved in the India Office Library* (London: Eyre and Spottiswode), 1902, p. 157.

<sup>11</sup>In one place (26a) the translator says, "Know that thirty-two verses in the Indian language have been transmitted from the sayings of Kamak. Now Kamak chose a certain kind from those, and added something else to it, and this poem is called *Kamak baray tajanka* (?)." Elsewhere he adds, "This is all a commentary on the thirty-two verses, which someone has written in the Indian language, in which many practices are mentioned, and in which are strange and wonderful sciences which all the practitioners of imagination (*wahm*) and magicians are agreed upon and pleased with" (29a). Once (15b) he says, "Now they put this book into 85 verses, and versified it in the Indian language."

<sup>12</sup>Prior to the 12th century, the terms yogin and yogini primarily designated sorcerers, according to David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini: "Tantric Sex" in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) and, p. 221.

<sup>13</sup>In actuality, the shrine of Kamakhya in Assam is characterized by a red arsenic flow that is identified in tantric thought with the menstrual blood of the goddess; see David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1996) pp. 195-6.

<sup>14</sup>White, *Kiss*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup>Vidya Dehejia, *Yogini Cult and Temples: A Tantric Tradition* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1986).

<sup>16</sup>White, *Kiss*, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup>Dehejia, pp. 30, 36; White, *Kiss*, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup>Dehejia, pp. 74-75.

19 It should be emphasized that there was no universal standard system of numbered cakras; see White, *Kiss*, p. 222.

20 See Eliade, *Yoga*, p. 88, n.

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

22 al-Ulughkhani, *Zafar ul Walih*, trans. Lokhandwala, I:333 (Arabic text, p. 417), and I:377 (Arabic text, p. 470), where a Deccani Muslim named Hasan, a specialist in these arts, is called in.

23 See my article, "'Accounts of Yogis in Arabic and Persian Historical and Travel Texts,'" forthcoming in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 32, Yohanon Friedmann Festschrift Volume (2007).

24 Simon Digby, "Illustrated Muslim books of omens from Gujarat or Rajasthan," in *Indian Art and Connoisseurship: Essays in Honour of Douglas Barrett*, ed. John Guy (Middleton NJ: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 1995), pp. 342-60.