



## LADDAT AL-NESĀ

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*LADDAT AL-NESĀ*, title of various renderings in prose and verse of an erotological treatise of Indic origin into Persian, the oldest such work being attributed to the Čestī Sufi (see ČESTIYA) Žiā'-al-Din Naḳšabi (q.v.; d. ca. 751/1350).

The oldest *Laddat al-nesā*' text in Persian prose has been attributed to the Čestī Sufi Žiā'-al-Din Naḳšabi, who had migrated to India from Transoxiana. Naḳšabi lived and died in Badaun (Uttar Pradesh). He possibly practiced as a physician and is known for his Persian writings and translations from Sanskrit works, encompassing religious, literary and medical texts (Moḥaddet Dehlavi, pp. 204-212; Šafā, vol. 3/2, pp. 1293-1296; Berthels). The treatise, however, is absent from the lists of Naḳšabi's works in the biographical literature, although it seems to bear his mark in combining aspects of his otherwise known literary production, not only in terms of content but also, e.g., by the mention of his name in verses interspersed in some of the *Laddat al-nesā*' manuscripts. The fact that Naḳšabi is not so prominent a writer that the attribution to his name would enhance the prestige of the work makes it even more likely that the original version of the *Laddat al-nesā*' was authored by him. However, the manuscript tradition is too complex to ascertain Naḳšabi's original contribution with any precision.



جواب گوید مالی که تلف کرده بود بخشم و آن مقدر دیگر عطا کنم که کا عرض کرد که  
 این زمان بسیار کسان ازین مکر غالب آمده اند باقبال پادشاه در این قضیه و  
 مغلوب خواهند کرد و پادشاه چون وقت شد فرمود که خلوت کند و آن بکار در آن  
 خلوت بگذرد تا مراد خود بحسب مطلوب خود بیند و معلوم کند که بدرگاه پادشاه این  
 بشدین خلوت آرسند و بسیار خوبوی و عطیات آماده کرده و تبرجی  
 در آن خلوت بردند و نیز از کوه کانبند و اگر ده خلعتی که پادشاه در برداشت  
 در پوشانند که کا خوشفت شده پیش پادشاه بنجاء خود ببارگشت و برگری  
 طلب کرد و دوسوزن از طلا ساخته چون ساعتی از شب ماند سر جوکنی از ته سهوت  
 بسیار شد و دست بر سینه خود در آورد و از هر دو پستان جوان و سوز ز آورد



و چون وز شد روی خود را در پوشانید و بدرگاه پادشاه بیاید و نهرم بنا

Figure 1. Folio with illustration from Wellcome MS Persian 223, Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

There are different groups of manuscripts attributing the *Laddat-al-nesā'* to Naḳṣabi, but with varying contents and copied at relatively late dates (17th century onwards), and works by the same title, but adapting completely different sources, as well as anonymous manuscripts and manuscripts with different titles that still belong to the Naḳṣabi tradition based on their contents. Therefore, any study of the *Laddat al-nesā'* first has to examine the actual contents of any given manuscript. Due to the mostly scarce data given in manuscript catalogues, it is often impossible to tell if, e.g., a manuscript by a generic title such as *Bāh-nāme* or even bearing the title of a different, yet contentually similar work like *Alfiya va šalfiya* is, in fact, rather part of the Naḳṣabi tradition of the *Ladda -al-nesā'*.

The exact identity and contents of the source text(s) is also unclear. Commonly, it is assumed that the original work is the Sanskrit treatise *Ratirahasya* (The secret of the art of love) by the pandit Kokkoka/Kōkā, also known as *Koka-śāstra* (The teachings of Kōkā), as the *Laddat-al-nesā'* is described as a translation of the “book of Kōkā” in most manuscripts. Yet we still lack a reliable critical edition of the *Ratirahasya*, and its basic data (e.g. regional provenance, time of composition) are controversial. Besides, there are more works that include characteristic elements of the *Ratirahasya* (Mylius, pp. 13-14; Schmidt, pp. 29, 52, 76), most prominently the *Anaṅgaraṅga* (The stage of the god of love), also titled *Koka-śāstra* (Schmidt, p. 44). In addition, translations of the *Ratirahasya* into vernacular languages did exist (Schmidt, pp. 64-65) and could have been the actual sources of the Persian adaptations.

This wider *Koka-śāstra* tradition and the Naḳṣabi tradition of the *Laddat al-nesā'* share several characteristic topics: the four types of women (*padmini*, *čitrini*, *sankhini*, *hastini*), the erogenous zones (“phases of the moon”), general characteristics of women, foreplay and positions for sexual intercourse, etc. The *Laddat al-nesā'* presents a rearranged and abbreviated version of these contents while at the same time adding new material and sometimes dropping elements crucial to the notion of pleasure and satisfaction in the Indic traditions like the classification of men and women into animal types according to the size of their sexual organs (for the significance of this element in the *Kāma Sutra*, see Doniger, pp. 67-69).



The first of three manuscript groups analysed by this author integrates the source material into a larger Islamicate discourse on controlling women as a means of preserving male authority (here by inducing pleasure through sexual skills and potency) and widens the geographical scope. The second group incorporates the treatise explicitly into the “knowledge of coitus” (*elm-e b āh*) genre and introduces Muslim medical material. Here and in the third group, sexual pleasure is also merged with a more aesthetic vein, showing in (not always explicitly erotic) illustrations and verse quotations, and linked with entertainment (Kurz, 2018a, 2018b). Despite the usually inferior quality of the illustrations, the aesthetic aspect clearly relates to the notion of sexual pleasure as part of a refined lifestyle and an “art” pertaining to self-mastery (cf. Ramos, pp. 419-20).

The introductory story with its notion of a sexually (almost) insatiable woman as an embodiment of male fantasy and anxiety, challenging male identity and supremacy by linking it to a man’s ability to provide her with sexual satisfaction, taken over from the *Koka-śāstra* tradition, may also have placed the *Laddat al-nesā’* in the wider context of the “wiles of women” sub-genre (cf., e.g., Najmabadi 1999) in the minds of readers well-versed in Islamicate *adab* literature. This reading is suggested by the insertion of related *adab* stories in some versions of the treatise. Yet in the *Laddat al-nesā’*, male supremacy prevails with a complete subjugation of the unruly woman – if only by living up to the challenge and, thereby, implicitly confirming the standards set by it (cf. Doniger about similar notions in the *Kāma Sutra*).

The enrichment of the most voluminous versions of the *Laddat al-nesā’* by material from medical, ethical, *adab*, and erotic literature connects them to most of the notable genres that provide solutions for the perceived problem of controlling women. A link between virility and power displayed in sexual imagery is well-documented elsewhere (e.g., Ramos, pp. 424-25), suggesting a similar subtext for the main body of the *Laddat al-nesā’* based on the courtly setting and themes of the introductory story that frames the treatise. However, the varying eclectic blends of contents in the various versions of the *Laddat al-nesā’* call for further scrutiny of their exact interplay.

Although the title *Laddat al-nesā’* has already been mentioned in an erotological treatise from 1516 that includes similar material (Kurz, 2018c), there are also later traditions, partly in verse, ascribed to Moḥammad Šāh Jāmi and Faqir-Allāh b. Moḥammad ‘Aziz, both active in the 17th century.



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