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al-Suyūfī and Erotic Literature

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Erotica form an important part of Classical Arabic literature, but they have received rather scarce scholarly attention. In the West, al-Nafzāwī's *al-Rawḍ al-āfir* remains the rare exception, commonly known even to the general audience. In the late Mamlūk and Early Ottoman East al-Tijānī's *Tuḥfat al-ʿarūs* and Ibn Kamāl-Pāshā's *Kitāb Rujūʿ al-shaykh ilā ṣībāhu fī l-quwwa ʿalā l-bāh* enjoyed a similar position as *the* erotic books. In the earlier Mamlūk period, the *Jawāmiʿ* (or *Jāmiʿ*) *al-ladhdha* played the same role.

Arabic erotica, however, compose a much wider genre than this small selection would lead one to think. Most pieces of Arabic erotic literature, with the above exceptions, remained unpublished for centuries, but especially since the 1990s the situation has improved, and today we have a wider selection of works available to us, even though still usually and unfortunately in inferior editions.

The proliferation of editions has also brought al-Suyūfī to the limelight as an author of erotica. His production in this field has been known to the academic world since, at least, Brockelmann, but the majority of his works remained for a long time unpublished and inaccessible.¹ The definition of what belongs to erotica is, of course, vague, as the Arabs themselves did not have a clearly defined and distinct genre for erotic writings.² Al-Suyūfī's oeuvre contains at least two works that, by any definition, belong to the genre, viz. *al-Wishāḥ fī fawā'id al-nikāḥ* and *Nawādir al-ayk fī maʿrifat al-nayk*.³ In addition, al-Suyūfī

¹ For surveys of erotic texts written by or attributed to al-Suyūfī, see Brockelmann, *GAL* ii, 153–154, *GAL* S ii, 191–192, nos. 207–215, and Declich, L'erotologia di ... as-Suyūfī. For al-Suyūfī in general, see also Spevack, al-Suyūfī.

² Even in poetry, the situation is far from clear. While the genre of *mujūn* does provide plenty of erotic material, it also contains parodies, satires and, e.g., blasphemous poems without any erotic elements. Moreover, *ghazals*, especially *mudhakkarāt*, often contain openly sexual materials (cf. Hämeen-Anttila, Abū Nuwās). For *mujūn*, see, e.g., van Gelder, *The Bad*, and Rowson, *Mujūn*. For erotic literature in Classical Arabic literature in general, see Hämeen-Anttila, *What is obscene*.

³ Declich, L'erotologia di ... as-Suyūfī 137, also lists his *Mabāsīm al-milāḥ*, but this work was never completed, cf. below.

wrote several works which deal with erotica from a lexicographical, literary, legal or medical point of view and could also be discussed as erotica in a wider sense.⁴

In surveying the published Arabic erotica, or works still remaining unpublished in manuscript form, one finds several other works attributed to the Egyptian polygraph. Many of these are, however, pseudepigrapha, as al-Suyūṭī seems to have received a certain reputation, or even notoriety, as a writer of erotica. Erotic literature belongs to genres ridden with various pseudepigrapha. These, with one exception, will not be discussed in this paper.

In assessing the authorship of erotic works, we err on the safe side by beginning with what al-Suyūṭī himself says in the Preface to the *Wishāḥ*, which, though not listed in his autobiibliography, is without the slightest doubt his.

In the *Wishāḥ* 34, al-Suyūṭī gives a brief list of his works concerned with *nikāḥ*, as the author himself understands it. This list, it should be emphasized, is not a list of completed works but of drafts. Al-Suyūṭī himself writes: *wa-qad sawwadtū fī dhālika* (i.e., *nikāḥ*) *musawwadāt muta'addida*. The works he considers to belong to *nikāḥ*, to avoid using any modern term, are the following (adding here the *Wishāḥ* itself):

1. *al-lfṣāḥ fī asmā' al-nikāḥ*
2. *al-Yawāqīt al-thamīna fī ṣifāt al-samīna*
3. *Mabāsīm al-milāḥ wa-mabāsīm al-ṣibāḥ fī mawāsīm al-nikāḥ*
4. *al-Wishāḥ fī fawā'id al-nikāḥ*

Al-lfṣāḥ fī asmā' al-nikāḥ, concerned with lexicography and containing material that was also included in the *Wishāḥ* (91–196 *al-Bāb al-thānī: Fann al-luḡa*), is a dry list of words

⁴ Declich, L'erotologia araba and L'erotologia di ... as-Suyūṭī, understands the genre very catholically and includes a wide variety of texts under the category of "erotologia". I restrict my discussion here by excluding texts that are oriented towards lexicography, medicine, law, and romantic literature, although all these contain erotic elements among other materials. The *sine quā non* of erotica is, in my understanding, the inclusion of openly sexual material meant to titillate or to provoke reactions.

used for intercourse and sexual organs.⁵ The second work on the list, *al-Yawāqīt al-thamīna fī šifāt al-samīna*, is a lexicographically oriented *adab* work. Even though concerned with *nikāḥ* in the sense al-Suyūṭī gives it, these two works are somewhat marginal from the point of view of my definition of erotics.

After this, al-Suyūṭī mentions his *Mabāsīm al-milāḥ* and finally his present work, the *Wishāḥ*. The *Mabāsīm* he introduces as his magnum opus on erotica, but it is clear that it was never finished. Its materials were used for the *Wishāḥ*, which contains exactly the same chapters as the *Mabāsīm*, the contents of which are listed in *Wishāḥ* 34–35, and also his other erotica mined the same source for materials. Of the *Mabāsīm*, al-Suyūṭī writes: *thumma sawwadtū musawwadatan kubrā sammaytuhā Mabāsīm al-milāḥ wa-mabāsīm al-ṣibāḥ fī mawāsīm al-nikāḥ ... ghayra annahā balaghat naḥwa khamsīna kurrāsan fa-staṭaltuhā wa-sa'imtu min ṭūlihā wa-maliltuhā fa-ṣana'tu minhā hādhā l-mukhtaṣar fī naḥwi 'ushrihā*. This leaves little doubt that the *Mabāsīm* was never finished. The author, in fact, uses three different expressions to say that he himself became weary and considered it of excessive length.

The *Wishāḥ* is a well-organized book, a typical *adab* collection. It gives the material in strict order (1. *al-Ḥadīth wa-l-āthār*; 2. *al-Luḡa*; 3. *al-Nawādir wa-l-akhbār*; 4. *al-Asjā' wa-l-ash'ār*; 5. *al-Tashrīḥ* – meaning here anatomy in general; 6. *al-Ṭibb*; and 7. *al-Bāḥ*). In contrast to the *Nawādir*, to be discussed below, this book also refers to religious authority at the end of the Preface (p. 35) by quoting from Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī's *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif* how Zayd ibn Thābit had told that the Prophet spoke with him of all possible things, thus giving implicit authority for including all possible things, erotica among them, as topics suitable for discussion.

The outspoken material in the work is preceded by a long and exhaustive – one could even say exhausting – second chapter, which contains detailed lists of names and expressions for sexual parts, coition and the noises made during it (pp. 91–196). The material in this chapter is mainly taken from lexicographical and grammatical works,

⁵ It is probable that *al-lfṣāḥ bi-fawā'id al-nikāḥ*, mentioned in al-Suyūṭī's *Taḥadduth* 114 (and footnote 99) is the same as this.

presumably through the *Mabāsīm*.⁶ Only the end of the book is clearly erotic, al-Suyūṭī referring to and excerpting the lists of sexual positions⁷ in the *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* (about twenty positions, pp. 392–397) and the *Rujū‘ al-shaykh ilā ṣibāhu* (45 positions, p. 393), and other books, totalling over 100 different positions, adding that these are listed in full in his *al-musawwada al-kubrā*, i.e., the unpublished *Mabāsīm* (*Wishāḥ* 393). Of other erotic works, al-Suyūṭī quotes al-Ṭijānī’s *Tuḥfat al-‘arūs* (pp. 214, 231, 245), al-Ṭifāshī’s *Qādimat al-janāḥ* (p. 223), and the anonymous *Rawḍat al-azhār* (p. 255),⁸ thus excerpting several of the main works of Arabic erotica in addition to a large number of other *adab* works. The long list of sources, here only selectively mentioned, gives the work an extremely erudite character.

Al-Suyūṭī tackled erotic topics in two further works:

5. *Shaqā’iq al-utrunj fī raqā’iq al-ghunj*

6. *Nawādir al-ayk fī ma‘rifat al-nayk*.

The latter was only written after the *Wishāḥ* and, hence, does not figure on the list in its preface. The dating of the former is unclear, but al-Suyūṭī seems deliberately to have excluded it from the list in the *Wishāḥ* as it is mentioned by him in his *Kitāb al-taḥadduth bi-ni‘mat Allāh* (ii, 123, no. 24). The latter, on the other hand, does not mention the *Wishāḥ*, which implies that the *Wishāḥ* was written after it. Al-Suyūṭī seems to have conceived of the work in terms of a legal treatise (whether it is permissible to make noises during coition or not), rather than *nikāḥ*. In the *Kitāb al-Taḥadduth* 123, the work is listed under the heading *Mā ullifa fī wāqi‘āt al-fatāwā min kurrās wa-fawqahu wa-dūnahu*.

The *Shaqā’iq* resembles the *Wishāḥ*, but is considerably shorter, covering less than 50 pages in the lavishly printed edition, and its theme is restricted to noises made during

⁶ Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *Af‘āl* (pp. 98, 100, 106, 117); al-Firūzābādī, *Qāmūs* (pp. 98, 108, 155); al-Tha‘ālibī, *Fiqh al-lughā* (p. 101); Abū Ḥayyān, *Sharḥ al-Tas’hīl* (p. 123); Ibn al-Qaṭṭā‘, [(*Abniyat*) *al-af‘āl*] (pp. 143–153), cf. GAL i, 308, GAL S i, 540); al-Zajjāj, *Khalq al-insān* (p. 157); Ibn Durayd, *Jamhara* (p. 157); Ibn Sīda, *Muḥkam* (p. 158); etc.

⁷ Some have already been given on pp. 361–362, and in some of the anecdotes.

⁸ This may refer to the similarly titled work by al-Qurṭubī, for which see GAL S i, 596.

coition. The author himself calls it a *juz'* (p. 63, at the beginning of the text) and it is, thus, not considered by him a fully-fledged finalized work. The work is lexically inspired and learned and the material is mainly culled from lexicographical and religious sources.

The *Shaqā'iq* contains only a limited number of verses and anecdotes. It quotes, though less extensively, many of the same sources as the *Wishāḥ* – al-Suyūṭī worked in his erotic works in the same fashion as he did in many of his other works, excerpting a set of earlier works and composing several works out of the material used in these sources. The sources quoted in the *Shaqā'iq* include, among many others, Ibn Durayd, *Jamhara* (p. 63); Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *Afāl* (p. 63); and al-Fīrūzābādī, *Qāmūs* (p. 64). Of the erotic works, he quotes al-Tījānī, *Tuḥfat al-‘arūs* (pp. 68, 91, 99, 100), al-Tifāshī, *Qādīmat al-janāḥ* (p. 90), and the anonymous *Murshid al-labīb ilā mu‘āsharat al-ḥabīb* (pp. 96, 97).

At the end of the book, p. 108, the author quotes a saying by al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, an authoritative early Muslim, to the effect that – in modern terms – whatever happens between two consenting adults is their own concern (*idh khalawtum fa-falū mā shi'tum*).⁹ This also seems to be al-Suyūṭī's position on the question of erotica. At least he, a polymath and religious scholar, seems to have written freely on the topic.¹⁰

The *Nawādir al-ayk* is more explicit. In the preface (p. 31), al-Suyūṭī refers to the book as a *dhayl* to his *Wishāḥ*. The stylistic difference between the more respectable *nikāḥ* in the full title of the *Wishāḥ* versus *nayk* in the full title of this book seems deliberate. At the beginning of the book (pp. 31–35), al-Suyūṭī quotes different kinds of authoritative texts, even though as a whole the *Nawādir* is much less academic than the *Wishāḥ*. He begins with a line of poetry, quotes what in modern terms would be archaeological evidence (a stone from Ḥulwān – cf. also the variant of this story on pp. 37–38), provides a maxim, involves both Hippocrates and Galen, and finally gives a specimen of Indian wisdom. Each type of evidence is represented by one, and only one, example (with the exception of medicine), as if introducing various sources of authority for discussing *nikāḥ* in terms not

⁹ For a similar saying, see al-Jāḥiẓ, *Mufākhara* ii, 94.

¹⁰ That he freely quotes in this serious work, as also in his other works on *nikāḥ*, from various erotic manuals shows that works of explicitly erotic content were considered by him and his readers to be authoritative mainstream works, suitable to be quoted side by side with lexicographical authorities such as Ibn Durayd.

always decent and getting done with it as soon as possible. The religious aspect is somewhat surprisingly lacking in the Preface of this particular book.

In the *Nawāḍir*, al-Suyūṭī uses the same sources as in his other erotic books, though quoting them more sparingly. They, however, include his usual selection of erotica, especially *Jāmiʿ*, or *Jawāmiʿ*, *al-ladhdha* and *Rujūʿ al-shaykh ilā ṣibāhu*. From the latter he quotes a long list of sexual positions (pp. 129–142), obviously excerpting here from his own *Mabāsīm*.¹¹ From the former he gives quotations on pp. 113, 116, 123–128,¹² and 128. Other erotic works are not explicitly quoted in the *Nawāḍir*.¹³ In comparison to the *Wishāḥ* and the *Shaqāʿiq*, the *Nawāḍir* is marked by a less extensive use of explicit quotations, both from erotic and other works.

It is extremely probable that al-Suyūṭī has written these three works (*Wishāḥ*, *Shaqāʿiq*, *Nawāḍir*) by excerpting the very same sources¹⁴ and dividing the material into three different works, most probably first collecting a huge mass of materials in his *Mabāsīm* and then, after giving up the idea of composing one comprehensive encyclopaedia on *nikāḥ*, publishing this material in a series of shorter, and less exhaustive, monographs.

¹¹ There is much uncertainty as to the real author of this book and whether there were two books of this title or only one. Both al-Tifāshī (for whom, see GAL i, 495) and Ibn Kamāl-pāshā (see GAL ii, 452, no. 103) are credited with a book of this title. The latter author died in 941/1535, so either al-Suyūṭī is extensively using a younger contemporary's book or quoting from a book by al-Tifāshī. It is also possible that Ibn Kamāl-pāshā's book is an elaboration of al-Tifāshī's. A comparison of *Nawāḍir*, pp. 129–152, with the book attributed in the edition to Ibn Kamāl-pāshā, *Rujūʿ* 100–110 (ed. al-Jamal) = 64–68 (ed. 1309) shows strong similarities but also obvious differences. As he is very free when quoting from erotic manuals, the changes may be due to al-Suyūṭī.

¹² A comparison of this passage with the *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* 150–151, shows that al-Suyūṭī is quoting very freely, although one has to keep in mind that the manuscripts of the erotic works tend to differ greatly from each other. Lacking a critical edition, we cannot be sure whether al-Suyūṭī had the same text in front of him as we have in the edition. However, the changes are so considerable that it is improbable that al-Suyūṭī endeavoured to quote his source verbatim.

¹³ Ibn Abī Ḥajala's *Nayyirāt* (read: *Dīwān*) *al-ṣabāba* is quoted on p. 41. The text is correctly quoted as *Dīwān al-ṣabāba* on p. 70.

¹⁴ In addition to those already discussed, one may mention al-Wadāʿī's *Tadhkira*, quoted both in the *Shaqāʿiq* (96) and the *Nawāḍir* (65, here written al-Wādiʿī – for the author, see GAL ii, 9).

On pp. 159–162, al-Suyūṭī gives in excerpts 55 verses of an outspokenly erotic *qaṣīda*, which is anonymous and popular and, according to him, originally contained 105 verses and was written in poor language which he himself polished before including the excerpts in his book (*Nawāḍir* 163). It should be emphasized that al-Suyūṭī did not edit the *contents* of the poem, but only its substandard *language*: as it stands, the poem gives graphical descriptions of sexual positions, which, moreover, come from the mouth of a girl who wishes a man to do this and that to her, which must have made it sound even less decent in late Mamlūk ears. However, al-Suyūṭī did not find this reprehensible. He also responded to this poem by writing a similar poem of his own (pp. 163–166), 60 verses long,¹⁵ to show the superiority of his poetic talent – and, again, refraining from censoring the contents in any way and publishing the poem under his own name. These two poems are followed by another anonymous poem (pp. 166–168) of an even more outspoken nature, beginning: *khudh rijlahā wa-rmi ‘alā ḡahrihā / wa-ḥakkik-i l-zubba ‘alā shufrihā*, and continuing on similar lines.¹⁶

This openness shows that al-Suyūṭī was not disturbed by the material and was prepared to quote explicit material in a book circulating under his own name, even quoting his very outspoken poem in it, seemingly without scruples.

What perhaps distinguishes this work from any other pieces of Arabic erotica, is the preponderance of openly sexually-oriented verses in the collection, covering the middle part of the text. Mildly erotic verses of the *ghazal* type abound, of course, in any anthology, as do various *mujūn* poems, but the material al-Suyūṭī presents is mostly very graphic and the number of poets he quotes is considerable, so that the *Nawāḍir* should be closely perused by anyone wishing to write on erotic verse in Arabic literature. Along with later poets, he gives a good selection of, e.g., Abū Ḥukayma's verses (pp. 82–83, 92). Anecdotal material and maxims are only marginally present, which, in an erotic anthology,

¹⁵ It may be that the length of his own poem has induced him to quote the anonymous poem in excerpts only, not to show that his was the shorter of the two poems.

¹⁶ This poem opens a series of half a dozen poems at the end of the book (pp. 166–170), which are attributed to a person, or persons, whose identity al-Suyūṭī conceals, using expressions such as *wa-qāla man lā yusammā sāmaḥahu llāh*.

is anomalous and is probably to be explained with reference to the preponderance of this material in the *Wishāh*, which was to be supplemented, not duplicated, by the *Nawādir*.

From a structural point of view, the work seems only half finished. It amasses materials in a rather haphazard way and it is not easy to see any logic behind the organization – most probably there wasn't one. This, together with the fact that the *Nawādir* is explicitly stated to be a *dhayl* to the *Wishāh*, shows that we are dealing with one of the final works by al-Suyūṭī, which he obviously did not have time or energy to polish but gave out more or less as a collection of materials, an afterthought to the *Wishāh*, as it were.

In connection with al-Suyūṭī's erotica, one should also mention:

7. *Rashf al-zulāl min al-siḥr al-ḥalāl*

This book, also known as *Maqāmat al-nisā'*, belongs to the genre of *maqāma*, with a connection to the "adab of professions".¹⁷ The work consists of a set of twenty very short *maqāmas*, rather simple for the genre. In the Preface some young men listen to a preacher who condemns illicit, and especially homosexual, sex. Convinced by his words, the young men decide instantly to get married. This is no sooner suggested than done, and the next morning they reconvene to inform each other of their experiences in the nuptial chamber. Each tells an outspoken story of the night with his newly-wedded spouse, using the specialized vocabulary of their respective professions. Thus, e.g., in the 7th *maqāma* the Lexicographer (al-Lughawī) manages to squeeze into a few lines (p. 447) several allusions to well-known lexicographical works, partly in uncouth connections.¹⁸ The last speaker, the Sufi, relates for his part what happened *lammā ḥaṣala l-tajallī wa'l-kashf*, thus using two technical terms of mysticism for the unveiling of the bride (p. 466). There are few narrative elements in this descriptive work.

Al-Suyūṭī himself mentions few of these pieces of erotica on the list of his works. It is not that he would have endeavoured to hide them, as they circulated openly under his own

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., Sadan, Kings, and, for a case of profession *maqāma* Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqāma* 337.

¹⁸ E.g., *kuss muḥkam al-asās* alludes to two venerable dictionaries, Ibn Sīda's *al-Muḥkam wa-l-muḥīṭ al-a'zam* and al-Zamakhsharī's *Asās al-balāgha*.

name; likewise, his later fame shows that his name was soon attached to the genre of erotica, so his achievements in this field, too, must have been well known – one usually attributes works to people who have become well known in a particular genre. It seems that many of these works were written by him late in life, after he had compiled his *Kitāb al-Taḥadduth*.

Of the works wrongly attributed to al-Suyūṭī one deserves special attention, namely:

(8. *al-Īdāh fī ‘ilm al-nikāh*)

Who the author of the text is, is not clear. Brockelmann accepts it as a genuine work by al-Suyūṭī (no. 210), but the attribution is, to say the least, dubious and some manuscripts give ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Naṣr al-Shīrāzī as the author.

The style of the book differs from that of genuine erotic works by al-Suyūṭī. It uses none of the sources excerpted for his other works and, moreover, gives few explicit quotations from any learned sources, contrary to al-Suyūṭī’s usual habit. The only work explicitly quoted is al-Mas‘ūdī’s *Murūj al-dhahab* (p. 126).¹⁹ In addition, *Dīwān al-ṣabāba* is referred to on p. 128. The text uses colloquial expressions,²⁰ and, what is perhaps the strongest argument against al-Suyūṭī’s authorship, quotes popular narratives known from the *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, something he does not seem to have done in any of his other works.²¹ The explicit contents themselves would not necessitate excluding al-Suyūṭī from the

¹⁹ The passage is found in *Murūj* §2053 (where we have the correct reading al-Ḥārith ibn Kalada for the edition’s al-Ḥārith ibn Kinda). The quotation, not necessarily and even not probably coming directly from the *Murūj*, which was a rare book by this time, is again rather free. It would seem that the anecdotes on al-Ḥajjāj in the *Īdāh* were lifted as a block from one unidentified source, as some of them have nothing to do with the erotic subject matter of the *Īdāh*.

²⁰ *Rāyih yaqtulnī* (p. 122); *fard zubb* (p. 124); *‘ād yasma‘* and *jāb* (p. 125); *kamān shwayyah* (p. 134).

²¹ The three wishes (p. 133 = Lyons *Arabian Nights* ii, 587; Littmann, *Erzählungen* iv, 329–331); The Jewish judge and his virtuous wife (pp. 139–142 = Lyons *Arabian Nights* ii, 327–330; Littmann, *Erzählungen* iii, 708–712); and The pious Israelite and his wife (pp. 142–144 = Lyons *Arabian Nights* ii, 335–338; Littmann *Erzählungen* iii, 720–725). As these stories are not restricted to the *Arabian Nights*’ tradition and could have been taken from some other source, they cannot be used for dating either of the works. For the interrelatedness of the *Arabian Nights* and post-Mongol literature, see most recently Marzolph, Studio.

authorship, but it seems very improbable that the work could be by him. In the improbable case that the book was, after all, by al-Suyūṭī, it would probably have been written only after the *Nawāḍir*.²² The author seems to be Egyptian, as several Egyptian elements would suggest.²³

The work is a random collection of material ranging from the explicitly erotic to stories where this element is negligible. It quotes pseudo-scientific material attributed to Avicenna (pp. 130, 138), Galen, Plato and Aristotle (p. 137), as well as to some unnamed philosophers (*baʿḍ al-ḥukamāʾ*, p. 131; *al-ḥakīm*, p. 146). It conspicuously often uses pseudo-*isnāds*, often parodically (pp. 122, 123, 124 – *ruwiya ʿan Iblīs!* – 145).²⁴ Another distinguishing feature of the work is the openly parodic use of Qurʾānic and religious vocabulary (pp. 123, 124, 125), which does not easily fit the authorial profile of al-Suyūṭī. As in most erotic works, those of al-Suyūṭī as well as of others, the material is heterosexual.

Whoever its author, the *Ṭḍāḥ* contains material aimed at shocking the reader, both by its explicitness and, even more so, by mixing almost pornographic elements with religion. As an example of this, one might quote the beginning of the book (p. 122), which reads: "Praise be to Him who has embellished the chests of virgins with breasts and has set women's thighs as benches for the wild asses of pricks and who has made the prick-spears stand erect, ready to push in cunts, not chests," etc. This passage, in fact, may have caused the misattribution – if such it is – to al-Suyūṭī, as the *khuṭba* may have been lifted from his *Nawāḍir* 106, where it is attributed to an anonymous author (*li-baʿḍihim*). Whether the *Nawāḍir* or some earlier book is the source of the *khuṭba*, it most probably is not by al-Suyūṭī, as this section of the *Nawāḍir* consists exclusively of quotations and he does not otherwise conceal his authorship when quoting explicit material.

²² As a potential argument in favour of al-Suyūṭī's authorship one might, though, mention that the temporal sequence of his two genuine works, *Wishāḥ* and *Nawāḍir*, shows a lessening of explicitly quoted sources and an increase in popular material, as well as a development towards less structural cohesion. Against this background, one could speculate on the *Ṭḍāḥ* merely being the peak of this development.

²³ Cf., e.g., the preponderance of Egyptian place names on pp. 125 and 145.

²⁴ A pseudo-*isnād* is also used in the beginning of the *Rashf*, but there it is short and the stylistic device is conventional in the *maqāma* genre, cf. Hämeeen-Anttila, *Maqama* 46–48.

A comparison of the two texts again shows differences between them, as if one, or both, of the versions had been freely modified. It is slightly difficult to understand why al-Suyūṭī should have modified a text he himself had quoted in another of his works to this extent, so the comparison favours the supposition that the *Īdāh* is by a different author.²⁵

As I have drawn attention to in Hämeen-Anttila (What is obscene), there follows after this an imaginary and hilarious discussion preceded by an openly fictitious *isnād*, narrated by an anonymous friend, who has sex with his neighbours through a breach in the wall (*ḥukiya ‘an ba‘d al-aṣḍiqā’ wa-l-khullān wa-nayyākī l-jirān min shuqūq al-ḥiṭān*). The story involves, among other characters, Cunt, Cock and Reverend (literally *ḥājj*) Balls (pp. 122–123).²⁶ Instead of a fully-fledged Cock and Bull story, though, we only have a brief Cock and Balls dialogue.

To make sure the reader understands we are treading in dangerous territory, the author defines, using Qur’ānic terms, all girls over fourteen as old hags (*‘ajūz fī l-‘ghābirīn*)²⁷ that should be avoided. Both ideas – the preference for young girls and the avoidance of old women – are present in many respectable books that discuss whom a man should marry, but the outrageous way of defining who is an old hag must have provoked even the pre-modern reader, especially as Qur’ānic terms were borrowed for this purpose. Even more outrageous are the mock *ḥadīths* narrated on the authority of Iblīs (p. 124) and the listing (p. 125) of whores bearing names that make Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* sound innocent: Umm al-Khayr, Khadīja, Ḥalīma, Fāṭima, and Bilqīs.

To conclude, it remains to say some words on al-Suyūṭī's relation to erotica in general. Why did he write works belonging to this genre? The first part of the answer is a counter-question: why should he not have done so? It is obvious that the relation to erotic literature was more relaxed in Mediaeval Arabic culture – both Mamlūk and otherwise – than in the

²⁵ The *Īdāh* is definitely the later of the two, but it cannot be excluded that both works derive the *khutba* from a third source. As al-Suyūṭī is very free in his quotations, the version of the *Īdāh* may well be truer to the original.

²⁶ In Carrington's translation, pp. 33-4, Madame Slit, Mr. Tool and Al Hajj Eggs.

²⁷ The text reads *fī l-‘ābirīn*, failing to recognize an allusion to Q 26: 171; 37: 135.

Victorian and perhaps even the modern world.²⁸ Not that the topic was completely unproblematic, as we see from the explanations often given in the preface (of the type: "I would not have written this, had not my patron pressed me to") and the religious arguments used to defend the selection of the topic (the two favourites being that (1) God has created the language, or at least the nouns, as testified by the famous scene with Adam in Q 2:33 and hence words are not impure or sinful in themselves, without actions, and (2) the *ḥadīth* defending comic relief in the middle of a serious work, here "comic" being often subtly and on purpose confused with "pornographic").

The second part of the answer is somewhat more specific. As we can easily see from the list of al-Suyūṭī's publications, he aimed at being a polymath and set about proving it by profuse publications which more or less cover the whole range of Mediaeval Arabic learned literature. Erotica was also a subject that was considered a separate science (*ʿilm*), though only a minor one, and a true polymath should be able to prove himself also in this field.

The erotic works of al-Suyūṭī contain little homosexual material. This has been seen by Aaron Spevack, al-Suyūṭī 401,²⁹ as programmatic, but this need not be the case. Although homosexuality is common in comic anecdotes and *ghazals*, erotic manuals are in general mainly heterosexual, and al-Suyūṭī may just have been following the tradition.³⁰ On the other hand, he did have a reputation to defend and probably was himself somewhat on the conservative side, so that not advertising overtly illicit sex goes well with what one might expect of him.

Lorenzo Declich, L'erotologia di ... as-Suyūṭī 143–146, has seen al-Suyūṭī's erotic works of strictly heterosexual content as a programmatic response to what he may have seen as the loosening morals of the late Mamlūk society. This may, perhaps, be overdoing the

²⁸ Cf. Hämeen-Anttila, What is obscene.

²⁹ Spevack speaks of the licit character of sex in al-Suyūṭī's works and bases himself mainly on the *khutba* that forms the starting point of the *Rashf al-zulāl*.

³⁰ A similar, well-known case of the genre defining whether the author takes a homosexual or a heterosexual stance comes from Persian literature, where the same authors used to write mainly homosexual *ghazals* but almost without exception heterosexual romantic *masnavis*.

case and gives more serious attention to these works than they deserve. It is obvious that al-Suyūṭī liked to see himself as a polymath, so, basically, one might expect him to write on every conceivable topic, erotica among them. His occasional references to the legitimacy and preferability of matrimonial sex are to be seen as a topos in erotic literature, and also authors who are very outspoken in their writings often pay lip service to Islamic morals. Had he wished to attack homosexuality in Mamlūk society, he would have had much more powerful means to do so than compiling collections of erotica.

When it comes to specifically homosexual love, al-Suyūṭī is perhaps not quite as strict as Declich and Spevack would have it. In a dialogue on homosexuality in the Paradise between ‘Alī ibn al-Walīd al-Mu‘tazilī and Abū Yūsuf al-Qazwīnī, which al-Suyūṭī relates in the *Nawāḍir*, p. 64 (on the authority of Ibn ‘Aqīl al-Ḥanbalī), the last word is given to Ibn al-Walīd, who is of the opinion that homosexual love, as well as wine, exist in Paradise, despite the two being prohibited on earth, thus giving an implicit approval to homosexuality as such when considered outside of the sphere of the Sharī‘a.

Al-Suyūṭī's wish to appear as a polymath may well have been one of the main causes why he also delved into the field of erotica. A further cause may simply have been his joi-de-vivre: although now and then falling into dry, antiquarian learnedness, he is also able to show himself to be a man who enjoys life in all its variety.

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