



'ABHAR AL-'ĀŠEQĪN

'**ABHAR AL-'ĀŠEQĪN**, one of the most characteristic works of the great Persian mystic Rūzbehān Baqlī Šīrāzī (522-606/1128-1209). The word '*abhar* is generally considered to be the Arabic equivalent of Persian *narges*, itself a loanword from Greek *narkissos* ("narcissus"). Without enumerating the difficulties of comparative floral nomenclature, one may say that '*abhar* designates a variety of narcissus corresponding to what we call jasmine. The term '*āšeqīn* "lovers," bears mystical implications, in contrast to the Western term. We have translated the title as "Jasmin des fidèles d'amour" to evoke something in common between Rūzbehān and the *Fedeli d'amore* grouped around Dante. The book of Rūzbehān is written throughout in an ecstatic Persian: unusual terms, Arabic-Persian compounds, a wealth of images determining in themselves the dialectic of the visionary. This extraordinary book is the breviary of a religion of transfigured love. Its conception of love is in the same vein as that of Aḥmad Ġazālī and of Sohrawardī. Rūzbehān detaches himself from the conceptions of those whom he calls pious devotees (*zohhād*), the Sufi ascetics, for whom human love was an obstacle to divine love. In the prologue, he has a feminine person to whom he dedicates the book pose a preliminary question: Is it permissible to use the word love ('*ešq* "eros") with regard to God? How may one claim to love the God of love, and to speak of love of God, by God, in God? Rūzbehān recalls the serious conflict this question aroused among the Sufi shaikhs. He counts himself among those who approve such a use of this word, but understood within the total context of his doctrine of love. "In effect," he says, "it is only a question of one and the same love; and it is in the book of human love that one must learn the rule of divine



love.”

It is not in the object of love that the transition takes place; this transition consists of the interior metamorphosis of the subject, the mystical lover. Love is then humano-divine. One and the same text, but it is necessary to learn how to read this text. One must be initiated into a spiritual hermeneutics, a *ta’vīl* of love; because love is also a prophetic text. It has a double sense and is amphibological. These two meanings appear essentially in the theophanic function of beauty. This is the aspect that one must perceive in a human visage; because beauty is the theophany par excellence. It is to this that the word love aspires when it is a question of God. From this concept comes the mystical religion of beauty (*jamāl-parastī*), practiced by so many Iranian spiritualists, which should not be confused with “aestheticism.” The perception of beauty as the source of theophanies (*taǰallīyāt-e elāhī*) is a prophetic function which makes the mystical lover a partner of the prophet (*nabī*), because the souls of one and the other are the mirrors in which the theophanies take place. This concept of beauty provides the great themes under which the thirty-two chapters of the “Jasmin des fidèles d’amour” are successively presented: theophany in beauty, the prophet of beauty, the prophetic sense of beauty, the pre-eternal source of love, the esoteric *tawhīd*, etc. We have given elsewhere a very detailed analysis of the work. This book is, in some fashion, the recital of the interior pilgrimage of Rūzbehān which should be read side by side with his spiritual diary (*Kašf al-asrār*) and with his great work entitled “The paradoxes of the Sufis.” The difference between the pure ‘*odri*’ love of Ebn Dāvūd Eşfahānī (d. 297/909) and Rūzbehān’s doctrine of divine initiation through human love is immediately apparent. Both sides have occasion to evoke and record many Platonist reminiscences; but the prophetic sense of beauty, which transfigures love according to Rūzbehān, remains alien to the externalist (*zāher*) doctrine professed by Ebn Dāvūd. In Islam, there are two positions possible (comparable to a Platonist ambivalence) with regard to prophetic religion.

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