



‘ĀMELĪ EŞFAHĀNĪ, ABU’L-ḤASAN

‘ĀMELĪ EŞFAHĀNĪ, ABU’L-ḤASAN ŠARĪF B. MOḤAMMAD ṬĀHER, Shi‘ite theologian and author (d. Naḡaf, 1138/1726). He was born in Isfahan, where he spent most of his life, into a family of Iranized *sayyeds* originally from Jabal al-‘Āmel in Lebanon; he studied with the great Shi‘ite theologian Moḡammad Bāqer Maḡlesī, from whom he received the *ejāza* or “license to teach” in 1107/1695. He also followed the teachings of Ne‘matallāh Jazā’erī, Qāzī Sa‘īd Qomī, and Moḡsen Fayz Kāšānī. He is both a theologian and a philosopher in the sense that his major work bears witness to the stimulation that Shi‘ite theological thought provided for philosophic research. Though he is said to have written a large 60,000 line book on the imamate, no manuscript of it survives; he is known to us by his Koranic commentary, the Arabic *Tafsīr mer’āt al-anwār* (“The mirror of lights”), presented as the “prolegomena to all Shi‘ite hermeneutics of the Qur’ān.” This project aimed at demonstrating the esoteric and spiritual meaning (*bāṭen*) of the Qur’ān by collecting all the traditions going back to the Imams relevant to each verse, but its completion exceeded the limits of a single human lifetime. The part of it that the author finished contains only Prolegomena (*Moqaddamāt*) I to III (the recent edition by M. b. J. Mūsawī Zarandī, Tehran, 1374/1955, forms a folio volume of 362 pp. and includes a biography of the author). The long third part is a type of work which in the West was called *Clavis hermeneutica*; around some 1,300 typical Koranic words the author assembles the minimum information coming from the Hadith of the Imams. The general thesis is that the exoteric (*zāher*)



meaning of the Qur’ān concerns that which touches on *tawḥīd* and the prophetic mission and message (*nobūwa* and *resāla*). But, as Imam Moḥammad Bāqer observed, the Qur’ān would long since have ceased to be a living book if its significance were exhausted in the exterior sense relating to past events and the circumstances in which the verses were revealed. The entire esoteric meaning (*bāṭen*) of the Qur’ān concerns everything related to the imamate and *walāya*, concepts which are the source of the philosophy, as well as of the spirituality, of Shi’ism. The tendency of Iranian editors has been to consider the work, unfairly, as an introduction to the great *Tafsīr al-borhān* of Sayyed Hāšem Baḥrānī (d. between 1107/1695 and 1109/1697), because the four large volumes of the latter partially realize the project of ‘Āmelī. The “Mirror of Lights,” which deals with the whole tradition of spiritual hermeneutics, is one of the monuments of Iranian theological literature, furnishing inexhaustible material for comparative research on the hermeneutics of the Book among the three “People of the Book” (*ahl al-ketāb*).

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