



## 'AQL-E SORK

---

'AQL-E SORK, “The Crimsoned Archangel” (lit., “The Red Intellect”), title of one of the visionary recitals or treatises on spiritual initiation of Šayḡ-al-ešrāq Šehāb-al-dīn Yaḡyā Sohravardī Maqtūl (d. 587/1191). The Arabic word *'aql* corresponds to the Greek *noûs* and Latin *intelligentia intellectus* (not “reason”) while the “hierarchical Intelligences” (*'oqūl*) of the Muslim Neoplatonists are traditionally identified with the archangelic entities known as Cherubim (*Karūbīān*). In this treatise the intellect, or rather, the archangel, is presented haloed in red (*sork*), a symbolism connected to the mixture of night and day found in the evening, for the archangel stands at the boundary between the spiritual and the material worlds. The archangel is at the same time the philosophers’ “active intelligence” (*'aql fa“āl*), which is the tenth in the hierarchy of the Cherubim and the angel of the human race (*rabb al-naw‘ al-ensānī*), and the figure that the theologians call the Holy Spirit, or Gabriel; it is both angel of knowledge and angel of revelation. It dominates Sohravardī’s *ešrāq* philosophy, which combines philosophic research and mystical experience; hence in his long treatises Sohravardī expounds his doctrine, while in his shorter works he shows how the doctrine is gradually mastered by the soul. The visionary recitals are concerned not simply with a theory of knowledge or of cosmology, but with meeting with the angel. The “Recital of the Crimsoned Archangel” helps teach the mystic how to achieve this meeting. The archangel instructs its disciple about the difficulties he will have in ascending the cosmic, or rather psycho-cosmic, mountain Qāf. Seven wonders will have to be conquered; finally, if the visionary is capable of identifying himself with Keẓr-Elias, he will easily cross Qāf, the mountain separating him



from the spiritual world. One of the fundamental intentions of Sohrawardī's *ešrāq* philosophy is to revive the wisdom of Light professed by the sages of ancient Persia. The "Recital of the Crimsoned Archangel" bears the clear marks of his intention, e.g., in the importance given to the bird Sīmorǧ, which provides the key for the mystical interpretation of two episodes of the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsī: the birth of the white-haired infant Zāl and his exposure in the desert, and the combat of Rostam and Esfandiār. Sohrawardī thus inaugurates a true mystical *ta'wīl* (hermeneutics) of the *Šāh-nāma*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Sohrawardī, *Oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques* II. *Oeuvres en persan (Opera metaphysica et mystica* III), ed. with intro. by S. Ḥ. Naṣr; prolegomena, analysis, and comm. by H. Corbin, Bibliothèque Iranienne 7, Tehran and Paris, 1970; tr. by Corbin in Sohrawardī, *L'Archange empourpré: quinze traités et récits mystiques traduits du persan et de l'arabe (Documents spirituels* 14), ed. Paris, 1976; also in idem, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques* II. *Sohrawardī et les Platoniciens de Perse*, Paris, 1971, chap. 5. See also W. M. Thackston, Jr., tr., *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Suhrawardi*, London, 1982, pp. 35-43.

(H. Corbin)