



## ŠARḤ-E TA'ARROF

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**ŠARḤ-e TA'ARROF**, an extensive commentary in Persian on Abu Bakr Moḥammad Kalābādi's well-known Sufi manual *Ketāb al-Ta'arrof le-maḏhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, written by Abu Ebrāhim Esmā'il b. Moḥammad b. 'Abd-Allāh al-Mostamli of Bukhara (d. 434/1042-3), most probably a disciple of Kalābādi himself. Known also as *Nur al-moridin wa faẓiḥat al-modda'in* (Light of the disciples and [proof of the] disgrace of the false claimants), this commentary follows the *Ta'arrof* quite closely. *Šarḥ-e Ta'arrof* consists of 68 chapters, and is divided into four parts (*rob's*). The author first quotes a phrase or a word from Kalābādi's Arabic text, and having supplied a Persian translation, adds to it his own gloss and commentary. Very often he offers several interpretations for a single passage. Qur'anic verses, hadith, and some proverbial sayings are cited in Arabic.

As well as a commentary on the *Ta'arrof*, Mostamli's *Šarḥ* can also be studied as an independent Sufi manual—the first and one of the lengthiest in Persian. But although cast in the format of a manual, the focus in *Šarḥ-e Ta'arrof* is on the doctrinal and theoretical aspects of Sufism rather than on the practical daily practices and rituals, which often occupy the bulk of these manuals. From the very beginning, Mostamli underlines his intention to write about the Sufis' beliefs concerning Divine Unity, and other articles of faith, in conformity with the beliefs commonly held and sanctioned by the Muslim community at large as well as on more specifically mystical ideas about the spiritual states and stations, and the illuminations that mystics receive through intuition and direct personal spiritual experience. He also attempts to explain the symbolic



significance of mystical utterances.

Like his master Kalābādi, Mostamli was an Ash'arite and consequently an overt opponent of the Rationalists, particularly the Mo'tazilites, whom he has no qualms branding as infidels (*koffār*) (*Šarḥ-e Ta'arrof* I, p. 323). In the third chapter of the book, devoted to the doctrine of Unity (*tawḥid*), he criticizes the different sects and beliefs that fall outside the pale of orthodoxy, such as those upholding anthropomorphism (*mošabbaha*), the Karrāmiyya, and the Zoroastrians (*Moḡān*), whom he criticizes as dualists.

Mostamli's book also provides many contemporaneous historical, social, and practical aspects of religious life in general, and of Sufism, in particular. True Sufism, according to him, belonged to the past, and in his own era, the early 11th century, it had lost its pristine purity. It had become corrupted and one of the signs of this malaise was the Sufis' practice of listening to music, contemplating beautiful youthful figures (*šāheds*), and dancing. Mostamli was not opposed to the practice of *samā'*, as he even justified it in his own chapter on the *samā'*, itself the oldest extant writing on the subject in Persian. However, as he was a strict adherent of Islamic religious law, the *šari'a*, he was opposed to the practices of the antinomian Sufis in a manner reminiscent of his later contemporary [Hojviri](#), in his *Kašf al-maḡjub*.

Another important aspect of Mostamli's commentary is his choice of the Persian language as the vehicle of discourse on theological issues and mystical ideas, and his use of Persian words to explain Arabic terms. This has made *Šarḥ-e Ta'arrof* an invaluable quarry for Persian equivalents of Arabic religious terms and expressions. Had the Persian commentary of the Qur'an attributed to him by Rašid al-Din Waṭwāt (Minovi, p. 407) survived, we might have had an even more extensive list of lexical substitutes.

Mostamli's anecdotes concerning the great Sufis of the past—he is on the whole reticent about his own contemporaries—their sayings and the snippets of biographical data, make his commentary a precious source for the study of the early history of Sufism. Almost every theoretical and social problem confronting Sufism at the time of Mostamli is discussed by him, including the question of whether a Sufi should work or not, the etiquette of traveling and pilgrimage, the mystical significance of being a stranger (*ḡarib*), the esoteric meaning of mystical allusion (*ešārat*), and its difference from expression (*'ebārat*), the relation between master and disciple, the idea of saint-hood (*velāyat*), and its relation to prophet-hood. Like many devout Sunni Sufis, his



doctrinal differences with the Shi'ites do not impinge on his respect and devotion to the descendents of the Prophet, and he refers with much sympathy to Shi'ite imams and cites them by name down to Ja'far al-Šādeq (*Šarĥ-e Ta'arrof* I, p. 198).

Mostamli did not rely exclusively on oral traditions and on what he had heard from his master, but seems to have used written sources as well. His book abounds with the sayings of eminent Sufis and their anecdotes and stories (sometimes the same anecdote is repeated in different places). He mentions the name of ḤOallāj on several occasions, something that his later contemporary Abu'l-Qāsem Qošairi cautiously avoided in his *Resāla*.

*Šarĥ-e Ta'arrof* was used as a Sufi source book by Persian Sufi readers in later centuries, and was particularly popular with the Naqšbandis in Central Asia. It was published in a lithograph edition in Lucknow (1330 A.H. /1912), and later, in a critical edition with indices by Moḥammad Rawšan in Tehran (1363-6/1984-7). Unfortunately, the latter edition is not devoid of misprints and mis-readings, some of which have been enumerated by Aḥmad Sami'i in the article mentioned below in the bibliography. An abridgment of the book by an anonymous compiler, entitled *Ḳolāša-ye Šarĥ-e ta'arrof*, was made in 1310. This was edited by Aḥmad-'Ali Rajā'i (Tehran, 1349) from a supposedly unicum manuscript at Tübingen University Library, although another manuscript of the abridgement appears to exist in the Delhi Persian Collection of the India Office Library in London (Arberry, p. xiii, n. 1).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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No thorough study of *Šarĥ-e Ta'arrof* has appeared so far in Persian, or other languages.

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