



## TADKERAT AL-AWLIĀ'

**TADKERAT al-AWLIĀ'** (Saints' Lives), a hagiographic account of the sayings and miraculous deeds (*karāmāts*) of eminent sufis and other religious figures from the early Islamic centuries by the famous mystical poet Farid-al-Din 'Aṭṭār (q.v.; 1145-1221). It is his only surviving work in prose and was probably written in early 13th century. The book in its earliest surviving manuscripts consists of an introduction followed by 72 biographies, beginning with Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādeq (d. 765), the Sixth Imam of the Twelver Shi'ites, and ending with the martyred mystic, [Ḥosayn b. Manṣur al-Ḥallāj](#) (d. 922)

According to his prefatory remarks, from early youth 'Aṭṭār had nurtured a deep affection for the sufis and their discourse (*Tadkera*, ed. Este'lāmi, p. 8; unless specified, all subsequent references will be to this ed.). [In an earlier passage he writes about compiling a book in the future comprising of accounts of three groups, the prophets in general, the family of the Prophet, and his Companions (*ṣaḥābe*), so that, in his own words, "from these three groups, a sweet scented compound will remain as a memento to 'Aṭṭār" (*Tadkera*, p. 6).]

In the authentic surviving manuscripts of the work dating from before the end of the 15th century, including the earliest, that of the Hudai Efendi Collection (Pir Hudai), Hacı Selim Ağa Library, Üsküdar, Turkey, written in 692/1293, end with the 72nd chapter (on Ḥallāj), followed by the usual coda signaling the end of the book and mentioning the scribe and the date of the completion of the manuscript. However, in later manuscripts, dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, there is an extensive addendum under the general heading of "An Account of Later Eminent Masters" (*Dekr-e mota'akkerān az māšāyeḳ-e kebār*;



*Tadkerat al-awliā*, ed. Nicholson, II, p. 147; and his preface II, pp. 3-4); which contains additional biographies of twenty to twenty-five more figures, noted for their piety and remarkable deeds and memorable sayings. Furthermore, in this additional cycle, the final chapter is on the Fifth Shi'ite Imam, Moḥammad al-Bāqer (d. 732), which strikes an odd chord, for as already mentioned the book itself begins with an account of his son, the Sixth Imam, who had been singled out, as 'Aṭṭār himself explains, had contributed more than any other member of the family of the Prophet to the discourse on the mystic path (*ṭariqat*, *Tadkera*, p. 12). This further suggests that the inclusion of the Fifth Imam could have been penned by a later and possibly a Shi'ite compiler. There are also other reasons confirming this conjecture. In many of the later manuscripts, the latter part is written in a different hand from the first part and suggests that it must have been written down by a different calligrapher at probably a later date, and then appended to the manuscript. Moreover, even in one late manuscript, a well-preserved manuscript in the Majlis Library (the library of the Persian Parliament) written in 985/1577, the biographies end with Harllāj and are then followed by the *Haft wādi*, a treatise wrongly attributed to 'Aṭṭār. It does not exist in the 15th century Uighur translation of the *Tadkera*, composed in Herat at the time of Mir 'Ali-Šir Navā'i (1441-1501). Also, in no authentic manuscript does 'Aṭṭār's introduction (where he clearly lists the names of those whom he intends to treat) contain any names other than the 72 mentioned in the authentic first half; and finally, the addenda in most cases have orthographic and stylistic features not always compatible with their respective main texts.

'Aṭṭār's own preface to the book (*Tadkera*, pp. 5-9) provides some information about the contents of the book and the manner of its composition. He maintains that with the exception of the Qur'an itself and the Traditions of the Prophet, there is no discourse more elevated than those of the "masters of the mystic path" (*mašāyakh-e ṭariqat*; p. 5). And it is because of his own firm belief in this, as well as the prompting and requests from his friends, that he had collected the words and acts of these masters and, in order to avoid too long an account, had made a selection of them for himself and his friends (p. 5). In the same passage, 'Aṭṭār refers those readers who wish to acquire a more extensive account of the sayings of the sufis, to three books. Two of these books, neither of which are extant, are *Šarḥ al-qalb* ("Exposition of the heart") and *Ma'refat al-nafs* or *Ma'refat al-nafs wa'l-rabb* ("Knowledge of self and the Divine"). At the end of the 58th biography in the *Tadkera*, he refers to the first of the two as a work of his own without giving any further information about



it (*Tadkera*, p. 533). The third book, *Kašf al-asrār* (“Disclosure of the secrets”), also poses problems. Bibliographical tools list more than twenty books bearing the title “*Kašf al-asrār*,” or “*Kašf al-asrār fi’l-taššawof*,” most of which have not survived. The voluminous commentary on the Qur’an, *Kašf al-asrār* of Abu’l-Faḥl Rašid-al-Din Maybodi (ed. ‘A.-A. Ḥekmat, 10 vols, Tehran, 1952-60), is unlikely to have been the one intended by ‘Aṭṭār as it is basically a work of exegesis on the Qur’an rather than a significant treasure trove for information on the words and the deeds of the mystics.

Prior to the writing of the *Tadkera*, there was already abundant material on various aspects of sufism, both in Persian and Arabic. As a relatively well-to-do and well-established apothecary and physician, ‘Aṭṭār would have had ready access to most of these sources. Clearly he would have first referred to sources in his own native language, Persian, before reaching out for the Arabic material. In these sources, including those in Arabic, one often meets with identical quotations from the sayings and discourses of eminent mystics like Ḥallāj or al-Jonayd, written at the same or almost the same period. This makes it impossible to distinguish and attribute specific and definite sources for each line of the *Tadkera*. Nevertheless, a careful scrutiny of the *Tadkera*, in the context of the stories and accounts depicted in earlier sources, proves ‘Aṭṭār’s direct indebtedness to several books, as well as inducing the strong possibility of his having culled some of his stories from other sources. Among the important extant sources, one must mention the *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣufiyya* of Abu ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Solami (d. 1021) of which many passages can be seen translated in the *Tadkera* (Este’lami’s introduction to the *Tadkera*, pp. thirteen and fourteen; also A. J. Arberry’s introduction to his selected tr. of the *Tadkera*, pp. 13-17 including a comparative table of sources, pp. 15-16). The same is true of *Ḥilyat al-awliā’* of Abu No‘aym Ešfahāni (d. 1038; *Tadkera*, p. fifteen), and *Šefat al-ṣafwa* of Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200) (*Tadkera*, pp. sixteen and seventeen). More important perhaps is the well-known work of ‘Abd-al-Karim al-Qošayri Nišāburi (1072), known as *Resāla al-qošayriyya*. Many stories and sayings are borrowed directly from this source by ‘Aṭṭār, a good many of them in the form of exact or almost verbatim quotations from the Persian translation of Qošayri by his pupil, Abu ‘Ali Ḥasan b. Aḥmad (*Tadkera*, pp. seventeen and eighteen; and the extensive table in R. A. Nicholson’s introduction to his edition, II, pp. 29-56). And finally, there is one of the earliest sources in Persian on Sufism, *Kašf al-maḥjub* by Abu’l-Ḥasan Hojviri (d. circa 1075) which bears many resemblances to Qošayri’s work, and from which ‘Aṭṭār seems to have taken some stories and borrowed some passages (*Tadkera*, pp. twenty–twenty-one;



Arberry, pp. 14-16). There were also works on various aspects of Sufism such as Abu Naṣr Sarrāj's (d. 988) *Ketāb al-loma'* and others which may have well been used by 'Aṭṭār.

Apparently the *Tadkera* is one of 'Aṭṭār's later works; this can be seen, on the one hand, from the stories and sayings he quotes from the sufi masters, which indicate his long association with them, and on the other, from his statement – reflecting an ageing believer's wishes – that in writing the *Tadkera* he expected no reward but a plea for intercession for clemency (*ṣafā'at*) on the Day of Judgment (*Tadkera*, p. 10).

The lives of the sufis in the *Tadkera* are set in a more or less uniform format. Each biography starts with a set of embellished phrases, rhyming with one another and mentioning the subject's name, and alluding to his or her attributes before expounding on them through stories about their lives, and then by quotations from their sayings. While as indicated most of what is said is taken or translated from the existing sources when required, the material is supplemented by the author's own store of knowledge gathered from his infancy onwards (*Tadkera*, p. 8). As for the documentation, 'Aṭṭār points out in his introduction that he has tried to be succinct and avoid the pitfalls of a tedious exposition and has avoided inserting his own interpretations in recording the saints' aphorisms and sayings except on the rare occasions when a clarification was required to counteract malicious charges [of heresy] against the Sufis (p. 5).

Given the fact that many of his sources were in Arabic, 'Aṭṭār had to translate many passages into Persian (*Tadkera*, p. 7). In the choice of passages and personalities, 'Aṭṭār shows remarkable balance and equanimity. Thus he begins his account with Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādeq on the basis of his being “the master of all the seekers of the Divine (*ṣayk-e hame-ye elāhiān*),” and after bestowing lavish praises on him, he criticizes the fanatics for believing that there is a conflict between the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) and the Sunnis; and quotes a verse from Imam Ṣāfe'i, praising Ahl al-Bayt, and confirming the same ecumenical sentiments (*Tadkera*, p. 13). In the same vein, he includes the lives and sayings of the founders of three major Sunni schools of jurisprudence, Abu Ḥanifa, Ṣāfe'i, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (nos. 18, 19, 20; pp. 240-62) and praises their piety, ascetic conduct, and compassion.

In most cases, the stories cited about the lives of the individual sufis and the sayings quoted from them lack historical proof or defy rational possibility. For



instance, *Bāyazid Bestāmi* is alleged to have spent thirty years wandering as an ascetic in the Syrian desert during which he is said to have been apprenticed by 130 master mentors of whom one was Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq (*Tadkera*, p. 161). Leaving aside these numbers and the nature of the story itself, we know for fact that Ja'far al-Šādeq died about fifty years before Bāyazid was born; similarly, Bāyazid is said to have been asked about pudency (*ḥayā*) but when he answered, the questioner literally melted away leaving on the ground only a little yellow water (*Tadkera*, p. 180). Sahl of Tostar is said to have walked on the sea surface and come back without wetting his feet. It is interesting to note that Sahl himself, when asked to verify the story, responded in such a way that belied the claim (*Tadkera*, pp. 308-9). It is probable that 'Aṭṭār himself did not believe in the verisimilitude and credibility of these stories and that the intent and the emphasis was on the pedagogic and inspirational aspects of the narrative. It may be noted that attribution of miraculous acts to saints is common in hagiographical literature in practically all religions, being Hindu, Buddhist or Christian, to name only the best known.

Such stories and related sufi sayings, of course, abound in the *Tadkera* and other sufi literature. Leaving aside their factual validity and rational possibility, another issue that has been very controversial about them throughout Islamic history, is their incompatibility with the letter of the canonical Islamic law (the *šari'a*), and the popular beliefs of the Muslims in general. Although most of the Sufis, particularly the early ones, maintained the validity of the canonical laws in social life, in contrast to the religious jurists (*faqih*s), who gave priority to the manifest and ritualistic adherence to the letter of the law, they concentrate on the spiritual side of Islam to the detriment of the ritual aspects of the faith, accusing their opponents of excessive pedantry and even hypocrisy. Some of the Sufis saw only a symbolic value in religious ordinances and some, generally called *malāmatis*, preached anti-nomianism as for their stories and sayings, which otherwise seem sacrilegious, they are claimed to have only symbolic meanings, and, are supposedly meant to purport some pedagogic principles. The stories of the Sufis in the *Tadkera* and the sayings and paradoxical statements attributed to them cover a wide range of approaches from pious adherence to the letter of the law to flagrant disregard of the *šari'a*.

With regard to style, the prose of the *Tadkera* does not contain any unique feature or innovation of 'Aṭṭār's own. Much of the book was literally copied from the existing Persian sources which were composed in the simple



Khorasani style of the 11th century, and in the parts which 'Aṭṭār himself added or translated, he naturally followed the same stylistic tradition. In most rhymed sentences, however, the purity of style is greatly undermined by artificiality and overexertion, and in some cases, even the meaning of the sentence has been obscured (*Tadkera*, Estelami's introduction, p. twenty-three). In his introduction to Nicholson's edition of the *Tadkera* (see below), Moḥammad Qazwini refers to some grammatical constructs and verb forms in the *Tadkera* which he believes are different from those that were current in the literary language of Khorasan in the 11th and 12th centuries (*Tadkerat*, ed. Nicholson, p. *yt-kd*). These constructs and verb forms, however, do not exist in the credible manuscripts of the 13th and 14th centuries, and according to Moḥammad-Taqī Bahār, they are alterations wrought by scribes in the 15th century and later (*Sabk-šenāsi*, vol. 2, p. 205)

*Translations.* At the central library of Tehran University, there is an Arabic manuscript, dated 869/1367, which, in its division and content, closely resembles that of the *Tadkerat al-awliyā'* and Moḥammad Qazwini has regarded it a translation of the latter. But in a note added to the manuscript by 'Ali-naqī Monzawī, it is said that the manuscript does not contain all parts of the *Tadkera*, and even the parts that it contains do not match their seemingly corresponding parts in the *Tadkera*. Apparently, the manuscript in question is the work of an unknown author who, using 'Aṭṭār's work as a model, has collected some information from its Arabic sources, such as *Ṭabaqāt al-sufiyya* and *Ḥelyat al-awliyā'*, and then has compiled them in a volume on the great sufis.

2. In the late 15th century, an Uighur Turkish translation of the *Tadkera* was done under the auspices of Amir 'Ališir Navā'i at Herāt. Of this translation, only one copy exists at Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The manuscript with an accompanying French translation was published by A. Pavet de Courteille in Paris in 1886. As indicated earlier, this Uighur translation contains only the original 72 biographies of the *Tadkera*, and furthermore, it should be noted that the Uighur, as well as the other Turkish translations which Pavet de Courteille has reported to have seen at the Bibliothèque Nationale all are abridgements of the *Tadkera*, not the complete work (A. Pavet de Courteille, *Le Memorial des Saints*, Paris, 1886).

In English, there are two partial translations of the *Tadkera*. The first, by Bankey Bahari (Lahore, 1965), and the second, a more accurate one, by Arthur J. Arberry, (London, 1966). This translation also contains detailed bibliographic



information and supplies a most valuable list of sources and analogues for the various anecdotes and aphorisms at the beginning of each separate chapter. A complete translation by Paul Losensky of Indiana University is forthcoming in 2004. Other translations are mentioned in the general bibliography below.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Abu No'aym of Isfahan, *Helyat al-awliyā' wa t̄abaqāt al-aṣfiā'*, 10 vols., Cairo, 1932-38.

Denise Aigle, "Les biographies des saints de 'Aṭṭār et de Ğāmī, prolongement des écrits fondateurs du soufism," *Anatolia Moderna* V, Paris, 1994, pp. 1-21.

Idem, ed., *Miracle et Karāma. Hagiographies médiévales comparées*, Turnhout, Belgium, 2000.

Leili Anvar-Chenderoff, "Le genre hagiographique à travers la tadhkirat al-awliyā' de Farīd al-dīn 'Attār," in *Saints Orientaux*, ed. Denise Aigle, Paris, 1995, pp. 39-53.

Farid-al-Din 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkiratu'l-Awliya*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson, intr. by Moḥammad Qazwini, 2 vols., 1905-1907.

Idem, *Tadhkerat al-awliā'*, selections tr. by A. J. Arberry, as *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, London, 1966. Idem, *Tadhkerat al-awliā'*, tr. into Italian by L. Pirinoli, as *Tadkirat al-awliya parole di sufi*, Milan, 1994.

Idem, *Tadhkerat al-awliā'*, ed. Moḥammad Este'lāmi, Tehran, 1967, several reprints.

Moḥammad-Taqi Bahār, *Sabk-šenāsi* II, Tehran, 2nd printing, 1958, pp. 205-26.

Badi'-al-Zamān Foruzānfar, *Šarḥ-e ahwāl wa naqd o taḥlil-e ātār-e Šayḳ Farid-al-Din Moḥammad 'Aṭṭār-e Nišāburi*, Tehran, 1960.

Richard Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes. Theologien und*



- Erscheinungsformen des islamischen Heiligenwunders*, Wiesbaden, 1987.
- Ḥāji Kalifa, *Kašf al-zonun*, 2 vols., Istanbul, 1941-43.
- ‘Ali b. Oṭmān Hojwiri, *Kašf al-maḥjub*, ed. V. Žukovski, St. Petersburg, 1926.
- Abu Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Ketāb al-loma’*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson, Leiden, 1914.
- Abu ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Solami Nisāburi, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣufiyya*, ed. J. Pedersen, Leiden, 1960.
- ‘Abd-al-Karim al-Qoṣayri, *Resāla al-qoṣayriya*, tr. into Persian by Abu ‘Ali Ḥasan Aḥmad ‘Otmāni, ed. B. Foruzānfar, Tehran, 1967.
- ‘Ali-naqi Monzawi, *Fehrest-e noskähā-ye kaṭṭi-e ketābkāna-ye markazi-e dānešgāh-e Tehrān*, Tehran, 1971.
- Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, Leiden, 1955; tr. into Eng. by J. O’Kane as *The Ocean of the Soul*, Leiden, 2003.
- Idem, “Aṭṭār,” in *EI2*, Vol I, pp. 752-55.
- Idem, “Philologika XIV,” *Oriens* 11, 1958, pp. 70-76 gives particulars of the Turkish translations. Idem, article on ‘Attār’ in *Islām Ansilopedisi II*, Istanbul, 1970, pp. 6-12.
- C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, I/2, Leiden, 1927-, pp. 930-33.