

ISMĀ'İL ANĀARAVĪ AND THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF HIS COMMENTARY
IN THE MEVLEVĪ LITERATURE*

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It would be at best a memorable reiteration, if not an admiration, of a well-established fact, to say that the spiritual message embodied in the *Mesnevî* of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) has, since its inception up to the present day, remained alive and influential not only in the lands of Islam but in the intellectual milieu of the West as well. This particular work with its more than 25,000 couplets, all written in the language of the heart, has been conceived of by almost all the followers of this prominent Sufi Şeyḫ, Mawlānā Rūmī, as an outstanding interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān in Persian discourse. Besides its translations into various languages, extensive commentaries have also been composed on it by a number of great scholars throughout the world. One of these commentaries will be the primary subject of this survey, that is, the commentary entitled *Mecmū'atu'l-Letā'if ve Meṭmūratu'l Me'ārif*, composed in the Ottoman language by a renowned Mevlevī Şeyḫ of the seventeenth century the Ottoman period, Ismā'il Anṡaravī.

To begin with, the author of this commentary, Ismā'il b. Aḡmad Rusūḫiddīn Bayrāmī, Mevlevī, Anṡaravī,¹ known

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¹ See, for a comprehensive coverage of Anṡaravī's life, ideas and works, the author's "Ismā'il Rusūḫī Anṡaravī and *İzāḫu'l-Hikem*" (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1995); and also Erhan

also as Rusūhī (*maḥlas*)² the pen-name that he used in his poetry. Also called by the honorific title Ḥazrat-i Şāriḥ that was posthumously attributed to him by his Mevlevī admirers on account of his eminent commentary on the *Mesnevi*, which will be introduced later in this study, Anḩaravī was born in Ankara around the late tenth century A.H. Except for his father's name Aḩmad, nothing is known about his family.³ Anḩaravī, having been acquainted at an exceptionally high level with both Arabic and Persian, was also well educated in all the Islamic sciences such as *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *kalām*, *fiqh*, and *ḥikmah* (theoretical wisdom), as well as in the spiritual and gnostic sciences such as *taṣawwuf* (mysticism) and *ṭarīqahs* in which he became a unique master of his time.⁴ He is reported to have obtained, during his sojourn in Ankara, one *icāzet* (authorization) from the order of Ḥalwatiyye and another from that of Bayrāmiyye which was then the predominant order of the region and in which he was later promoted to the post of chief-Şeyḩ.⁵

Yetik, *Ismail-i Ankaravî: Hayatı, Eserleri ve Tasavvufî Görüşleri* (Istanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 1992).

- ² In one of his beautiful couplets he employs this name:

Gel *Rusūhî* nin sözünü dinle semâ`a aşık ol
Key teküne beyne ehliḩaşkı min ehlişşerefi.
[Listen to Rusūhî's, words and love *semâ`*

So you join amongst the people of love, high honoured.]

See Bursalı Meḩmet Ṭāhir Efendi, *Osmanlı Müellifleri* (Istanbul: Meral Yayınevi, 1974), 1: 120.

- ³ Only one source, whose reliability will be discussed later, tells us that his father was an Imam. See, Necati Elgin, "Ismail Ankaravî (Mesnevi Şāriḩi Rusūḩi Dede)," *Anıt* 30 (1960), 33.
- ⁴ Şemseddin Sāmi, *Ḳāmüsu'l-A'lam* (Istanbul: Mihrān Matba'ası, 1306), 1: 439; 'Umar Riḩā Kaḩḩālah, *Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin* (Damascus: al-Maktaba al-'Arabiyya, 1376/1957), 1: 259.
- ⁵ Ismā'il Rusūḩi Anḩaravî, *Mecmū'atu'l-Letā'if ve Meḩmūratu'l-Me'ārif*, known as *Şerḩu'l-Mesnevî* (Istanbul: Matba'a-i 'Āmire, 1289/1872), 1: 11. This is the only reference in which Anḩaravî