al-Samʿānī (268 words)

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, ABU 'L-KĀSIM ĀḤMAD B. MĀNṢŪR b. MUḤAMMAD b. ʿAbd al-Ḍjabbār (487-23 Shawwāl 534/1094-11 June 1140), author of Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fī ṣhārīʿ asmāʾ al-malik al-fattāḥ (ed. N. Māyi Harawi, Tehran 1368/1989), a long (600 pp.) Persian commentary on the divine names. His father ABU 'L-MUẓaffar Manṣūr (426-89/1035-96) wrote books in tafsīr, ḥadīth, fiqh, and other subjects. Āḥmad studied with his eldest brother, ABU Bakr Muḥammad, the father of ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Samʿānī [q.v.], author of al-Anṣāb, as well as several other teachers. In 529/1135 he travelled with ʿAbd al-Karīm to Nišāpūr to study ḥadīth. His nephew does not mention his writings but, in praising his virtues, speaks of his "elegant" (malīḥ) sermons and good poetry (al-Anṣāb, ed. A. al-Bārūdī, iii, Beirut 1988, 299-301). His elegance is clear in Rawḥ al-arwāḥ, a work of extraordinary beauty that was certainly meant to be recited aloud. The prose ranks with that of contemporary classics such as Ghażālī's Kīmiyā-yi saʿādat, but its main importance lies in its fresh interpretations of standard Islamic teachings on human salvation. Al-Samʿānī pays little attention to the divine names themselves; instead, he uses each name as a starting point for a series of meditations on the relationship between human beings and God. The extraordinary emphasis on love prefigures the teachings of Rūmī and reflects the same spiritual ambience as Maybūdī's ʿUṣūl al-Anṣāb commentary Kāšf al-asrār wa-ʿuddat al-abrār (begun in 520/1126).

(W.C. Chittick)

Bibliography