

# Shihab ad-Din as-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul and His Ishraq System Within Islamic Culture\*

Valentina Putyagina

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia

Moscow, Russia

E-mail: kiara25@yandex.ru

**Abstract**—Shihab ad-Din Suhrawardi al-Maqtul (d.1191) founded in twelve century new school of philosophy — Hikmat al-Ishraq or Philosophy of Illumination. Multiplicity of elements and terminology used by Suhrawardi in his works had led to the polemic about the role and place of his Ishraq system.

**Keywords**—islamic philosophy; philosophy of illumination; Ishraq; Sufism

## I. INTRODUCTION

The founder of Hikmat al-Ishraq or Philosophy of Illumination is not so well known as such Islamic philosophers as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd. For a long time publications devoted to a history of Islamic philosophy didn't include any data about Shihab ad-Din a-Suharawardi and his philosophy. Just during last 4-5 decades books about Islamic philosophy started to include special part about Suhrawardi. Meanwhile the Hikmat al-Ishraq had and has deep influence on the development of philosophy in the Eastern part of Islamic world. And as Seyyed Hossein Nasr said, Islamic philosophy didn't stop after Ibn Rushd, as many suppose, but continued to develop largely influenced by the Philosophy of Illumination of Suhrawardi [1].

Shihab ad-Din Abu al-Futuh Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak as-Suharawardi — this is the full name of the founder of Hikmat al-Ishraq. To know his full name (with all its' ibn) is useful in order not to confuse him (when we are working with sources with another two persons) with his namesakes who lived approximately the same time. He lived in the second part of 12 century (d.1191).

Religious and philosophical ideas of Suhrawardi were a subject of disputes during his life between his contemporaries. And in subsequent centuries there is no consensus between scholars how to treat his teaching.

## II. LIFE PATH AND A ROLE OF SUHRAWARDI'S SYSTEM AS HE SAW HIMSELF

“The greatest divine sage, noble philosopher, extremely bright and articulate”, “rising to the worlds of light and know divine mysteries” – just few of adjectives, used by followers

and biographers who described Suhrawardi. He also known as Sheikh of Ishraq or Suhrawardi Maqtul, that means “killed” but as Shams ad-Din Shahrazuri, said that followers of Suhrawardi understand it as Shahid – that's mean a person who died for the faith.

Suhrawardi was born in a village Suhraward in Zanjan province in northwestern Iran around 1154. He left home when he was young. First he travelled to Maragha, where he studied theology and philosophy with Majd al-Din al-Jili, who also trained Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (famous mutakallim). Next Suhrawardi studied in Isfahan with Fakhr al-Din al-Mardini. It is also known that Suhrawardi studied logic with Zahir al-Farisi, who taught him the “Basa'ir” Umar ibn Sahl al-Sawi. “Al-Sawi's logic differed significantly from Aristotelian logic, particularly in its abandonment of the nine-part division of the organon in favor of a simpler two-part division into semantics and proof theory, which is later reflected in Suhrawardi's reorganization of the logical corpus” [2].

According to Shams al-Din al-Shahrazuri, the biographer of Suhrawardi, the life of Suhrawardi was full of wanderings. Suhrawardi also journeyed in Anatolia and Syria, he visited Diyarbakr, Miyafariqin and Damascus.

Last years of his life Suhrawardi spent in Aleppo. He got acquainted with Malik al-Zahir, prince-governor of Aleppo, the son of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi. Soon Malik al-Zahir became a devoted disciple of Suhrawardi. Friendship with Malik al-Zahir arose envy and enmity. Religious authorities accused Suhrawardi of heresy and asked Malik al-Zahir to banish Suhrawardi from Aleppo. When Malik al-Zahir refused it, they sent petition to Salah al-Din and asked a death of person, who undermining the foundations of Islam. Malik al-Zahir did not dare to disobey father, and Suhrawardi was executed in 1191.

Suhrawardi spent most of his life in travels looking for a truth and experienced wise teacher. But as he wrote at the end of his book *Al-Masharia va-l-Mutarahat* he hadn't found a skillful companion among his contemporaries: “I almost reached the age of thirty, and most of my years were in travels, search, quest of skillful companion, but I hadn't found someone who possessed noble sciences and believed in it” [3].

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Suhrawardi didn't see himself not among Islamic Peripatetics (Mashaiyya), not among Islamic mystics (Sufiyya), not among Zoroastrians.

In the introduction to "Hikmat al-Ishraq" Suhrawardi described few degrees of those who had acquired wisdom and knowledge and those who intend to get it: 1) those who acquired gnosis and discursive philosophy; 2) those who obtained only discursive philosophy; 3) those who acquainted with gnosis; 4) those who got gnosis and partly discursive philosophy; 5) those who acquired discursive philosophy and in some ways gnosis; 6) "student" who seeks gnosis and rational knowledge; 7) "student" who intends to gnosis only; 8) "student" who looks for a discursive philosophy only.

Suhrawardi saw himself as a hakim illahii mutawaahil fi taallug wa bahs, or a sage who achieved gnosis and rational knowledge, the most high stage from sages. He noted that those who seek only discursive philosophy should follow the way of Peripatetics, his book ("Hikmat al-Ishraq") is a guide for those who is looking for gnosis and discursive philosophy [4].

Suhrawardi believed that through gnosis and discursive philosophy he had revived perennial wisdom, whose progenitor was Hermes. Empedocles, Pythagoras, Plato, Jamasp, Farshadshur, Buzarjumihir were among the greatest sages according to Suhrawardi. The perennial wisdom was in all the times all around the world. It was interpreted by different phrases and symbols, but it is same and unchanging in its essence.

So Suhrawardi connect in his philosophical system two previously opposing types of cognition, and founded a new school inside Islamic culture called Hikmat al-Ishraq or Philosophy of Illumination.

### III. WORKS OF SUHRAWARDI, CLASSIFICATION

Extant information about the life-path of Suhrawardi is rather scanty. So it just partly can unveil ideas, teachings that influenced on Suhrawardi.

Also absence of dates of writing in works of Suhrawardi does not help us to clarify the evolution of his ideas. Only at the end of his main work Hikmat Ishraq pointed out the date when Suhrawardi finished it – 1186 [5]. So it's seems impossible to make a chronological classification of Suhrawardi's works. And even in most closed to the time of life of Suhrawardi (Shahrazuri's Nuzhat Arvah – the main source in clarification of life and works of Suhrawardi) sources we can find only titles of his works. However Louis Massignon made attempt to construct chronological classification of Suhrawardi's works [6]. But it's obvious that he wasn't right in some points in his classification. He divided works of Suhrawardi in three periods:

- Works written in the early period of Suhrawardi's life: "Alwah al-'Imadiyya", "Hayakil an-Nur" and allegorical mystical stories.
- Works written in the middle, called by Massignon, peripatetic period of Suhrawardi's life: "At-Talwihat",

"Al-Lamahat", "Al-Muqawamat", "Al-Mashari' wa-l-Mutarahat".

- Works written in the late period "Hikmat al-Ishraq", "Maqamat as-sufiyya", "Risala fi I'atikad al-Hukama'".

But as for "Alwah al-'Imadiyya" we can say that it wasn't written in the early period of Suhrawardi's life. It is devoted, as Suhrawardi wrote in its beginning [7], to the ruler 'Imad ad-Din Kara Arslan, who asked Suhrawardi to write this work for him. 'Imad ad-Din Kara Arslan was a ruler from 1185. Also in the text of "Alwah al-'Imadiyya" Suhrawardi referred to other his work - "Hikmat al-Ishraq" [8]. So according to the classification "Alwah al-'Imadiyya" attribute to the late period.

We don't have evident remarks about the date in treatise "Risala fi I'atikad al-Hukama' ". Nevertheless, study and translation of this work in comparison with other Suhrawardi's works, like "Hikmat al-Ishraq", "Maqamat as-sufiyya", allows us to say that it was written in the early or middle period. "Risala fi I'atikad al-Hukama' " was written in order to defend philosophers against accusation in atheism.

Later were made attempts to classify works of Suhrawardi, but it weren't chronological classifications. Classifications relied on content and stylistic similarity.

### IV. SUHRAWARDI AND PHILOSOPHY OF ILLUMINATION ACCORDING TO THE RESEARCHERS

As we mentioned above there are several different points of view how to definite the teaching of Suhrawardi.

Henry Corbin, who published the main works of Suhrawardi, called Suhrawardi's system theosophy. He stated that a main goal of Suhrawardi's teaching is a revival of wisdom of ancient Persians, Iranians.

What led Corbin to such conclusion? First of all is the statement of Suhrawardi that among ancient Persians were those who possessed the truth and that he revived their wisdom. We can find this in "Maqamat as-sufiyya": "Inside Persians was a community who possessed the truth ... we revived their noble luminous wisdom" [9]. He also mentioned several times Ancient Persians, Zoroaster, Persian kings, in "Hikmat al-Ishraq" dealing with his teaching. But if we look carefully, we can read that Suhrawardi didn't talk about a revival of only ancient Persian wisdom, he saw himself as a revival of the perennial wisdom, Sophia perennis that was presented in the world among people of different nations and different times.

Second point is using by Suhrawardi the names of Persian angels. He used these names and we should remember that he was himself Iranian and he grow up inside different Iranian philosophical mystical teachings and believes, but these names are just names and not bears same meaning as in Zoroastrism or another Iranian religious teachings. We can see in "Hikmat al-Ishraq" that he used them just to indicate more certain different levels of lights that constituted through the emanation.

Third, Suhrawardi talks about light and darkness in his ontology. But we can read in “Hikmat al-Ishraq” and he stressed it that light and darkness are not two equal essences that constitute all beings. But only the light is a Supreme Being that self-necessary. The darkness according to Suhrawardi is just the lack of light.

Another point of view treated Suhrawardi as philosopher who stayed inside Islamic Peripatetism, - Hairy, Ashtiyani. Suhrawardi wrote that he was influenced a lot by Peripatetics, and defended their philosophy. And some of his books as he pointed out had been written in order to explain ideas of Peripatetics and also criticize it. In the introduction to “Hikmat al-Ishraq” Suhrawardi noted: “Before I wrote this book and during the times when interruptions prevented me from working on it, I wrote other books in which I have summarized for you the principles of the Peripatetics according to their method” [10]. He took a lot from Peripatetism, especially logic. He accepted the division of philosophy in two parts: theoretical and practical and the further division inside these two parts. But finally he criticized Peripatetics, their epistemology; a rational method is not valid for all kind of knowledge. He said they didn’t reach the wisdom and noted at the beginning of “Hikmat al-Ishraq” that he also didn’t receive the truth knowledge when he was following their way. He reached the wisdom by the way of Ishraq, illumination. Suhrawardi elaborated new epistemology, completely different from epistemology of Peripatetics.

Hossein Ziai saw Suhrawardi as innovative philosopher-scientist and a founder of an independent, non-Aristotelian philosophical school. In the opinion of Ziai allegorical stories of Suhrawardi are interesting just as a literature. But in order to understand Suhrawardi’s philosophical system we should examine thoroughly “Hikmat al-Ishraq” and anti-peripatetic works.

Some scholars maintain that Suhrawardi was a Sufi, Islamic mystic. These scholars stressed attention at his symbolic stories and talk that so-called peripatetic works (like, “Talwihat”, “Lamahat”, “Muqawamat”, “Mashariu wal-Mutarahat” were written in order to show incorrect way of Peripatetics; and the main goal of all Suhrawardi’s system is achieving the truth (or in Arabic Haqq and in terms of Suhrawardi – Light of Lights, Nur al-Anwar) using the way of mystical experience.

Suhrawardi widely use quotations from sufi masters, like Hallaj, Bistami. Moreover we can find such remarkable passage in “At-Talwihat”, where he describes his dialog with Aristotle in the state of Trans. He asks here Aristotle about a way that can lead us to self-cognition and after the explanation Suhrawardi asked Aristotle if there was someone from Islamic philosophers who had arose to a level of sages. The reply of Aristotle was that none of them hadn’t achieved the stage of wisdom, but among sages there were Sufis, like Bistami and Tustari [11].

But we can’t treat the teaching of Suhrawardi as Sufism. Sufis, Islamic mystics refused a rational way of knowledge at all. Suhrawardi in his works maintains that those who don’t rely on rational philosophy are similar to the blinds. So

rational philosophy is the necessary part of Suhrawardi’s system.

Such different points of view are caused by multiplicity of elements and terminology used by Suhrawardi in his works.

## V. CONCLUSION

On the way to forming Ishraq system Suhrawardi studied and analyzed many intellectual sources. By relying on his texts and scanty biographical data we can suppose that he started as Peripatetic philosopher. But further study of Peripatetic philosophy led Suhrawardi to its critical revision. Suhrawardi highly appreciated Sufis, and many of his works were written in a Sufi way. But excluding of rational part from his system wasn’t acceptable for him. Finally Suhrawardi elaborated new philosophical system which ontological and epistemological base is Ishraq.

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