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MAIN APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING THE LEGACY OF KALABADHI IN WORLD AND REGIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

Abstract. *This article is devoted to an analysis of the scholarly legacy of the outstanding tenth-century thinker Abu Bakr Kalabadhi and his fundamental work “Ta’arruf.” The author examines the reception of Kalabadhi’s ideas through the lens of four major world research traditions European, Russian, Turkish, and Central Asian. The article reveals Kalabadhi’s role as an “advocate of Sufism” who legitimized mystical practice within the framework of Sunni doctrine. The study concludes that “Ta’arruf” is a multilayered intellectual text and substantiates the necessity of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to its study.*

Keywords: *Abu Bakr Kalabadhi; Ta’arruf; Sufism; maqamat; ahwal; Islamic epistemology; research schools; methodological approaches.*

INTRODUCTION

The study of the heritage of Abu Bakr Kalabadhi in world and regional scholarship encompasses a wide spectrum of methodological approaches, each of which illuminates in its own way the significance of the “Ta’arruf” in the history of the Islamic intellectual tradition. The scholarly reception of Abu Bakr Kalabadhi’s legacy is neither uniform nor monolithic: depending on their methodological orientations and cultural contexts, different research schools interpret both the personality of the thinker and the significance of his principal work in fundamentally different ways. An analysis of these approaches reveals not merely geographical diversity, but principled differences in the manner in which each tradition constructs the image of Kalabadhi and defines his place in the history of Islamic thought.

The scholarly study of Kalabadhi's heritage is conducted by orientalists across the world, including such Western researchers as A. J. Arberry, P. Nwyia, A. Schimmel, and A. D. Knysh (Knysh, 2004:138–140). Among Russian scholars, O. F. Akimushkin and I. R. Nasirov have made important contributions to the field. However, the most numerous studies devoted to Kalabadhi and his works have been produced in Turkey. Among Turkish scholars who have engaged with this subject, one should note Bilal Saklan, Suleyman Uludağ, Sayfiddin Isler, Fikret Karapinar, Vahid Göktaş, and Hasan Kamil Yilmaz (Yilmaz, 1990:46). Even in these studies, however, a comprehensive and systematic approach to the investigation of Kalabadhi and his legacy is not consistently observed.

The purpose of this article is to systematically analyze the four principal methodological paradigms through which the legacy of Kalabadhi has been received in world scholarship, to identify the distinctive features and limitations of each approach, and to substantiate the necessity of a more comprehensive, interdisciplinary methodology for the study of the “Ta’arruf.”

METHODS

This study employs a comparative-analytical approach, systematically examining the methodological orientations of the four principal research schools that have engaged with the legacy of Abu Bakr Kalabadhi: the European philological tradition, the Russian and post-Soviet historico-systematic school, the Turkish normative-hermeneutical school, and the Uzbek and Central Asian cultural-historical school. The analytical framework draws on the sources of each tradition, including the works of Arberry, Schimmel, and Knysh (2004) for the Western tradition; Akimushkin and Nasirov for the Russian tradition; Uludağ and Yilmaz (1990, 2007) for the Turkish tradition; and Komilov, Namozov (2006, 2009), Daminov (2010), and Rakhimov (2015) for the Central Asian tradition. The comparative method enables identification of the defining assumptions, priorities, and blind spots of each school with respect to the “Ta’arruf” as an object of scholarly inquiry.

RESULTS

The European Philological School. The European philological school, represented by such scholars as A. J. Arberry, K. Brockelmann, and A. Schimmel, approaches the

“Ta’arruf” primarily as a historical source and an object of textual analysis. Within this framework, Kalabadhi appears not so much as the creator of a Sufi theoretical system as the author of a valuable document pertaining to the early history of Sufism. Priority is given to the verification of manuscripts, source criticism, and the clarification of terminology, while the doctrinal content of the treatise is relegated to the background. In this tradition, Sufism is perceived primarily as a historical-cultural phenomenon requiring philological reconstruction rather than theological reflection. Schimmel’s landmark work treats Kalabadhi as an important early witness to the consolidation of Sufi vocabulary and the emergence of a systematic discourse on spiritual states (Schimmel, 1975:56). Arberry’s translation and edition of the “Ta’arruf” similarly prioritized textual fidelity and historical contextualization (Arberry, 1935:v–vii).

The Russian and Post-Soviet Historico-Systematic School. The Russian and post-Soviet historico-systematic school, represented by O. Akimushkin, I. Nasirov, and others, emphasizes the intellectual structure of Sufi doctrine. Within this framework, Kalabadhi is evaluated as one of the first theoretical systematizers of Sufism, having created a conceptual apparatus for describing spiritual states and stations. Sufism is treated as an intellectual system possessing its own internal logic, rather than merely a mystical practice. This orientation determines a particular interest in the concepts of maqamat and ahwal as elements of a rigorous doctrinal construction (Nasirov, 2009:214). The emphasis on systematic analysis distinguishes this school from both the European philological approach and the Turkish hermeneutical tradition.

The Turkish Normative-Hermeneutical School. The Turkish normative-hermeneutical school, represented by S. Uludağ, V. Göktaş, and a number of other researchers, reads the “Ta’arruf” from within the Sufi tradition, perceiving it as a practical guide to the spiritual path. In this context, Kalabadhi emerges as one of the founders of Sufi pedagogy and the tradition of spiritual guidance (Yilmaz, 2007:52, 66, 76). Special attention is paid to the consistency of the Sufi path with the norms of the Sharia, and the treatise itself is regarded as a map of an inner spiritual itinerary rather than an abstract theological text. Hasan Kamil Yilmaz’s studies on Sufi hadith commentaries situate the “Ta’arruf” within the living tradition of spiritual formation and hermeneutical practice (Yilmaz, 1990:46). This approach brings out dimensions of the text that purely historical or philological readings tend to overlook.

The Uzbek and Central Asian Cultural-Historical School. The Uzbek and Central Asian cultural-historical school places Kalabadhi within the context of national spiritual

and intellectual heritage. Within this approach, he emerges as one of the early theoretical founders of the Central Asian Sufi-enlightenment tradition. Emphasis is placed on the continuity of the scholarly and spiritual culture of the region, and the “Ta’arruf” is regarded as testimony to the high level of Islamic learning that flourished in Bukhara during the Samanid era.

The ideas of Kalabadhi have been actively studied in Uzbekistan by N. Komilov, B. Namozov, and other researchers, resulting in the publication of specialized encyclopedias and explanatory dictionaries of Sufi terminology. Tajik scholar K. Olimov has also addressed questions related to Kalabadhi and his “Ta’arruf” in his articles. The Uzbek orientalist B. Namozov was among the first to study the philosophical views of Abu Bakr Kalabadhi within the framework of a dissertation research, publishing a scholarly monograph and articles on the topic (Namozov, 2006:146–148; Namozov, 2009). In this monograph, the scholar’s life path, spiritual heritage, and philosophical views were analyzed for the first time in Uzbek scholarship.

Information about Kalabadhi and his works has also appeared in significant encyclopaedic publications. The 2010 volume “Uzbekistan Land of Great Scholars” contains a dedicated entry on his life and contributions (Daminov, 2010:146–150). The “Explanatory Dictionary of Sufi Terminology,” published in 2015, provides detailed information about his life and work (Rakhimov, 2015:120–127). The “Encyclopedia of Scholars and Thinkers of the Medieval East,” published in 2016 by the Imam Bukhari International Centre in Samarkand, includes an article on his life and creative legacy that, although concise, is notable for the relative novelty of the information it presents. In particular, in the works of N. Komilov, S. S. Bukhari, and A. Razzakov, as well as in articles included in the Uzbek National Encyclopedia, the Islamic Encyclopedia, and in “The Memorial of the Noble Saints and Scholars of Turonzamin,” information about the life and scholarly legacy of Kalabadhi, including the “Ta’arruf,” is provided. Furthermore, in separate articles by N. Komilov, U. Uvatov, and J. Kholmuminov, Kalabadhi and his scholarly heritage have become the subject of dedicated investigation.

The influence of Kalabadhi on world literature was particularly evident in the Persian mystical tradition, where his work became the conceptual foundation for both early prose and classical poetry. Knysh (2004:138) observes that Kalabadhi’s systematic treatment of Sufi terminology and his defence of Sufism within orthodox Sunni Islam made the “Ta’arruf” one of the most widely cited reference works in the subsequent development of Islamic mystical literature.

DISCUSSION

The reception of Kalabadhi's legacy is structured around four fundamentally distinct interpretive paradigms. The European tradition sees in him the creator of a historical text; the Russian tradition sees a theorist of an intellectual system; the Turkish tradition sees the founder of practical Sufi hermeneutics; and the Central Asian tradition sees a figure of cultural and spiritual continuity. This diversity of approaches demonstrates that the "Ta'arruf" constitutes a multilayered intellectual text that admits of different readings depending on the methodological horizon of the researcher.

Each paradigm brings genuine and irreplaceable insights. The European philological approach provides the textual foundations without which any further analysis would be unreliable (Arberry, 1935:v–vii; Schimmel, 1975:56). The Russian systematizing approach reveals the internal logical coherence of Kalabadhi's doctrinal architecture (Nasirov, 2009:214–215). The Turkish hermeneutical approach recovers the living, practical dimension of the text as a guide to spiritual formation (Yilmaz, 2007:52, 76). The Central Asian cultural-historical approach restores the work to its geographically and civilizationally specific context, demonstrating that the "Ta'arruf" was not produced in a vacuum but emerged from a specific intellectual environment of extraordinary richness (Namozov, 2009; Daminov, 2010:146).

At the same time, each approach also carries characteristic limitations. The European school risks reducing a living theological and spiritual tradition to a collection of historical documents (Knysh, 2004:139). The Russian school's emphasis on systematic logic may fail to capture the experiential and existential dimensions of Kalabadhi's teaching. The Turkish school's insider perspective, while generative, may be less attentive to the historical distance between the text and its contemporary readers (Yilmaz, 2007:66). The Central Asian school's emphasis on cultural heritage risks instrumentalizing the scholarly inquiry for the purposes of national identity formation (Rakhimov, 2015:120).

These considerations underscore the need for a genuinely interdisciplinary approach that integrates the methodological strengths of all four traditions. Such an approach would combine rigorous philological analysis of the text with systematic doctrinal analysis, hermeneutical sensitivity to the text's practical spiritual dimension, and historically grounded attention to its Central Asian intellectual context.

CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted in this article demonstrates that the scholarly reception of Abu Bakr Kalabadhi's "Ta'arruf" in world and regional scholarship has been shaped by four fundamentally distinct methodological paradigms, each of which illuminates specific dimensions of the text while leaving others in shadow. The European philological school (Arberry, 1935; Schimmel, 1975), the Russian historico-systematic school (Nasirov, 2009), the Turkish normative-hermeneutical school (Yilmaz, 1990, 2007), and the Uzbek and Central Asian cultural-historical school (Namozov, 2006, 2009; Daminov, 2010; Rakhimov, 2015) together constitute a rich and internally diverse scholarly tradition.

The very multiplicity of interpretive approaches confirms the multilayered character of the "Ta'arruf" as an intellectual text. This multiplicity makes the legacy of Kalabadhi an inexhaustible object of scholarly inquiry and underscores the necessity of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to its study. A future research programme that integrates the textual rigour of the European tradition, the systematic analysis of the Russian tradition, the hermeneutical depth of the Turkish tradition, and the civilizational contextualisation of the Central Asian tradition would make possible a genuinely adequate understanding of Kalabadhi's place in the history of Islamic intellectual thought.

As a Bukharan scholar of the tenth century CE who systematized Sufi doctrine within the framework of orthodox Sunni theology and created a conceptual vocabulary that would be employed across the entire subsequent history of Islamic mystical literature, Kalabadhi deserves to be recognized not merely as a regional or confessional figure, but as one of the foundational thinkers of Islamic intellectual civilization.

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