

Is "Mashariq al-Anwar" an authentic book?

Question

Who was Sheikh Hafiz Rajab Borsi? Is his "Mashariq al-Anwar" an authentic book?

Concise answer

Sheikh Hafiz Borsi (d. 1392 AD or 1394 AD) is a Muslim thinker known as an expert of *hadith*, a jurisprudent and an erudite. There is also a strong presence of theoretical mysticism everywhere in his works.

"*Mashariq al-Anwar fi Asrar-e Amir Almo'menin*" [1] is Borsi's most prominent and most famous work that interprets and elaborates on Ahl al-Bayt's (A.S) virtues and merits especially Imam Ali's (A.S) applying an innovative and novel method and using principles of theoretical mysticism. In this work, Borsi has narrated special traditions and narrations pertaining to the infallibles' (A.S) virtues less noticed before. Borsi was brave in his statements and his strong love of Ahl al-Bayt (A.S) made him collect strange traditions about Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them, in a single collection making people, who could not have been able to understand the true meaning of these traditions, to criticize and condemn him.

[1] Agha Bozurg Tehrani, *al-Zari'a ala Tasanif al-Shi'a*, vol.21, p.34, Esmailian, Qom, 1986; Hosseini Jalali, Seyyed Muhammad Hussein, *Fehres at-Torath*, vol.1, pp. 751-753, Dalile Ma Publications, Qom, 2000

Detailed Answer

Razi al-Din Rajab bin Muhammad bin Haif Borsi is a Muslim scholar who live in late 8th and early 9th centuries (*of the Hegira* calendar, 14th century AD) (d. 1392 or 1394 AD) [1]. There are a few possibilities why he has become known as *Hafiz* [someone who has memorized the entire text of Quran or other books]. The first reason is that he had memorized the text and chain of narration of about one hundred thousand traditions.[2] His vast knowledge in his famous book – *Mashariq al-Anwar*- confirms this possibility – i.e. his being a scholar of traditions- and rejects other possibilities.

Long after his death no biographical account has been recorded about him in any biographical books or collections. Probably the first biography writers who has covered his life in detail are *Sheikh Hurr Ameli* (d. 1683) and *Mirza Abdullah Afandi* (d. 1709). However, copying these two, many have tried to write biographies of Borsi mostly based on information provided by these two scholars and contain not much new information. In a biography by *Sheikh Hurr Ameli*, he has considered Borsi as an expert of *hadith*, jurisprudent and an erudite based on an interpretation of his writings and poems[3]. Where *Ameli* makes reference to Borsi in his "*Al-Jawaher al-Saniyya fi al-Ahadith al-Qudsiya*" he calls him an "*aref*" [mystic] many times[4]. About his mysticism it should be noted that there is a strong presence of theoretical mysticism concepts in all of his writings. Borsi knew about the secrets of letters and numbers which helped him everywhere in his works especially "*Mashariq al-Anwar*" to elaborate on traditions. He was also endowed with a literary talent. In addition to his capabilities in prose, he was a

skillful poet. He had a strong love of Ahl al-Bayt (A.S) and has narrated and interpreted many traditions about their spiritual position and has composed many poems in this field. Some works, mostly concise treatises, have been attributed to Hafez Borsi so far, to show his love for Ahl al-Bayt (A.S) especially Imam Reza (A.S), such as "*Mashariq al-Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar al-Amir Al-Mo'menin (A.S)*", "*An Interpretation of Quran Chapter al-Tawhid*", "*Asrar al-Nabi, Fatima and A'emmah (A.S)*" etc [5]. He has left some poems which are entirely about Ahl al-Bayt's (A.S) virtues.

His grave is not certainly clear; some say his grave is in the cemetery of *Qatlgah* in Mashahd – where *Tabarsi* the author of "*Majma' al-Bayan*" is buried - without providing a resource or reason[6]. Some others are of the view that his grave is in the middle of a garden in Ardestan[7].

Bibliography of "*Mashariq al-Anwar al-Yaqin*"

"*Mashariq al-Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar al-Amir al-Mo'menin (A.S)*" [8] is Borsi's most prominent and famous work that interprets and elaborates on Ahl al-Bayt's (A.S) virtues and merits especially Imam Ali's (A.S) applying an innovative and novel method and using principles of theoretical mysticism. In this work, Borsi has narrated special traditions and narrations pertaining to the infallibles' (A.S) virtues less noticed before and has become an important source for people after him.

"*Mashariq al-Anwar al-Yaqin*" is among the works that compares mysticism with Ahl al-Bayt's (A.S) life with respect to the belief in numbers and letters[9].

Muslim Scholars' Viewpoint about "*Mashariq al-Anwar al-Yaqin*"

Borsi was brave in expressing his thoughts. His strong love of Ahl al-Bayt (A.S) made him collect strange traditions about Ahl al-Bayt (A.S) in a single collection making people who could not have been able to understand the true meaning of these traditions to criticize and condemn him. Another group – who had seen his sincerity and his belief in these traditions in *hadith* collections sporadically- defended him. However, everyone praise and emphasize his strong love of Ahl al-Bayt (A.S).

The most important criticism about "*Mashariq al-Anwar al-Yaqin*" is its exaggerations and its irrational and incomprehensible content. *Sheikh Hurr Ameli* [10], *Allamah Majlesi* [11] and *Seyyed Mohsen Amin* [12] have noticed this point and have said that *Mashariq* contains extreme and exaggerative information, sometimes implicitly though. However, *Seyyed Mohsen Amin* points out that the contents of this book are not in such a way that leads to question Borsi's beliefs making him unreliable[13].

Some others also believe that hundreds of fabricated traditions have been narrated in Borsi's "*Mashariq al-Anwar*". He says Borsi has many supporters among *Sheikhiyah*, *Kashefis* and *Ghulat* [exaggerators] [14].

These criticisms have led *Allamah Majlesi* to reject traditions narrated only by Borsi[15] as unreliable[16]. In fact, strange issues seen in Borsi's works especially *Mashariq al-Anwar* is partly due to traditions narrated only by Borsi without any sign of them being in other Shiite *hadith* collections and partly due to his interpretation of different traditions. About his singularity in the narration of some traditions including some traditions such as "*sermon of pride* [iftikhar]" [17] and "*sermon of tatanjiyah*"[18]. It should be noted that Borsi has had access to a remarkable number of earlier Shiite sources such as "*Kitab al-Waheda*" by *Ibn Jomhour Basri*.

Nevertheless, some scholars of whom one is *Allamah Majlesi* have defended Borsi's book saying: "*Ustad Hafiz Razi al-Din Rajab Borsi Hilli*" was a Shiite writer with mystical

orientations and was a jurist who has been knowledgeable in a number of sciences – with his evident supremacy in the science of *hadith* and his progress in literature and in his brilliant speeches as well as his expertise in the science of letters and their secrets and extraction of their benefits- therefore it can be noted that his writings are filled with research and deep investigation. In mysticism and science of letters he has chosen special methods and in love of Ahl al-Bayt (A.S) he has interpretations and viewpoints not endorsed by some people who consider him as an extremist. However the position Borsi considers for Imams, peace be upon them, does not always lead to extremism." [19] Then he refers to traditions like what Imam Ali, peace be upon him, has said: "Do not exaggerate about us; consider us as God's servants trained by Him then you can say whatever you wish." [20] Having narrated some traditions, *Allamah Amini* says: "Where can we look at the limits of supremacy God has granted the infallibles, peace be upon them? And when can we become aware of all the merits God has granted them? And who can know Imams, peace be upon him, properly? Or choose them? No! No! Minds will get astray and patience will run out, brains will become anxious and eyes blind, the great men belittled and thinkers boggled... That is why we see many of our scholars who have been researchers of secrets, think that only our Imams (A.S) deserve these positions while others are unable to accept these interpretations." [21]

However, regardless of what viewpoint we accept and what viewpoint we reject, some points should be taken into account about this author and his book:

1. In his brief review of Shiite beliefs, Borsi has shown his faith in famous Shiite beliefs. Having introduced both groups at both extremes, Borsi has considered himself in the middle that he calls "*arefoon*" [those who know][22]. Although he has criticized *ghulat* [exaggerators] many times, the reflection of some ideas in his writings have raised some questions about his religious beliefs.

It should be noted that he has been aware of the ambiguity of his book mentioning many times that some of his contemporaries would not tolerate these teachings. According to some scholars, due to his expertise in wisdom and mysticism and grasping and revealing some of Ahl al-Bayts' (A.S) positions, Borsi has been accused of exaggeration. Borsi has been supposedly condemned in his own era as he has mentioned in some parts of "*Mashariq al-Anwar*". He does not recognize any sin for himself but love of Imam Ali (A.S) and preaching and propagating his secrets denying exaggeration and delegation [of God's authority] and clearly states that exaggerators are those who consider a divine position for God's servants and have abandoned religious obligations[23]. With all these correct analyses, what Borsi has said is based on a research about *ghulu* [exaggeration] in Shiite theology.

2. Criticisms by some Muslim scholars are about its content i.e. they have noticed issues in some of traditions that are not compliant with Quran or with other traditions or foundations of Islamic theology. However, this method of criticism is true only if their criticism are based on arguments or based on absolutely endorsed traditions so that traditions narrated by Borsi be rejected if they are against the arguments or absolutely endorsed traditions while some of these criticisms are not based on argument and are not compliant with Islamic mysticism –which is the subject matter of some traditions narrated in *Mashariq al-Anwar*. Moreover, while criticizing the text of traditions, irrational concepts should not be deemed as the ruling of the intellect and use them as a basis to reject non-compliant traditions.

3. The respected book of "*al-Kafi*" also contains erroneous traditions. However it demonstrates Ahl al-Bayt's (A.S) teachings altogether and its luminescence is famous among the people of heart, because sometimes when judging a book it can't be completely accepted or completely rejected but a general statement can be offered about it on one hand and study the book completely with details and find the errors and forgeries on the other hand. The book "*Mashariq al-Anwar*" demonstrates the infallibles' (A.S) true position and general content of the book is not incorrect; since its general content complies with other traditions, rational reasons and foundations of Islamic mysticism and it is not correct to attribute exaggeration to its contents, although with a look at details some errors can be found as in case of any other book.
4. Moreover, traditions of this book can be applied as a proof. It has been supposedly the way scholars[24] have treated this book and has benefitted from its traditions. Even *Sheikh Hurr Ameli* [25] and *Allamah Majlesi* in "*Behar al-Anwar*" have narrated some traditions from "*Mashariq al-Anwar*" although he criticizes some of its content. *Allamah Majlesi* has narrated only some of his traditions compliant with authentic books[26].
5. In order not to be labeled as an exaggerator, traditions about Ahl al-Bayt's (A.S) position have not been usually narrated leading these traditions and their chain of narration to be lost. That's why books like "*Mashariq al-Anwar*" and other books compiled during later centuries contain traditions without a reliable source and if they have a source it is untraceable by *ilm al-rejal* [the science that discuss narrators and whether they are reliable or not]; therefore it is difficult to assess the source of exaggerative traditions.
6. *Allamah Majlesi's* statement is supposedly true that "I do not trust traditions narrated only in this book" [27] but the reason he provides that "because both books by Borsi [*Mashariq al-Anwar* and *al-Alfayn*] "contain issues leading to error, mixture of true and false and exaggeration about Ahl al-Bayt's (A.S) position" may not be correct since those books are unreliable due to traditions without a source and because it is necessary to have confidence to accept traditions about beliefs which need more care and attention.

[1] Amin Ameli, Seyyed Mohsen, A'yan al-Shi'a, vol.6, p.465, Dar al-Ta'arof lel-Matbu'at, Beirut, 1984; Sobhani, Jafar, Mosu'a Tabagat al-Fogaha, vol.9, p.106, Imam Sadeq (A) Institute, Qom, 1996

[2] A'yan al-Shi'a, vol.6, p.465

[3] Sheikh Hurr Ameli, Muhammad bin Hassan, Amal al-Amel, vol.2, p.117, Maktabat al-Andolos, Baghdad, 1963

[4] Like he says:"*al-Sheikh al-aref, Rajab al-Hafez al-Borsi* may Allah bless him, narrates ..." see: Sheikh Hurr Ameli, al-Jawaher al-Sanyyia fel ahadith al-Qodsyia, pp. 30, 195 and 526, Dehqan Publications, Tehran, third print, 2001

[5] See: A'yan al-Shi'a, vol.6, p.466

[6] Shirazi, Muhammad Ma'sum, Tara'eq al-Haq'eq, researched and corrected by: Mahjub, Muhammad Ja'far, vol.3, p.711, Sana'ee Publications, Tehran, first print, Bita

[7] Khansari, Muhammad Baqer bin Zein al-Abedin, Rozat al-Jannat fi Ahval al-Ulema va al-Sadat, vol.3, p.345, Qom, 2011; Modarres Tabrizi, Muhammad Ali, Rayhanat al-Adab, vol.2, p.11, Tehran, 1990

- [8] Aqa Bozurg Tehrani, al-Zari'a ela Tasanif al-Shi'a, vol.21, p.34, Esmailian, Qom, 1986; Husseini Jalali, Seyyed Muhammad Husseini, Fehres at-Turath, vol.1, pp. 751-752, Dalile Ma Publications, Qom, 2000
- [9] Letters can be thought and spoken about from different aspects. First, there are two types of letters; verbal and written. Verbal letters are based on sounds while written letters are based on writing. Lexicographers first study the etymology and structure of the word then they pay attention to its meaning and finally they try to find out what writer has meant out of a range of likely meanings based on context, internal and external signs. On the contrary, *Horofiyah* [scholars who study the letters independently] separate the word from its context then they dissect the word and study each letter separately to extract the secrets within each letter. Mohy al-Din bin Arabi, Movahhed, Mohammad Ali, Movahhed, Samad, Fosus al-Hekam (Translation and Analysis), p.48, Karname Publications, first print, 2006
- [10] See: Amal al-Amel, vol.2, p.117
- [11] See: Majlesi, Muhammad Baqer, Behar al-Anwar, al-Madkhal, p.152, Dar Ehya at-Torath al-Arabi, Beirut, second print, 1981
- [12] A'yan al-Shi'a, vol.6, p.466
- [13] ibid
- [14] Hassani, Hashem Ma'ruf, al-Mozu'at fel-Athar val-Akhbar, p.293, Beirut, 1973
- [15] *Hadith-e mofrad* [single tradition]; is a tradition narrated by a single narrator or a single sect or in a single city. Sometimes *shazz* is mistaken with *mofrad* and it is thought that *shazz* is *mofrad*. However, it is not correct; since *shazz* is where it is in contrast with a *mash-hur* [famous] tradition while *mofrad* is not like *shazz* in this respect. See: Nasiri, Ali, Study of *Hadith*, vol.2, p.54, Sanabel Publications, Qom, first print, 2004
- [16] Baqir, Majlesi, Behar al-Anwar, al-Madkhal, p.153
- [17] Hafez Borsi, Rajab bin Muhammad, Mashareq Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar Amir al-Mo'menin (A), researched and corrected by Ashur, Ali, p.260, A'lami, Beirut, first print, 2000
- [18] Ibid, p.263
- [19] Amini, Abdol Hussein, al-Ghadeer fi al-Ketab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Adab, vol.7, p.50, Markaz al-Ghadeer le al-Derasat al-Eslamiya, Qom, first print, 1994
- [20] Ibn Sho'be Harrani, Hassan bin Ali, Tohaf al-Oqul an Aal ar-Rasul (peace be upon him and his family), researched and corrected by Ghaffari, Ali Akbra, p.104, Daftar-e Entesharate Eslami, Qom, second print, 1982
- [21] al-Ghadeer fi al-Ketab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Ada, vol.7, pp.50-51
- [22] See: Mashareq Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar Amir al-Mo'menin (A), p.315
- [23] Mashareq Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar Amir al-Mo'menin (A), p.105
- [24] Such as: Qatifi, Ahmad bin Saleh, Rasa'el Aal Toq al-Qatifi, vol.1, p.127, Darol Mostafa le Ehya at-Torath, Beirut, first print, 2000; Shubbar, Seyyed Abdollah, Taslyat al-Fo'ad fi Bayan al-Mowt wa al-Hayat, p.76, Mo'assesat al-A'lami, Beirut, first print, 1993
- [25] See: Sheikh Hurr Ameli, al-Fusul al-Mohemma fi 'Osul al-A'emmah (Takmelat al-Wasa'el), researched and corrected by Qa'eni, Muhammad bin Muhammad Hussein, vol.1, p.323, Imam Reza (A.S) Islamic Ma'aref Institute, Qom, first print, 1996; Also in "Ethbat al-Hodat ben Nosus wa al-Mo'jezat", a lot of traditions from "Mashareq al-Anwar" by Hafez Borsi have been narrated.

[26] Behar al-Anwar, al-Madkhal, p.152

[27] ibid

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