

# 'ABDÜ 'L-MECÎD B. FIRIŞTE (D. 1459/60) AND THE EARLY TURKISH READING OF HURUFI CORPUS CANONICUM

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## ABSTRACT

After the notorious persecution of its Khurasani protagonists, profiting from the political and ideological vacuum of the interregnum and the upsurge of the Shiite propaganda of the late 15th century, the Hurufi teaching penetrated Eastern and Central Anatolia, partly disguised under the tenets of different Batini indoctrinated groups, making these regions by the end of the century, its new stronghold. The main stage of the events became the Ottoman lands. Particularly in the years after the Ankara disaster of 1402, Asia Minor and the Balkans became a fertile soil for all unorthodox doctrines, especially those, like Hurufi one, nurturing apocalyptic or messianic expectations. Simultaneously, Persian and the Gurgani vernacular retreated before the Anatolian Turkish as its written medium. The paper concentrates on the exegetical attempts of the second generation of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 1394)'s disciples, in particular the first Turkish translations and commentaries on his seminal works.

On the very eve of his arrest and the eventual execution at the fort of Alanjaq near Nakhchivan on September 2, 1394, anticipating his martyrdom, Fażl Allāh Astarābādī writes his last will, *Vaşiyyat-nāme*, forewarning his family and adherents, notably his son Salām Allāh and his preferred disciple Mīr 'Alī al-'Alā of the upcoming persecutions, and ordering them to make themselves inconspicuous, disperse to different locations and wait for the Apocalypse and his second coming as Messiah. After an attempted assassination of the Timurid ruler Shāhrukh (d. 1447) in Herat 1427, the revenging authorities executed an uncertain, but allegedly large number of Khurasani Hurufis including some members of Master's family. A few years later, in 1431, a second significant Hurufi instigated insurrection was suppressed in Isfahan. The last such attempt, stirred by the ubiquitous apocalyptic expectations of the time occurred in Tabriz under Jahān Shāh of Qara Qoyun (d. 1467), whose aftermath brought the execution of some five hundred prominent members of the movement, including Fażl Allāh's daughter Kalimat Allāh, and put an end to Hurufism in Khurasan and Azarbaijan.

Apart from the Messiah's own offspring, perished in the subsequent persecutions, and leaving behind virtually no written records, the Hurufi tradition distinguishes three prominent personalities as his immediate successors, responsible for further expansion and survival of the order: 1) Khawaja Sayyid Ishāq, who after Fażl Allāh's death remained in Khurasan, in his writings being more radical

and militant than the other two, and very probably belonged to the fraction led by the above mentioned Fażl Allāh's daughter; 2) Sayyid 'Imād al-Dīn Nasīmī (d. 1404/5), being of Turkic origin, and less personally but more through popularity of his Turkish *divān* heavily contributed to the spread of Hurufi teachings among Anatolian Turks, particularly in the later times; 3) Amīr Sayyid 'Aliyy al-A'ālā (d. 1419), being the most prolific writer among the three, the major propagator of Fażl Allāh's teachings and beliefs in his messianic mission. If we disregard the birth of Nuqtawiyya movement of an alleged disciple of Fażl Allāh, Maḥmūd Pasikhānī (d. 1427) in Iran and India, the Iranian era of Hurufism was closed. The main stage of the events moved to the Ottoman lands. Particularly in the years after Ankara disaster, and due to the ideological vacuum it created, Asia Minor and the Balkans became a fertile soil for all unorthodox religious doctrines, especially those, like Ḥurūfī one, nurturing apocalyptic or messianic expectations.

Considering the appearance and the further development of Hurufism in the Ottoman Empire, I found it convenient to tentatively distinguish three not sharply divided periods regarding the form and extent of their propaganda activities: 1) the missionary period, covering roughly 15th century; 2) the *ısrık* period with its peak towards the end of the 16th century; 3) the multifaceted Hurufi-Bektaşī period, from the 16th century on. As for the implantation of Hurufism in Anatolia, it is hard to discern the truth from the legend. What is sure is that Fażl Allāh's *khalīfas* started their propaganda in Anatolia from the beginning of the 15th century via Tabriz and Aleppo. According to a Bektaşī tradition, the person responsible for the spread of the Hurufi teachings in the Turkish speaking lands was Fażl Allāh's *khalīfa* 'Alī al-A'ālā, who, after escaped from persecutions in Khurasan and Azarbaijan took shelter in a Bektaşī convent, and according to, for Hurufis less favorable version of the same story, disguised as a Bektaşī dervish, passed *Jāvidān-nāme* off as a work of Hacı Bektaş. On this legend insists also an once extremely popular anti-Hurufi propaganda pamphlet of a certain İshāk Efendi from 1893, *Kāshif al-Asrār wa Dāfi' al-Ashrār*. However, the story is not supported by any historical document, save that 'Alī al-A'ālā was rather actively travelling westward to Syria and further, and among the places he visited mentions also Aladağ near Adana, and I assume it to be a Bektaşī legend. If ever being active in Anatolia, we know for sure that he has eventually returned to Khurasan where died and buried next to his *murshid* in Alıncaq. Another possible channel of communication between the Khurasani Hurufis and the Anatolian Bektaşīs was the proselytizing activity of another *khalīfa* of Fażl Allāh, Mīr Sharīf, who in his *Khajj-nāme* describes his and his brother's travels in Asia Minor, bringing some Fażl Allāh's books with them. The third channel could be Nesīmī's Turkish poetry. Indeed, Bektaşīs believed that Nesīmī was a companion of Hacı Bektaş, indulging in long conversations with him, but, as mentioned before, all legends about direct contacts and conversations between early Hurufi protagonists and Bektaşīs have to be taken with an utmost caution.

The first well documented account on the Hurufi activities in the Ottoman domains is a report of the Ottoman 16th century chronicler Taşköprü-zâde, who in his *Şhaqâ'iq al- Nu'māniyya* relates a well-known event, when, kindled by the religious zeal of Fahu 'd-Dîn 'Acemî (d. 1460) and grandvizier Mahmûd Paşa (d. 1474), a Hurufi teacher having considerable influence on Mehmed II was executed together with his associates. From the report it is not completely clear when the event actually occurred. The modern researchers<sup>1</sup> tend to place it in Mehmed's first sultanate (1444-1446); I dare, however, to date it to his second reign. If not to an extent suggested by Kuçek Abdal in the *Otmân Baba Vilâyetnâmesi*, it was not a secret that Mehmed II was intellectually inquisitive and heavily inclined to un-orthodox doctrines of the time. His ambitions of conquering Constantinople were not concealed, and were particularly appealing to those, who, like Hurufis, believed that the conquest of Constantinople by Muslims will be the final evidence of Messiah's coming, so they naturally hurried to reveal themselves to him. We, of course, cannot be sure to which extent the Sultan was close to the Hurufi ideas, but we also cannot fail to notice that his dreams of making himself the universal ruler are not without a messianic flavor. In any case, Hurufi presence in the half of the 15th century in a place as distant as Edirne, let alone having access to a ruler, shows that the teaching spread through Anatolia in a very short time.

The clandestine chapter of the Hurufi history opened with the Edirne affair continued for almost a century. From the Ottoman *mühimme defterleri* we learn about a sudden revival of Hurufi groups in the second half of the 16th century, in Anatolia usually connected with Bektâşis or Kızılbaş, in the western Balkans mostly independent, and generally referred as *İşıks*. As centers of their activities were mentioned tekkes in Plovdiv, Varna, and Tatarpazarı.<sup>2</sup> The six notes from *mühimme defterleri* were dated between 1573 and 1577. 1573 is the year when the notorious persecution of the Bosnian Hamzevîs started, so it is impossible not to bring two events together. Indeed, a contemporary religious treatise of the Bosnian provenance warns of Hurufis and Hamzevis, who united threaten to overthrow the Sultan and the 'ulemâ' and establish a state based on immorality and unbelief.<sup>3</sup> Similarly tempered, and probably referring to the same dervish groups is a letter written by the Halveti sheikh Bâlî Efendi of Sofia to the grandvizier Rustem Paşa.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Franz Babinger, "Von Amurath zu Amurath. Vor- und Nachspiel der Schlacht bei Varna," *Oriens* 3, no 2 (1950): 244-245; Colin Imber, "A Note on 'Christian' Preachers in the Ottoman Empire," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 10 (1990): 59-60.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmet Refik, *Onaltıncı Asırda Râfızîlik Ve Bektâşîlik* (Istanbul, 1932), 41-42, 44-46, 49-50, 59-60, 63, 90, 101-102.

<sup>3</sup> Ibrahim Mehinagić, "Četiri neobjavljena izvora o hamzevijama iz sredine XVI vijeka," *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* 18-19 (1973): 217-266.

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Tietze, "Sheykh Bâlî Efendi's Report on the Followers of Sheykh Bedreddin," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 7-8 (1988): 115-122.

The sheikh reports on “apostates and atheists” (*melâhide ve zenâdka*), who declare that “...the wine they promise to be offered in paradise is none other than this exhilarating, mirth imparting wine. What they call Kevser, the sweet river in paradise, is none other than lips of the beloved, sheikh’s soothing words and healing breath. And the promised paradise virgins are none others than these earthly maids and brides...”<sup>5</sup> Simultaneously with the Hurufî penetration westwards, Persian and Gurgani vernacular retreated before the Anatolian Turkish as its written medium. The original Hurufî ritual books needed to be translated and commented in order to accommodate new adherents.

Which were the books Mîr Sharîf brought with him from Khurasan? Or, in other words, what is the essential corpus of the Hurufî literature which needed to be translated and commented? At first, the works of Fazl Allah himself. His opus is considerably smaller than of many of his disciples. The four prose works are: 1) *Jâvidân-nâme*, the magnum opus, written in Gurgani dialect of Astarabad; 2) *Navm-nâme*, a short work, commonly attached to the previous book, deals with the interpretations of dreams, obviously pertaining to the early period of Fazl Allâh’s prophetic career; 3) *Maḥabbet-nâme*; 4) *Vaṣiyet-nâme*, his last will. Actually, there are two versions, the larger one was published by Abdülbâkî Gölpinarlı.<sup>6</sup> 5) *‘Arsh-nâme*, also known as *‘Arsh-nâme-i Ilâhî*, a *mathnawî* in 1220 distichs, is Fazl Allâh’s most important work after *Jâvidân-nâme*. The name was taken from the Quranic term meaning “God’s Throne”<sup>7</sup> For Fazl Allâh, “the Throne of God” is, naturally, the human face. The book is sometimes called also *Jâvidân-i Şağîr*, a denomination which deserves the further explanation below. Fazl Allâh left behind also a *dîvân* in Persian under a nom de plume (*makhlâs*) Na‘îmî. In different manuscript collections I have found some more titles attributed to him, which could not be confirmed in any biobibliographical work. The titles are: *Kitâb-i Rûḥîyye*, *Shaa al-Qamar*, *Vaḥdat al-Vujûd*, *Nûr-nâme*.

Highly esteemed were also the works of his *khalîfas*: ‘Alî al-A‘lâ’s *Tavḥîd-nâme*, *Qiyâmat-nâme*, *Akḥîrat-nâme*, and *Sa‘âdat-nâme*; Sayyid Ishâq’s *Maḥram-nâme*, *Taḥqîq-nâme*, *Khâb-nâme*, *Ishârat-nâme*, and *Turâb-nâme*; Mîr Sharîf’s *Khajj-nâme*, *Maḥshar-nâme*, *Risâle-i Ism u Musammâ*, *Bayân al-Vâqî‘*; Amîr Ghiyâs al-Dîn’s *Istivâ-nâme*; Nasîmî’s *Dîvân* and *Muqaddimat al-Ḥaqâ’iq*; and Mîr Fazîlî’s *Risâle* and *Sharḥ-i Taqṣîmât*.

Even though the late Bektaşî propaganda prefers to ascribe such a role to one of Fazl Allâh’s immediate successors, ‘Alî al-A‘lâ, it seems that the personality

<sup>5</sup> “...cennetde şarâb gelür dedikleri şarâb bu şarâb-ı gam-zidâ ve ferâh-bahşâdır. Ve Kevser dedikleri leb-i dîlber ve şeybin kelîmât-i tayyîbesi enfâs-i kudsiyyesidir. Ve hûrî dedikleri işbu gelinler ve dubterleri...” Tietze, “Sheykh Bâlî,” 116.

<sup>6</sup> Abdülbâkî Gölpinarlı, “Fazlullah-ı Hurufî’nin Vasiyyat-Nâme’si veya Vesâyâsi,” *Şarkîyat Mecmuası* 2 (1958): 53-62.

<sup>7</sup> Qur’an 20:5.

mainly responsible for distribution of Hurufî ideas, and their exposition among the Anatolian Turks was 'Abdü 'l- Mecîd b. Firişte, born in Tire near Izmir, and according to Taşköprü-zâde<sup>8</sup> also a younger brother of the much more famous 'Abdü 'l-Latîf b. Firişte, known also as İbn-i Melek. İshâk Efendi in *Kāshif al-Asrār* asserts, without reference to the source that he died in 1459/60. The author of a recent work on the, allegedly his, dictionary of Quranic terms, Cemal Muhtar complicates things even further, claiming that the former could not be his elder brother but his father, finding forty years between the dates of their deaths too much, assuming somehow that both died in the same age and were born from the same mother.<sup>9</sup> I guess that Taşköprü-zâde and Mecdî<sup>10</sup> were right asserting that they were brothers. Mecdî claims that there was one more writer in the family, bearing the same name, and being the real author of the well known lexicographical work *Luğat-i Kânûn-i İlahî*, a work generally wrongly attributed to 'Abdü 'l-Mecîd the Hurufî by modern Turkish researchers. 'Abdü 'l-Mecîd has left behind four written works: *Ashq-nâme*, *Akhiret-nâme*, *Hidāyet-nâme*, and a translation of Fazl Allāh's *Khāb-nâme*. The seminal work of Firişte-zâde, *Ashq-nâme* was extremely popular and influential in the Hurufî circles, so much that it deserved the honorary title: *Jāvidān-i Şağîr* (The Small *Jāvidān*). Here we need to make a small digression and address some common mistakes regarding this second title and the İbn-i Firişte's work itself. In the introduction to his book, the author says: "Now, this humble servant Firişte-zâde translated *Cāvidān-nâme*, the Book of Eternity, written by the exalted Fazlullāh, from Persian to Turkish, so that it could be used by those who do not know Persian."<sup>11</sup> Abdülbâkî Gölpınarlı in his article in Brill's *Encyclopedia of Islam*, asserts in footsteps of Sâdiq Qiyā<sup>12</sup> that İbn Firişte's work was a Turkish translation of *Jāvidān-nâme*, or more precisely, of its shorter version written by Fazl Allāh himself in standard Persian, generally known as *Jāvidān-i Şağîr*. However, no contemporary source mentions such a book of Fazl Allāh. Infallibly well informed Amîr Ghiyās al-Dîn in *Istivānâme*, the main source for Fazl Allāh's biography, also does not mention such work, so I have enough reasons to believe that it has never existed. Gölpınarlı indirectly accepted his mistake in the introduction to his later work *Hurûfî Metinleri Kataloğu* admitting that he has never found a sole mentioning of the work<sup>13</sup>, however later researchers including authors like

<sup>8</sup> Taşköprü-zâde, *Al-Shaqā'iq al-Nu'māniyya fî 'Ulamā al-Dawlat al-Uthmāniyya* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabî, 1975), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Cemal Muhtar, *İki Kur'an Sözlüğü Luğat-i Ferišteoğlu Ve Luğat-i Kanuni İlahi* (Ankara, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Mehmed Mecdî, *Şakâ'ik Tercümesi* (İstanbul, 1269 H), 67.

<sup>11</sup> *İmdi bu fakîr Firişte-zâde, Hazret-i Fazl-i Yezdân'ın Cāvidān-nâme'sinin lisân-i Fârsî'den Fârsî bilmeyenlere nefî olmak için lisân-i Türkî'ye terceme eyledüm.*

<sup>12</sup> Şâdiq Kiyā, *Vāzbe-nâme-yi Gurgānî* (Tahrân: Intishārât-i Dānishgāh-i Tahrân, 1330 H).

<sup>13</sup> Abdülbâkî Gölpınarlı, *Hurûfî Metinleri Kataloğu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1973).

Hüsametdin Aksu<sup>14</sup>, Shahzad Bashir<sup>15</sup>, and Rüşhan Khiyāvi<sup>16</sup> meticulously transmitted Gölpınarlı's error, adding also some of their owns. Fazl Allāh's *Jāvidān-nāme* is a voluminous book of some 600 folios (631 in Ankara Milli Ktp. manuscript I used) while *'Ashq-nāme* has 164 pages in the lithographic edition of 1871, less than 100 in the manuscript from Türk Tarih Kurumu I used. Also the comparison between two works assured me that *'Ashq-nāme* is neither translation of *Jāvidān-nāme* nor its précis or summary. It is an independent original work elaborating Hurufi doctrine even in a better organised way than Fazl Allāh's own works. The Arabic root *t-r-j-m* comprises but does not denote specifically a literary translation, it could mean also commentary, explanation, even approach. As far as the *Jāvidān-i Şağîr* is concerned, I assume that such work of Fazl Allāh was an invention of the modern researchers. Such honorary title I found attributed to: 1) İbn-i Firişte's *'Ashq-nāme*; 2) Derviş Murtazâ's 17th century abbreviated translation of *Jāvidān-i Kabîr* named *Dürr-i Yetîm*; 3) Gölpınarlı<sup>17</sup> thinks that *Jāvidān-i Şağîr* could be Fazl Allāh's second-by-importance work *'Arsh-nāme*. It sounds reasonable. 4) A manuscript from the National Library in Ankara contains a rather extensive (131 folios) Hurufi work in standard Persian beginning with: "*Dhāt-i nutq ki vujūd-i 32 kalima Hazrat-i F H [Fazl-i Haqq] ast J H [jalla jalālu-hu] majmū' i mavjūd va mukavvanāt-rā az ān 32 kalima-yi aşl dar vujūd āvurde ki hama mavjūdāt-i ān-ast. Bā ān 32 kalima-yi aşl ki vujūd-i mutlaq Hazrat F Q [Fazl-i Haqq] ast J H [jalla jalālu-hu]...*"<sup>18</sup> On folio 1a there is a colophon informing that the title of the work is *Jāvidān-i Şağîr*, and that its author is 'Alī al-A'lā. So I dare to claim that: a) such a work of Fazl Allāh has never existed; b) any exegetic works related to *Jāvidān-i Kabîr*, or elaborating main tenets of the Hurufi belief, and enjoying highest respect had chance to be called *Jāvidān-i Şağîr*.

Firişte-zâde's book is symbolically divided into twenty eight chapters corresponding to the twenty eight letters of the Arabic alphabet. The author expounds the essential postulates of the Islamic creed, like prayer, pilgrimage, or *tawhid*, explains meanings of certain Koranic verses, naturally in the light of the Hurufi exegesis. The book enjoyed a considerable popularity, judging by the huge number

<sup>14</sup> Hüsametdin Aksu, "Câvidānnâme," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* Vol. 7 (Istanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1993), 178.

<sup>15</sup> Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Rüşhan Khiyāvi, *Hurūfiyya Tārīkh 'Aqā'id Ve 'Arā'* (Tahrān: Nashr-i Ātiya, 1379 H).

<sup>17</sup> Abdülbâkî Gölpınarlı, "Faḍl Allāh Hurūfî," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 733-735; Gölpınarlı, *Hurūfîlik Metinleri*, 24-26.

<sup>18</sup> "The essence of the faculty of speech which exists through 32 primordial letters in the possession of the sublime Fazl Allāh, the Grace of God, may His glory be exalted, from which all existing and called into being were brought into existence. These 32 letters are the absolute existence of the Grace of God, may His glory be exalted..." MS Ankara, Milli Ktp., Adnan Ötügen 139.

of its copies in different manuscript collections. The work was printed in 1871, some popular modern editions full of mistakes and virtually useless were produced by tiny publishing houses, or Alevite cultural institutions. The other Firişte-zâde's works are his Turkish translation of Fazl Allâh's *Maḥabbat-nāme* entitled *Hidāyet-nāme*, a Turkish translation of Sayyid Ishāq's *Khāb-nāme*, and an original work *Ākhirat-nāme*.

As a conclusion, I offer a simple categorization of the Turkish Hurufi literature of the later period: 1) exegetic works; 2) linguistic auxiliary works; 3) original prose works; 4) poetry. The exegetic works could be subdivided into three categories: 1) translations; 2) abbreviated translations; 3) commentaries. Linguistic auxiliary works could be subdivided into: 1) dictionaries of the Gurgani dialect; 2) lists of sigla and symbols.

As an important translation we should mention *Dürr-i Yetîm* of Dervîş Murtazâ, as a commentary Kemâl Hâşimî's commentary on *Jāvidān-nāme*. Original Hurufi treatises were written by İškurt Muhammed Dede (*Şalāt-nāme*), Yemînî (*Fazîlat-nāme*), Misâlî (*Miftāḥ al-Ghayb*, *Fayz-nāme*, *Kavthar-nāme*), Muhîti (*Vahdat-nāme*, *Kashf-nāme*, *Qismat-nāme*), Virânî (*Risāle*). Among Hurufi *dīvān* poets the most prominent were: Refî'î (mathnawis *Bashārat-nāme* and *Ganj-nāme*), Misâlî, Rümûzî, Bosnalî Vahdetî, Temennâyi, Muhîti, Penâhî, Usûlî, Rûhî-yi Bagdâdî, 'Arşî. *Jāvidān-nāme* was written in the Astarabadi (Gurgani) dialect, so there were many, more or less complete dictionaries, usually at the end of a book. Even more common are lists of sigla and abbreviations typical for Hurufi scriptures. Combining different manuscript sources I composed a list of more than 200 such symbols. Such small dictionaries were referred as "key" (*miftāḥ*) in the title: *Miftāḥ*, *Miftāḥ-i Kutub-i Hurūfiyān*, *Miftāḥ-i Hurūf-i Jāvidān*, *Kashf-i Rumūzāt-i Jāvidān-i Şağîr*, *Bayān-i Rumūzāt-i Jāvidān-nāme ve Maḥabbat-nāme ve 'Arsh-nāme-yi Ilāhî*. I should also add hundreds of anonymous Hurufî treatises, scattered in libraries throughout the world. I would in particular like to draw attention to three rich and virtually untouched Hurufi collections to be found in the Library of Albanian Academy of Sciences in Tirana, Hacı Bektaş Museum Archive in Nevşehir, and Yapı Kredi Sermet Çifter Araştırma Kütüphanesi in İstanbul.

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