



'ALĪ AL-A'LĀ

'ALĪ AL-A'LĀ (d. 822/1419), also known as Amīr Sayyed 'Alī, principal successor of Fażlallāh Astarābādī, founder of the Ḥorūfī sect. Mention is to be found of him in the following Ḥorūfī texts: *Bayān al-wāqe'* by Mīr Šarīf, where he heads a list of fifteen important disciples of Fażlallāh; the *Šalāt-nāma* of Iščort Dada; and above all the *Estewān-nāma* of his own disciple and nephew, Amīr Ġiāt-al-dīn Moḥammad Astarābādī. In this last work he is designated as “the unveiler of the secrets of the *Jāvīdān-nāma* [the principal scripture of Horufism]” and “God’s vice-regent and trustee upon earth;” the work records several of 'Alī al-A'lā's discourses, including one rejecting the Islamic doctrine of the afterlife, pronounced at Aladağ near Kars (see A. Gölpınarlı, *Hurufilik metinleri Kataloğu*, Ankara, 1973, pp. 14-15, and H. Ritter, “Die Anfänge der Ḥurūfisekte,” *Oriens* 7, 1954, p. 35). By contrast, the *Ešq-nāma* of 'Abd-al-Majīd Ferešta-zāda, an early Turkish Ḥorūfī, omits 'Alī al-A'lā's name from a list of the four principal confidants of Fażlallāh: Majd, Maḥmūd, Kamāl Hāšemī, and Bu'l-Ḥasan (quoted in Tarbiat, *Danešmandān*, p. 387). It has therefore been concluded that 'Alī al-A'lā must be identical with one of the four, most probably Bu'l-Ḥasan (Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” p. 35), but as Gölpınarlı has shown (*Hurufilik metinleri kataloğu*, p. 15), such an identification is impossible, because numerous Ḥorūfī texts mention 'Alī al-A'lā and Bu'l-Ḥasan as separate individuals.

Little is known of 'Alī al-A'lā's biography. It is probable that he belonged to the circle of eight followers that gathered around Fażlallāh Astarābādī in Toqči near Isfahan after he founded his sect in about 778/1376. After Fażlallāh's



execution in 796/1394 and the consequent suppression of Horufism in Iran, ‘Alī al-A‘lā traveled westwards to seek adherents for the new faith in Syria and Anatolia, possibly in the year 802/1400 (date suggested by Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” p. 29). In his *matnawī* entitled *Korsī-nāma*, he writes that from Syria he sent copies of the *Jāvīdān-nāma* to Anatolia, and that it went “beyond Istanbul and across the water.” Soon he traveled himself to Anatolia, going as far east as *īl-e Lāz*, i.e., the Lāz-inhabited region of the Black Sea coast east of Trebizond (*Korsī-nāma*, quoted in Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” pp. 50-51). His statement that the *Jāvīdān-nāma* went across the water is to be interpreted as an allusion to the propagation of Horufism in Edirne, then capital of the Ottoman state; Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, when a young prince in Edirne, is known to have inclined to the sect. The fusion of Horufism with the Bektāšī Sufi order, in Turkey and elsewhere, is also associated with the travels of ‘Alī al-A‘lā. According to *Kāšef al-asrār wa dāfe‘ al-ašrār*, a Turkish polemic against the Bektāšīs written in 1290/1873 by a certain Ešḥāq Efendi, ‘Alī al-A‘lā went to the chief *tekke* of the Bektāšīs near Kırşehir, claiming to be the successor of Ḥājjī Bektāš Veli and introducing the *Jāvīdān-nāma* to the Bektāšīs as a hitherto unknown work by the founder of their order (quoted by Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* III, pp. 371-72; F. Köprülü, *Türk edebiyatında ilk mutasavvıflar*, 2nd ed., Ankara, 1966, p. 95, n. 45; J. K. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, London, 1937, p. 60). Similar accounts are to be found in Kamāl-al-dīn Ḥarīrī’s *Tebyān wasā‘el al-ḥaqā‘eq fī bayān salāsel al-ṭarā‘eq* (ms. Ibrahim Ef. [Süleymaniye], 430/1, fol. 124a)—“many people took the *ṭarīqat* from him, going astray themselves and leading others astray”—and the anonymous *Īzāḥ al-asrār* (Istanbul University Library, Turkish ms. 4382, quoted in Gölpınarlı, *Hurufilik metinleri kataloğu*, p. 28). All three of these sources are late and are characterized by a hostility to contemporary Bektāšīs that leads them to seek an explanation for the transformation of the order from Sunnism to antinomianism and crypto-Shi‘ism. That ‘Alī al-A‘lā played a role in the incorporation of Horufism into the eclectic doctrines of the Bektāšī order is however confirmed by the oral tradition of the Bektāšīs themselves; he is reputed by them to have become the *morīd* of Gül Bābā, a celebrated Bektāšī whose tomb still stands in Budapest (Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, p. 61). He is said to have been put to death, presumably by the Ottomans, in Moḥarram, 822/February, 1419, and to have been buried near his master at Alīncak near Nakjvān (Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” pp. 35-36).

In addition to the *Korsī-nāma* already mentioned, ‘Alī al-A‘lā composed three other *matnawīs*, *Tawḥīd-nāma*, *Ferāq-nāma* and *Qīāmat-nāma*, and two elegies,



one on the death of his brother and the other on the execution of another successor of Fażlallāh Astarābādī, Sayyed Kamāl-al-dīn Ḥosayn. Extracts from some of these works have been printed in C. Huart, *Textes persans relatifs à la secte des Houroufis*, Leiden and London (GMS 9), 1909, pp. 260ff., and Ş. Kīā, *Vāža-nāma-ye Gorgānī*, Tehran, 1330 Š./1951, pp. 282-84. Manuscripts of ‘Alī al-A’lā’s writings are listed by Gölpınarlı in *Hurufilik metinleri kataloğu*, pp. 133-38, and Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” p. 36 (Ritter’s attribution to ‘Alī al-A’lā of a fifth *maṭnawī*, *Başārat-nāma*, and a prose work, *Maḥşar-nāma*, is unsound; see Gölpınarlı *Hurufilik metinleri kataloğu*, pp. 78-79 and 92-93). For a definitive account of the life and activity of ‘Alī al-A’lā, we must wait until these works together with the rest of early Ḥorūfī literature, have been fully examined.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.