



ASTARĀBĀDĪ, FAẒLALLĀH

ASTARĀBĀDĪ, FAẒLALLĀH ŠEHĀB-AL-DĪN B. BAHĀ'-AL-DĪN (or B. ABŪ MOḤAMMAD) (d. 796/1394), founder of the Ḥorūfī religion that achieved some prominence in Timurid Iran before coming to exert a decisive influence on the Bektāšī order of dervishes in Turkey. He is sometimes designated as FaẒlallāh Ḥorūfī or FaẒlallāh Tabrīzī, the latter designation deriving presumably from his several periods of residence in Tabrīz. Among his followers he was known first as *ṣāḥeb-e ta'wīl* (the master of interpretation, both of dreams and of the inner meaning of Islamic ritual) and then, after advancing claims to divinity, as *rabb al-'ālamīn* (the Lord of the Worlds). In his poetry he used the *taḳallos* Na'imī.

According to all Ḥorūfī sources, FaẒlallāh was born in Astarābād in 740/1339-40, where his father was chief *qāẓī*. His family claimed 'Alid descent, by way of Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓem. From earliest childhood he showed an inclination to devoutness and asceticism, being particularly fastidious that all he ate should be *ḥalāl*. When his father died, he assumed the duties of *qāẓī*, despite his extreme youth, and it was while he was returning home one day from his judicial duties that he heard someone in the bazaar reciting this verse of Rūmī: "Why fret over death, when you have the essence of eternity? / How can the grave contain you, when you have the light of God?" Inquiring about the meaning of this verse, he was advised that it could be understood only experientially, through following the well-known practices of Sufism. He therefore redoubled his pious zeal, engaging in *dekr* with particular vigor. The effectiveness of this practice enabled him to transpose all aspiration to the



spiritual world, made visible to him in a series of intense and luminous dreams, and gradually to cast off all worldly attachment.

When he was about eighteen, FaẒlallāh donned the felt garments of a shepherd and set out on the *ḥajj*. Returning from Mecca, he went to K̄vārazm and stayed there for a period of unknown duration before leaving again on the *ḥajj*. While traveling through Fārs, he was confronted with an apparition of the Imam ‘Alī al-Rezā, who commanded him to change direction and travel to Mašhad. This he did, and he remained for some time at the shrine of the imam in communion with his spirit before resuming the journey to Mecca. (The statement in Mīrzā Maḳdūm’s *al-Nawāqeẓ le bayān al-rawāfeẓ* quoted in ‘Abbās ‘Azzāwī, *Tārīḳ al-‘Erāq bayn eḥtelālayn*, Baghdad, 1373/1953, I, p. 249, that FaẒlallāh spent twenty years at the shrine of ‘Alī in Najaf is to be discounted).

After completing his second *ḥajj*, FaẒlallāh again returned to K̄vārazm and had there a number of dreams that seemed to foretell greatness and a mission that would bring to an end his life of private devotion. In one of these dreams, he saw himself in the garden of his former house at Astarābād that he now perceived to be the “seat of sincerity” (*maq‘ad ṣedq*) mentioned in Qur‘ān 55:55. Also in the garden was the prophet Solomon, calling for his celebrated hoopoe. The hoopoe appeared, bearing with it a raven. On the orders of Solomon, the feathers of the raven were plucked and thrown over the wall of the garden; the featherless bird was then entrusted to FaẒlallāh. According to FaẒlallāh’s interpretation, Solomon represented God, the hoopoe, the spirit (*rūhĀj*), and the raven, the soul (*nafs*). In another dream, still more fraught with indications of greatness, FaẒlallāh saw a bright star rising in the east, a ray from which pierced his right eye until gradually the whole orb was absorbed in his eye. A voice informed him, “this is a star that rises once every few centuries” (Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” pp. 10-12; Gölpınarlı, *Katalog*, pp. 5-6.).

An interest in dreams and their interpretation, an element constant throughout his life, dominated the first and orthodox stage of his religious activity. It was through the ability to interpret dreams, both his own and those of others, that he now began to acquire a following, first in K̄vārazm, where Darvīš ‘Alī, Darvīš Bāyazīd, and Moḥammad Nānvā gave him their allegiance, and then, on a wider scale, in Țoḳċī, a northern suburb of Isfahan. Together with his followers, who now included a Sufi called Mo‘īn-al-dīn Šahrestānī, he took up residence in the mosque of Țoḳċī and established an ascetic and pious community whose members came to be known as *darvīšān-e ḥalālḳvor* o



rāstgūy (*ḥalāl*-eating and truth-speaking dervishes). They never accepted charity, making their livelihood with the manufacture and sale of caps, they held their property in common and were generous to the poor. Their pious way of life, as well as Fażlallāh's skill in the interpretation of dreams, drew the notables of Isfahan to seek out Fażlallāh in Ҷoқči, and the fame of his small community spread throughout Khorasan, 'Erāq, Azarbaijan and Šīrvān (Ritter, "Die Anfänge," pp. 12-14; Gölpinarlı, *Katalog*, pp. 6-8).

Fażlallāh's career took a decisive turn when he left Ҷoқči for Tabrīz, probably early in 775/1373. There he gained access to the Jalayerid court, and enrolled among his following the minister Zakariyā, Shaikh K̄vāja Šāḥeb Šadr, and Sultan Oways b. Ḥasan himself. To the last of these he gave a dervish felt hat imbued with his *baraka* (blessing). The devotion of the Jalayerid nobility to Fażlallāh seems to have been based purely on his skill in the interpretation of dreams, but it was also in Tabrīz at this time that he began his progressive dissociation from Islamic orthodoxy. It is said that in late Ša'bān or early Ramażān, 775/February, 1374, he received a comprehensive revelation of esoteric knowledge that embraced the truths (*ḥaqā'eq*) and stations (*maqāmāt*) of the prophets, the inner meaning of the Islamic rites of worship, and the symbolic sense of the letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet, numerologically determined. This experience left him in a state of bewilderment for three days and nights, until he heard a voice intoning the cryptic verse, "at the moment wherein time became separated the world was fully delivered from torment," and proclaiming Fażlallāh "the Lord of the Age and the Sultan of the Prophets" (Ritter, "Die Anfänge," p. 20). The event is alluded to by 'Alī al-A'lā as a manifestation of the divine essence in the person of Fażlallāh (see lines from *Korsī-nāma* quoted in Kīā, *Wāža-nāma*, pp. 289-90).

It appears that Fażlallāh left Tabrīz for Ҷoқči again without making a public proclamation of his new-found eminence. He retired to a cave, and did not emerge until he was informed that an aged follower, Darvīš Mosāfer, was on the point of death. Darvīš Mosāfer told him that the time had come for him openly to declare his teaching and for "the manifestation of divine glory" (*zohūr-e kebrīā*), adducing as proof a dream that Fażlallāh had seen while in Tabrīz. Fażlallāh agreed, and gathered around him his first eight *morīds*: Faḫr-al-dīn, Jalāl Borūjerdī, Fażlallāh Korāsānī, Ḥosayn, Mīr Abdāl Eşfahānī, 'Alī al-A'lā, and two unnamed persons, one from Nā'in and the other from the Dašt-e Qepčāq (Gölpinarlı, *Katalog*, p. 7; a slightly different list is given by Ritter, "Die Anfänge," p. 38, although like Gölpinarlı he quotes the *Korsī-nāma* of 'Alī al-



A'lā). Precisely what is meant by the term *zohūr-e kebrīā'* is uncertain: it may have been a claim to mahdihood (see Šibī, *al-Fekr al-šī'i*, p. 181), a claim to divinity, or both simultaneously, notwithstanding the logical contradiction between the two. The exact sequence and dating of events is also unclear, since, again according to the *Korsī-nāma* (quoted in Ritter, "Die Anfänge," p. 22), the "descent of the essence of beings into the luminous consciousness of FaẒlallāh, the Lord of the Worlds" took place in Tabrīz in 788/1386. It was in the same year that FaẒlallāh began writing the *Jāvīdān-nāma*, a work regarded by Ḥorūfīs as sacred, but no clear correlation is made between the *zohūr-e kebrīā'* and the beginning of the composition of the *Jāvīdān-nāma*.

FaẒlallāh was back in Țoqčī in 790/ 1388, and at some point visited Gīlān and Dāmḡān, but he seems to have spent most of the last part of his life in Baku (Bākūya). There are several references to Baku in the *Jāvīdān-nāma*, and it is certain that he was there six months before his arrest and execution in Țu'l-qa'da, 796/September, 1394. He is said to have had foreknowledge of the exact time, place, and manner of his execution, and even of the physical particulars of his executioner (*Bašārat-nāma* of Rafī'i quoted by Gölpınarlı, *Katalog*, p. 11), so that what befell him was fully expected. Returning to Baku from a visit to a certain Qāzī Bāyazīd in Šamāķī, he was arrested by a party of soldiers coming from Astarābād and imprisoned in the castle at Alenja(q) (or Alanjaq?) near Naķjavān on the command of Mīrānšāh, son of Tīmūr, on 1 Țu'l-qa'da 796/28 August 1394. He was executed six days later (Gölpınarlı, *Katalog*, p. 8).

The precise reasons for his arrest and execution are not known. According to the account of Ebn Ḥaġar (Saķāwī, *al-Żaw' al-lāme'* VI, p. 173), FaẒlallāh had written to Tīmūr, summoning him to belief in Horufism. Far from agreeing to do so, he gave orders to Mīrānšāh for the arrest and execution of FaẒlallāh. There is no indication in Ḥorūfī sources that FaẒlallāh ever communicated with Tīmūr, although he may have wished in general to promote his religion through contact with rulers. We have already seen how he gained the allegiance of Sultan Oways in Tabrīz before the *zohūr-e kebrīā'*; and he is recorded to have dreamed that he was once praying in the presence of Tīmūr (*Jāvīdān-nāma*, quoted by Ritter, "Die Anfänge," p. 23). Another dream attests that he hoped to win influence among the Golden Horde by marrying the daughter of its ruler, Țoqtameš Khan (Ritter, "Die Anfänge," p. 24). According to Maqrīzī (Saķāwī, *al-Żaw' al-lāme'* VI, p. 174), FaẒlallāh's execution was preceded by meetings of the '*olamā'*' held in Gīlān and Samarkand to discuss his heretical doctrines; these meetings ended invariably in a demand for his



death. The occurrence of such assemblies is not confirmed by the Ḥorūfī sources; mention is made only of a certain Shaikh Ebrāhīm who gave a *fatwā* authorizing his execution (*Kvāb-nāma*, quoted by Gölpınarlı, *Katalog*, p. 8). It has been suggested that one of Fażlallāh's writings, the *'Arš-nāma*, in which he identifies the divine throne with the human frame, was the immediate cause for his execution (*Kašf al-ẓonūn* II, col. 1132). This is plausible, but not attested by any contemporary or near-contemporary sources. It is in any event unnecessary to look for specific religious causes for the death of Fażlallāh; his claim to be a divine incarnation and to have abrogated the major part of Islamic law was enough to place him beyond the bounds of Islam. It seems that he was also contemplating the use of violent means for the propagation of his religion. Fażlallāh is quoted by 'Alī al-A'lā as saying: "The decisive proof, other than these words of mine, is none other than the trenchant sword" (quoted by Šībī, *al-Fekr al-šī'i*, p. 182 n. 18). He also dreamed once that he had one hundred and forty sons, each armed with two replicas of Du'l-feqār, the celebrated sword of 'Alī (*Jāvidān-nāma*, quoted by Ritter, "Die Anfänge," p. 24). In ordering the execution of Fażlallāh, Tīmūr may, then, have been motivated either by religious considerations, or by the simple desire to rid Azarbaijan of potentially rebellious elements on the eve of his campaign against the Ottoman Sultan Bāyazīd.

According to Ebn Ḥaǧar, Mīrānšāh beheaded Fażlallāh with his own hand. The headless corpse was dragged around the bazaar before being turned over to Fażlallāh's followers for burial. Six years after his death, a structure was erected over the grave by one Sayyed Mūsā; it also came to shelter the body of 'Alī al-A'lā. The site of execution (*maqalgāh*) became a pseudo-Ka'ba for the Ḥorūfīs; they came to it on pilgrimage in the month of Du'l-qa'da, and circumambulated it twenty-eight times. Another custom established in imitation of the *ḥajj* rites was the casting of twenty-one stones, on three successive days, at a tower in the castle of Alenǧaq associated with the memory of Mīrānšāh. The executioner of Fażlallāh was designated by the Ḥorūfīs as Daǧǧāl (Antichrist) and, mockingly, as "*mārānšāh*" (king of the snakes), and his death in battle at the hands of Qarā Yūsuf, the Qarā Qoyunlū ruler, in 809/1406 was a cause of great rejoicing among them. Belief in the "second coming" (*reǧ'a*) of Fażlallāh was strong, and it was even suggested that he had in some way become reincarnated in Qarā Yūsuf. (Ritter, "Die Anfänge," pp. 25-28).

Works. The most important book left by Fażlallāh was the *Jāvidān-nāma*, a prose work written in the dialect of Astarābād that sets forth the distinctive



doctrines of Horufism: the numerologically determined significance of the letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet, and the substantial manifestation of the divine essence in the human physiognomy. Two recensions were made of the *Jāvīdān-nāma*: one designated as *kabīr* in the dialect of Astarābād, and the other as *ṣaġīr* in standard Persian. More a supplement to the *Jāvīdān-nāma* than an independent work is the *Nawm-nāma*, an account of the dreams FaẒlallāh had at various times in his life, as well as those submitted to him by others for interpretation. The *Nawm-nāma* is also in Astarābādī dialect, as is the *Maḥabbat-nāma*, a prose work that was imitated by Turkish Ḥorūfīs. Finally, among the works of FaẒlallāh, mention may be made of the *ʿArṣ-nāma*, a *maṭnawī* written in standard Persian.

FaẒlallāh also has a small collection of poetry in standard Persian, using the pen-name Naʿīmī, and is said to have written a treatise on *feqh* for ʿEzz-al-dīn Šāh Šojāʿ while in Tabrīz.

Manuscripts of his writings are listed in: E. Blochet, *Cat. Bib. Nat.* I, p. 127. E. G. Browne, *A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, Cambridge, 1896, pp. 69-86. W. Eilers and W. Heinz, *Persische Handschriften*, *Vezeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland* 14, I, Wiesbaden, 1968, p. 228. Gölpınarlı, *Hurufilik Metinleri Kataloĝu*, passim.

Descendants and followers. The sons, daughters, and grandchildren of FaẒlallāh are listed in the *Resāla-ye maʿādīya* of Sayyed Šarīf. He had three sons—Amīr Nūrallāh (put to death in Betlīs some time after the execution of FaẒlallāh). Kalīmallāh and Salāmallāh (both of whom died of the plague), and four daughters—Fāṭema Kātūn, Bibī Kātūn, Omm-al-keṭāb, and Fāteḥat-al-keṭāb (the last two also fell victim to the plague; see A. Gölpınarlı, “Faḍl Allah Astarābādī,” *EI*² II, p. 735). A nephew of FaẒlallāh, K̄vāja ʿAzod-al-dīn, was arrested in Herat in 830/1427 after the attempt on the life of Šāhroḳ (see *Ḥabīb al-sīar* [Tehran] III, p. 617). According to the *Maḥram-nāma* of Sayyed Ešḥāq Astarābādī, FaẒlallāh appointed his wife, known as Kalematal-lāh Hīa ʿl-olyā to be his successor (*qāʿem-maqām*) and executor (*wašī*), but this is doubtful, and unconfirmed by other Ḥorūfī texts, which anyhow identify Kalematal-lāh as one of FaẒlallāh’s daughters (Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” p. 32). According to Ḥāfeẓ Ḥosayn Karbalāʾī Tabrīzī (*Rawzāt al-ĵanān wa ĵannāt al-ĵenān*, ed. J. Solṭān-al-qorrāʾī, Tehran, 1344 Š./1965, I, pp. 478-81), an unnamed daughter of FaẒlallāh, aided by a certain Mawlānā Yūsuf, established a Ḥorūfī community in the village of Kānaqāh near Tabrīz and gained influence over Jahānšāh, the Qarā Qoyunlū ruler (r. 841-72/1438-67). Pressed by the ʿolamāʾ, he consented to her



execution, and about five hundred of her followers were also slaughtered. Maḥammad-‘Alī Tarbiāt (*Dānešmandān-e Āḍarbāyjān*, Tehran, 1314 Š./1935, pp. 386-88) identifies this ill-fated daughter as Kalematalloh.

We have already listed the eight followers that joined Fażlallāh in ʿoqčī. A further list of fifteen followers is contained in the *Bayān al-wāqe‘* of Mīr Šarīf, himself a disciple. Among the names included there we may mention Sayyed Kamāl Hāšemī, the scribe of the *Jāvīdān-nāma*; Amīr Sayyed Nasīmī, the celebrated Turkish poet flayed alive in Aleppo in about 810/1407; Sayyed Eshāq Astarābādī, known as the “*moršed* of Khorasan,” the author of several important works, *Torāb-nāma*, *Taḥqīq-nāma*, and—according to Gölpınarlı—*Kvāb-nāma*; and Amīr Sayyed ‘Alī, commonly known as ‘*Alī al-A‘lā*, who was the chief successor of Fażlallāh and carried Horufism to Anatolia. Mīr Šarīf adds that Fażlallāh had four hundred *sayyeds* among his followers who accompanied him at all times (Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” pp. 34-39; Gölpınarlı, *Katalog*, p. 14). Another list, that given by Fereštazāda ‘Abd-al-Maǰīd (quoted in Tarbiāt, *Dānešmandān-e Āḍarbāyjān*, p. 387), contains nine names; four among them were the close confidants (*maḥram-e asrār*) of Fażlallāh—Maǰd-al-dīn, Maḥmūd, Kamāl Hāšemī and Mawlānā Abu’l-Ḥasan. Aḥmad Lor, who attempted to assassinate Šāhroḳ, is said to have been a *morīd* of Fażlallāh (*Ḥabīb al-sīar* III, p. 615), but this may mean simply that he was a follower of Horufism, not necessarily that he was acquainted with Fażlallāh.

See also [Horufism](#).

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Sources: The Timurid chronicles are remarkably silent on the life of Fażlallāh, either because his movement assumed no practical significance until the attempt on the life of Šāhroḳ in Herat in 830/1427, or because of repugnance felt for his heretical doctrines. Brief and totally inadequate accounts are to be found in two contemporary non-Ḥorūfī sources: the *Enbā’ al-ḡomr fī abnā’ al-‘Omr* of Ebn Ḥajar ‘Asqalānī (reproduced in Šams-al-dīn Saḳāwī, *al-Žaw’ al-lāme’ le ahl al-qarn al-tāse’*, Cairo, 1354/1935, VI, p. 173, and *Kašf al-ẓonūn* [Istanbul] I, col. 578; translated into English by E. G. Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia*,



III, p. 357, and into German by H. Ritter, “Die Anfänge der Hurūfisekte,” *Oriens* 7, 1954, p. 8), and the *Dorar al-‘oqūd al-farīda fī tarājem al-‘ayān al-mofīda* of Maqrīzī (reproduced in Saḳāwī, *al-Żaw’ al-lāme’* VI, p. 174; translated into German by Ritter, “Die Anfänge,” p. 7, and into Persian by Şadeq Kīā, *Wāža-nāma-ye Gorgānī*, Tehran, 1330 Š./1951, pp. 13-14). Most important are the Ḥorūfī texts themselves. The writings of FaẒlallāh himself have a certain autobiographical content, and the works of his successors also offer information of interest about his life, notably the *Korsī-nāma* of ‘Alī al-A’lā (d. 822/1419), the *Estewā-nāma* of Ġīāt-al-dīn Moḥammad Astarābādī (nephew of ‘Alī al-A’lā), the *Maḥram-nāma* of Sayyed Eşhāq Astarābādī, and the *Kvāb-nāma* of disputed attribution. With the exception of the treatises published in 1909 by Clément Huart (*Textes Houroufis*, GMS 9, Leiden, 1909) and, in extract, by Ş. Kīā in his *Wāža-nāma*, the totality of early Ḥorūfī literature is still unpublished. The account of FaẒlallāh’s life given above is, therefore, largely based on two studies that draw extensively on Ḥorūfī manuscripts: H. Ritter’s “Die Anfänge der Hurūfisekte,” (Pers. tr. Ḥ. Mo’ayyed, “Āgāz-e ferqa-ye Ḥorūfiya,” in *FIZ* 10, pp. 322-93) and the introduction by A. Gölpınarlı to his *Hurufilik Metinleri Kataloğu*, Ankara, 1973, esp. pp. 2-16.

There exist a number of discrepancies between these two studies that cannot be resolved without reference to the manuscripts in question, most important being the attribution of the *Kvāb-nāma* to Naşrallāh Nāfaĵī by Ritter, and to Sayyed Eşhāq Astarābādī by Gölpınarlı.

See also E. G. Browne, “Some Notes on the Literature and Doctrines of the Hurufi Sect,” *JRAS*, 1898, pp. 61-94.

Idem, “Further Notes on the Literature and Doctrines of the Hurufi Sect,” *ibid.*, 1907, pp. 533-81.

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Idem, “Faḳl Allāh Ḥurūfî,” *ET*² II, pp. 733-35.

