



## JĀVDĀN-NĀMA

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**JĀVDĀN-NĀMA** (also known as *Jāvdān-nāma-ye kabir* or *Jāvdān-nāma-ye elāhi*), the major work of Fażl-Allāh Astarābādi (d. 1394; q.v.), the founder of the Ḥorufi movement (see [HORUFISM](#)). The title, which can be translated from Persian either as the “Eternal Book” or as the “Book of Eternity,” has been transcribed here as *Jāvdān* and not *Jāvidān* (although this latter form is more current in Persian and is often used in contemporary literature on the Ḥorufis), because early Ḥorufi authors mostly use the form without the “yā” between the “wāw” and the “dāl.”

*History and manuscripts.* The composition of this voluminous work (the complete copy contains about 500 folios) probably took many years. Interpreting the allusive indications found in the *Korsi-nāma* of ‘Ali al-A’lā (d. 1419; q.v.; one of the most significant followers of Fażl-Allāh), Hellmut Ritter (1892-1971) suggested that the *Jāvdān-nāma* could have been finished by 1386 (Ritter, pp. 22-23). Moḥammad-‘Ali Tarbiat relates in the *Dānešmandān-e Ādarbāyjān* (p. 553) that Fażl-Allāh wrote the *Jāvdān-nāma* during his imprisonment in Alinjaq in 1394, but this does not seem very plausible since Fażl-Allāh was executed shortly after his arrest. The *Jāvdān-nāma* does, however, mention Baku, the capital of Shirvan where Fażl-Allāh spent the last few years of his life, and the date 2 Rabi’ II 796/4 February 1394 (British Library, MS Or. 5957, fol. 85b), that is, just seven months before the most probable date of his execution on 6 Du’l-Qa’da 796/2 September 1394. It is therefore possible that Fażl-Allāh completed the *Jāvdān-nāma* shortly before his death.



Like most Ḥorufi texts, the *Jāvdān-nāma* is only available in manuscript form, with the exception of the fragments included in the *Vāža-nāma* of Şādeq Kiā (pp. 42-45) and those in an unpublished dissertation (Mir-Kasimov, 2007a, pp. 495-733). As for the other Ḥorufi writings, the catalogue descriptions require careful scrutiny, and much work still has to be done in order to identify the manuscripts. Among the dated copies of the work, the one in the Millet Library in Istanbul (MS Ali Emiri Farsi, no. 920, dated 992/1584) is perhaps the oldest of the extant. According to the Gölpınarlı catalogue (pp. 56-59), the Millet Library copy was transcribed in Baku from a manuscript which, in its turn, was copied from the manuscript written by Maḳdumzāda (d. 1441), the daughter of Fażl-Allāh. After the second half of the 15th century, the text of the *Jāvdān-nāma* was essentially preserved and transmitted within the Bektashi order of dervishes, from which some copies of this work found their way to the European libraries in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries (Huart, 1889, pp. 238-70; Browne, 1896, pp. 69-86; Idem, 1907, pp. 533-81). According to manuscript catalogues, there are copies of the *Jāvdān-nāma* in libraries in Istanbul, Cairo, Leiden, Cambridge, and in the British Library in London, as well as in some private collections.

The original *Jāvdān-nāma-ye kabir* (the “great” *Jāvdān-nāma*) was written in an idiosyncratic idiom, which mixes the literary Persian with the archaic dialect of Astarābād; the text starts with the word *ebtedā’* (beginning) repeated six times. This version should not be confused with the shorter and simplified version written without the use of the dialect, which is also ascribed to Fażl-Allāh and known as the *Jāvdān-nāma-ye şaġir* (the “little” *Jāvdān-nāma*). Two works in Ottoman Turkish are described as adaptations or translations of the latter version: the *’Eşq-nāma* (the Book of Love) of ‘Ezz-al-Din ‘Abd-al-Majid b. Ferešta Taravi (Firishte-oġlu, d. 1459-60), written in 1430; and the *Dorr-e yatim* (the Unique Pearl), composed by a Bektashi dervish named Mortazā in 1638-39 (Gölpınarlı, pp. 114 and 144-47). The former has been translated into modern Turkish under the title *İlm-i Cavidan* (see Taravi).

*Structure and contents.* The account of the text given here is based on the manuscript of the British Library. It is therefore feasible that some of the conclusions made here might need to be modified after the thorough comparison of the extant copies of the work has been made. The *Jāvdān-nāma* is without doubt the main source on the original Ḥorufi doctrine. Notwithstanding its foundational role, the contents of the *Jāvdān-nāma* cannot be easily comprehended. The structural idiosyncrasies and some of the



difficulties encountered in this text could be a result of intentional encryption elaborated in the Iranian heterodox milieu of the late medieval period, and there are some indications suggesting this possibility in the *Jāvdān-nāma* itself as well as in some later Ḥorufi works. An attempt to comprehend and analyze the contents of the *Jāvdān-nāma* with the help of the indications found in the *Jāvdān-nāma* itself and in other Ḥorufi works was made in Mir-Kasimov, 2007a.

One of the impediments here is the use of a little known local dialect already mentioned above and of the special signs or abbreviations which replace some of the most recurrent expressions. Fortunately, Ḥorufi manuscripts contain notes that explain the meaning of the abbreviations. Besides, the *Jāvdān-nāma* and other Ḥorufi works provide sufficient contextual information for deciphering these abbreviations without the need to consult any other source. Lists of the special signs used in the Ḥorufi texts have been provided by Clément Huart (1909, pp. 189-90), Şādeq Kiā (pp. 39-40), and Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı (pp. 148-49). Shahzad Bashir has discussed a possible metaphysical dimension of these signs (Bashir, 2005, pp. 77-81). Copies of a brief vocabulary of the Astarābādi dialect are sometimes appended to the manuscripts of the *Jāvdān-nāma*, and a substantially extended version of this vocabulary is now available thanks to the work of Şādeq Kiā (pp. 48-209). Another difficulty—the allusive, indirect language of the work, which does not allow any immediate conclusion—is attenuated by the incremental repetition in the text, returning regularly to the same questions with some extra details added on, thus gradually clarifying the intentions of the author. A much more serious obstacle is the fragmented composition of the *Jāvdān-nāma*. Indeed, the work is devoid of any thematic organization: paragraphs follow one another without any logical link, and passages related to the same topic are dispersed throughout different places in the text.

The major thematic divisions of the *Jāvdān-nāma* are suggested in an anonymous note annexed to the manuscript of the British Library. They are six, in accordance with the six words *ebtedā'*, with which the text starts. Although they do not cover all the subjects discussed in the *Jāvdān-nāma*, they give a general idea about the contents of the work. These six divisions can be summarized as follows: Time, Cosmogony, Anthropology, Theory of the Creative Imagination (*'ālam-e meṭāl* or *'ālam-e kayāl*), Prophetology, and Return to the Origin (*ta'wil*). The *Jāvdān-nāma* thus contains a complete theological doctrine, the logical pattern of which seems to be determined by



the cycle of the Divine Verb with its 28 and/or 32 aspects (literally “words,” *kalema*). This cycle unfolds according to two modalities: the “unconscious” one underlies the laws of evolution of the material Universe with all its components, from the heavenly spheres to the tiniest atoms; while the “conscious” one corresponds to the transmission of the knowledge of the Verb in the line of the Prophets. A close correlation exists, therefore, between the cosmic and prophetic cycles. There are only three points where the “unconscious” and “conscious” currents cross and where the physical Form of the complete Verb, with its 28/32 aspects, meets the complete Knowledge of the Verb. The first is Adam, whose bodily form is the locus of manifestation (*maḥzar*) of the Verb *par excellence*, and to whom God “taught all the names” (Qur’ān 2:31)—which means, according to the *Jāvdān-nāma*, that God taught to Adam all the 28/32 aspects of the Verb. Adam is also the last “crossing point,” because he will necessarily appear at the end of the cycle, as the locus of manifestation of the accomplished Verb. Between the two manifestations of Adam comes Jesus, whose body is not produced by the laws of the human heredity, but by the Verb spontaneously taking the form of the human body in the womb of Mary. According to the prophetology of the *Jāvdān-nāma*, Jesus begins a sub-cycle within the major prophetic cycle, and he will come back at its end as Mahdi, the eschatological Savior. This is the sub-cycle of the *Ommiyin*—prophets and saints which have a special connection with the “Mother” (*Omm*), the foundation of the divine Verb. Moḥammad is the second *Ommi* prophet. His mission achieves the period of the “descent” (*tanzil*) of the Verb, and it inaugurates the period of the “return to the origin” (*ta’wil*). The doctrine of the *Jāvdān-nāma* is clearly focused on this last phase of the cycle of the Verb, when the gap separating the 28 aspects of the Verb, revealed by the prophet Moḥammad (figured by the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet composing the text of the Qur’ān), from the 32 aspects of the complete Verb, revealed by God to Adam, will be filled. This is the mission of the *Ommi* prophets coming after Moḥammad, among whom the author apparently integrates the Shi’ite Imams (only very vaguely outlined in the *Jāvdān-nāma*, without any mention of their affiliations, numbers and names, with the exception of ‘Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb and his son, Ḥosayn), and the mysterious Witnesses (*ṣohadā*). The disclosure of the whole set of the 32 original aspects of the Verb will reveal the ultimate meaning of all sacred books. Simultaneously, the material universe will dissolve as the aspects of the Verb will withdraw from the created world on the way of Return to their source. The “conscious” and the “unconscious” lines of the cycle of the Verb will thus come to the common end in the movement which is the Spiritual Exegesis and the Return



to the Origin at the same time, in accordance with the etymological meaning of the Arabic term *ta'wil*.

The doctrinal positions of the *Jāvdān-nāma* are mainly developed through the comments of the scriptural materials: the Qur'ān, the Hadith, and extracts from the Old and the New Testaments. The Qur'ān is the main scriptural source of the *Jāvdān-nāma*. According to some evidence found in the *Jāvdān-nāma* itself as well as in the later Ḥorufi works, the fragmented structure and the allusive language of the *Jāvdān-nāma* could be inspired, to a certain extent, by the specific composition of the Qur'ānic text.

The only title of a Hadith collection mentioned in the *Jāvdān-nāma* is *Maṣābihá*, which probably refers to the *Maṣābiḥ al-Sonna* of Abu Moḥammad al-Ḥosayn Baḡawi (d. 1122). However, many Hadith quotations in the *Jāvdān-nāma* are not provided with references, and most of them cannot be found in any of the standard Sunni compilations. It is noteworthy that the author uses the Hadith ranging in a very large spectrum. Some hadiths are quoted in the text under the authority of the prophet Moḥammad's wife, 'Āyeša, who was particularly unpopular in Shi'ite circles because of her opposition to the caliphate of 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb. Yet, her name is accompanied with honorific titles, which is usually not to be expected from an "orthodox" Shi'ite author. At the same time, the *Jāvdān-nāma* frequently quotes theophanic sayings with the extreme-Shi'ite coloration ascribed to 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, which had little credit in the Sunni milieu. Besides, there is no sign in the text of the *Jāvdān-nāma*, which would further corroborate the remarks on its possible Shi'ite or more particularly Twelver or Isma'ili inspiration made in a number of previous studies (Browne, 1896, pp. 69-70; Huart, 1909, pp. xii-xiii; Corbin, pp. 234 and 255; Amoretti, p. 624; Ivanow, p. 188; Gölpınları, pp. 17-18; Ritter, p. 4). As it stands, the work seems to combine the Sunni and the Shi'ite views without conflict—a circumstance which is not unusual in Iranian mysticism, particularly in the period between the Mongol invasion and the rise of the Safavids (13th-16th centuries; see for instance Molé, pp. 61-142).

Along with the Islamic scriptural materials, the *Jāvdān-nāma* also contains extended comments derived from both the Old and the New Testaments, particularly from the Books of Genesis and Exodus, the Gospel of John, and the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse of John. The extent of the quotations from the Bible and the importance of the doctrinal positions developed around them may represent another aspect of the eschatological orientation of the *Jāvdān-nāma*: reforming Islam and ensuring its transition towards becoming



the universal religion which will reunify humankind at the end of time.

*The Jāvdān-nāma and the later Ḥorufi tradition.* Although the *Jāvdān-nāma* contains no such claim in itself, the followers of Fażl-Allāh considered it as a divine text (*Jāvdān-nāma-ye elāhi*) containing the secrets of the spiritual exegesis (*ta'wil*) of the Qur'ān and of all the previous Holy Books (it should be noted that Fażl-Allāh was addressed by his disciples as *Şāḥeb-e ta'wil*, the Master of the Spiritual Exegesis). This was certainly part of the general tendency to sanctify Fażl-Allāh after his death (cf. Bashir, 2000, pp. 289-308).

Ḥorufi community split into several branches almost immediately after the death of its leader and founder Fażl-Allāh in 1394. Doctrinal controversies between regional Ḥorufi groups are attested already in the early Ḥorufi sources, such as the *Estewā-nāma* of Ġiāṭ-al-Din Astarābādi (d. 1449; cf. Ritter, pp. 40-50). The comparison of the *Jāvdān-nāma* with the later Ḥorufi works also shows some significant shifts in the interpretation of a number of doctrinal topics as early as in the first generation of Fażl-Allāh's disciples (Mir-Kasimov, 2006, pp. 203-35). It seems reasonable, therefore, to admit that after the death of Fażl-Allāh there existed not one but several "Horufisms" which evolved along historically and theoretically divergent lines. Being the most comprehensive and the most authentic reference of the original Ḥorufi doctrine, the *Jāvdān-nāma* is the starting point of this evolution and the basis for the study of further developments of Ḥorufi ideas.

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