



## AHMAD SERHENDI (2)

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**AḤMAD SERHENDI**, SHAIKH (b. East Punjab, 14 Šawwāl 971/26 May 1564; d. Serhend, 1034/1624), Indian Sufi known as *Mojadded-e alf-e t̄āni*, the Renovator of the second millennium (of Islam). He was the fourth son of ‘Abd-al-Aḥad Fāruqi (d. 1007/1598), who traced his descent from the second “rightly-guided” Caliph ‘Omar with epithet *al-Fāruq* (d. 22/644). Serhendi received his early education from his father and learnt the Qur’an by heart at a very early age. Then he was sent to Siyalkot where he studied logic, philosophy, and theology under the supervision of Kamāl-al-Din Kašmiri (d. 1017/1608), and *hadith* with Shaikh Ya‘qub Šarfi (d. 1003/1594), who was a Sufi of the Kobrawiya order and the author of a commentary to Moḥammad b. Esmā‘il Bokāri’s *Šaḥiḥ*. After completing his studies, Serhendi returned home in 1581 at the age of seventeen (Ansari, p.11).

Three years later, he was invited to the Mughal court and left Serhend for Agra, the capital of the Emperor Akbar (r. 963-1014/1556-1605), where he joined other scholars and men of letters, among which were the Persian poet Abu’l-Fayz (d. 1004/1595, see [FAYZĪ, ABU’L-FAYZ](#)) and his younger brother, the famous historian and secretary Abu’l-Faẓl ‘Allāmi (d. 1011/1602). Serhendi assisted the former in his work on the commentary to the Qur’an, entitled *Sawāte’ al-elhām* (Kešmi, p. 132; Ansari, p. 11; Rizvi, 1983, p. 197). On the other hand, Serhendi criticized the religious ideas of Abu’l-Faẓl ‘Allāmi and soon distanced from him, on the grounds that although Abu’l-Faẓl believed in God, he was more interested in philosophy, denied the necessity of Prophecy, and regarded the *šari‘a* (religious law) as worthless, which were the ideas shared



by many others at Akbar's court. It was most probably in these days that Serhendi wrote one of his short treatises, the *Eṭbāt al-nobowwa* (Confirmation of prophecy) as an outcome of the discussion with Abu'l-Faḏl 'Allāmi (Friedmann, p. 5; Ansari, p. 18; Rizvi, 1983, p. 198; Ter Haar, 1992, p. 24).

Upon being informed of his son's disillusionment about the intellectual ambience of the court, Shaikh 'Abd-al-Aḥad (Serhendi's father) came to Agra and brought him back home (Kešmi, p. 135-36, Rizvi, 1983, p. 198). On the way to Serhend, 'Abd-al-Aḥad arranged the marriage of his son to the daughter of Shaikh Solṭān, a member of the aristocracy in Thaneshwar, at the latter's request (Ansari, p. 12). Back home, Serhendi began to study Sufi texts, most notably *Ebn al-'Arabi's* (1165-1240) *Foṣuṣ al-ḥekam* and Sohrawardi's (1154-91) *'Awāref al-ma'āref*, under the direction of his father who also initiated him to the Češtiya and Qāderiya Sufi orders and introduced him to the Wahdat-e wojūd (unity of existence) doctrine (Kešmi, p. 113, Rizvi, 1983, p. 196). It was most probably at this time that Serhendi wrote two other short treatises almost entirely in Arabic, the *Resāla-ye taḥlīliya*, (Epistle on the formula "There is no God but God") and *Resāla-ye radd-e maḏhab-e šī'a*, (Epistle on the confutation of Shi'ism; Kešmi, p. 132; Ter Haar, 1992, p. 25).

After the death of Shaikh 'Abd-al-Aḥad in 1007/1597, Serhendi decided to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. On his way through Delhi he was introduced to his future spiritual teacher, the first great Indian Naqšbandi Moḥammad 'Abd-al-Bāqi (d. 1012/1603), also known as Ḳvāja Bāqi Bellāh, who resided in his *kānqāh* in Firuzābād, one of the seven quarters which made up the old town of Delhi. In 1008/1599 Serhendi was initiated into the Naqšbandi order and, under the direction of Ḳvāja Bāqi Bellāh, he made such a steady progress on the spiritual path that after quite a few months Ḳvāja Bāqi Bellāh conferred on him the status of spiritual master and granted to him the authorization (*ejāza*) to initiate others into the Naqšbandi order. Thereupon Serhendi returned to his hometown accompanied by some novices consigned to his care by his master. Since then, he visited his master only twice (Kešmi, 137-39; Ansari, pp. 13-14; Ter Haar, 1992, pp. 29-30). After the death of Ḳvāja Bāqi Bellāh, Serhendi settled down in Serhend as a Sufi master and spent the rest of his life spreading and popularizing the Naqšbandi *ṭariqa* (mystical path). He taught followers who came to see him from all over India, while his deputies (*kolafā'*, sing. *kalifa*) taught in many Indian towns, from Agra and Lahore, through Badayun and Jawnpur, to Allahabad and Patna.

The Naqšbandiya spread quickly across Bengal, Deccan, and even outside the



Indian Subcontinent, through Afghanistan and Turkistan—the fatherlands of the first Naqšbandi masters—to Ṭabarestān and other parts of Persia (Ansari, pp. 16-17). In order to keep in constant touch with his deputies, Serhendi wrote letters (*maktubāt*) in which he presented and illustrated his teachings and discussed the distinctive features of the Naqšbandi *ṭariqa*. As a strong follower of the Ḥanafi Sunni doctrine, he also wrote to many officials of the Mughal court, who were close to the Emperor Jahāngir (r. 1014-36/1605-27), soliciting them to spread the teaching of Islam, to restore Islamic institutions, and to suppress heterodoxy. By that time the Shi'ite ulema stood high in the favor of the emperor and convinced him to question Serhendi on the ground that his teachings represented a serious danger for the state. In particular, strong condemnation came from various quarters following a letter in which Serhendi had characterized his spiritual state as beyond the stage of Abu Bakr (the second “rightly-guided” Caliph, d. 13/634; Badr-al-Din Serhendi, pp. 123-26; Rizvi, 1983, pp. 218-23; Ter Haar, 1992, p. 4). In 1028/1619 Jahāngir called Serhendi to court to answer the allegations made against him. After a short conversation the emperor ordered his imprisonment at the Gwalior fort, mainly to pacify public sentiments. According to some sources, Jahāngir seems to have been satisfied with Serhendi's answers, but sent him to jail in a fit of anger because he did not prostrate before him when entering the court (Badr-al-Din Serhendi, pp. 116-17; al-Ḥasani, V, p. 44).

Serhendi served his sentence with patience, while continuing to work in prison. A year later, however, the emperor changed his mind: he set Serhendi free, called him to court, honored him with a robe, returned him all his properties, and offered him a thousand rupees. The emperor gave Serhendi the option to go home or stay with him. Serhendi stayed at the court for three more years, accompanying Jahāngir during his war campaigns and offering him spiritual support (Friedmann, pp. 81-85; Rizvi, 1983, pp. 216-17). When his health began to fail him, Serhendi returned home and devoted himself to prayers. He died in 1034/1624 in Serhend, and since then his tomb has been the object of veneration. After Serhendi's death, the Naqšbandiya order started to be referred to as Naqšbandiya-Mojaddediya, named after Serhendi's honorary title *Mojadded-e alf-e t̄āni*, the renovator of the second millennium (of Islam).

The most important work of Shaikh Aḥmad Serhendi is his collection of 534 letters which were originally written in Persian and Arabic and were later lithographed several times and translated into Turkish, Arabic, and Urdu. The



*Maktubāt-e emām-e rabbāni* are divided into three volumes which, according to their chronograms, were composed in 1025/1616, 1028/1618, and 1031/1621, and contain 313, 99, and 122 epistles accordingly. Altogether, they address nearly two hundred persons, chiefly Sufis, but also Mughal officials. The first volume was started after 1008/1599, the year in which Serhendi first met K̄vāja Bāqi Bellāh. Alongside with the letters, after being initiated into the Naqšbandi order, Serhendi wrote four other short epistles in Persian and Arabic, which deal with various crucial aspects of the Sufi doctrines. Two of these epistles, *Resāla-ye mabda' wa ma'ād* and *Resāla-ye ma'āref-e ladoniya* are very similar in structure and scope and are made up of sixty-one and forty-one short paragraphs accordingly. The third epistle, the *Resāla-ye šarḥ-e roba'iyāt-e K̄vāja Bāqi Bellāh*, contains Serhendi's commentary on a selection of quatrains written by his most important master, while the fourth epistle, *Resāla-ye mokāšafāt-e ġeybiya* (or *'eyniya*), is a collection of writings appeared posthumously.

Most scholars of medieval Muslim India seem to believe that Serhendi played a key role in preserving and restoring the purity of Islam. Nonetheless, a reconsideration is needed for the current point of view according to which Serhendi mainly aimed to restore the *šari'a* in India, since this opinion does not take account of his own approach to religious law. Serhendi did write to state officials to suggest changes in the imperial policy, but his attitude was definitely different from that of a *faqih* (law expert). First of all, he was a Sufi. His own view of reality focused on the idea that ontologically the prophethood was the higher stage of the Sufi path, much greater than closeness to God (*qorb-e elāhi*), as the majority of the Sufis believed those days (*Maktubāt*, 1972, I, n. 260, pp. 431-52; n. 291, pp. 602-08). In his letters Serhendi tried to analyze different aspects of Sufism starting from detailed descriptions of his spiritual experiences. He was the first in the whole Sufi tradition to distinguish between the prophetic way (*ṭariqa-ye nobowwat*) and the saintly way (*ṭariqa-ye walāyat*; *Maktubāt*, 1972, I, n. 302, pp. 639-44; n. 306, pp. 648-51; n. 313, pp. 662-72; Ansari, pp. 211-20; Friedmann, pp. 33-39; Ter Haar, 1992, pp. 140-45; Ventura, pp. 23-29). He extensively scrutinized the relationship between the mystical path (*ṭariqa*) and the religious law (*šari'a*; Aḥmad Serhendi, *Maktubāt*, 1972, I, n. 36, pp. 100-02; n. 84, pp. 182-84; n. 276, pp. 521-25), while considering the actual differences between the doctrines of *waḥdat al-wojud* (unity of existence) and *waḥdat al-šohud* (unity of witness; *Maktubāt*, 1972, I, n. 234, pp. 381-92; n. 261, pp. 452-56; n. 272, pp. 500-514; II n. 1, pp. 5-13; Friedmann, pp. 59-68; Ter Haar, 1992, pp. 117-136).



Serhendi's most original contribution to Sufi thought seems to be his description of the spiritual transformations that took place at the end of the first millennium of the Islamic era. Such changes resulted from a rearrangement in the hierarchic structure of the metaphysical realities (*ḥaqā'eq*)—as explained in Serhendi's *Mabda' wa ma'ād*—and also involved, on a lower level, the relationship between the Prophet of Islam and his community. Prophetic qualities, which had been gradually fading away since the death of Prophet Muhammad, appeared again and recovered their splendor at the beginning of the new millennium of Islamic era, revitalizing the spiritual conditions of Muslim community. Serhendi believed the *mojadded*, the renovator of the second millennium, to be the sole Muslim possessing this perfection. (*Mabda' wa ma'ād*, 1968, pp. 72-73; Friedmann, pp. 13-21; Ter Haar, 1992, pp. 145-53) Serhendi never acknowledged he was playing such a paramount role, but his disciples certainly thought of him this way (Kešmi, p. 176).

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