Qualified "heterodoxy" in a 17th century Ḥurūfī *muḳaddime*

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Abstract

The contribution discusses a previously unpublished Ottoman Ḥurūfī prose text, the "Preface (*muḳaddime*) to the theology of Sayyid Nesīmī" (dated 1623/1624). The text reflects a variety of Ḥurūfī doctrine that is based on a system of twenty-nine "words" (*lafẓ*). It is interpreted as belonging to a late form of Ḥurūfism, which both in content and practice diverged from the original Ḥurūfī sect of the 14th–15th centuries. The *muḳaddime*'s particular emphasis on ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*, *namāz*) is interpreted as an effort to address the dominating conservative circles of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, the *muḳaddime* is overtly critical of the Ottoman political system, including the sultan himself. In this regard, it reveals the co-operation of mystic currents with the political opposition. In a broader perspective, it is contextualized with the almost contemporary treatise of Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg.

Keywords: Islam, heterodoxy, mysticism, ritual prayer, Hurufism, crisis of the Ottoman Empire, political opposition, history, 17th century, Ottoman manuscripts

0. Note on transcription and languages

The basic language of the text investigated in this contribution is Ottoman. However, the text is interspersed with passages in Persian and Arabic. No established uniform and coherent system exists for transcribing all these three languages at the same time. As the extant transcription systems for Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic sometimes use identical symbols for different graphemes and/or phonemes or different symbols for identical signs and/or phonemes, this might lead to confusion in the present multilingual approach. Hence, in order to avoid any ambiguity resulting from transcription, quotations from Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic will be rendered according to the following unified system. It is based on the Ottoman system introduced by Kreutel, with some refinements adapted from the Omniglot website.[1]

The vowels of the three languages will be added according to the pronunciation of Ottoman, Classical/Modern Standard Arabic and Modern Persian. As the main language of the text is Ottoman, quotations are not marked if they are from this language. Change into Arabic or Persian will be marked by [Arab.] and [Pers.], respectively. If a return from these languages into Ottoman occurs, then [Ottom.] will be used.

1. Introduction

The Ḥurūfiyya religion revealed by Fażlullāh Astarābādī (ca. 1340–1393/1394)[2]

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[1] See http://www.omniglot.com/writing/persian.htm [accessed April 13, 2006], Kreutel 1965: XIV–XX.
[2] The majority of researchers agree on his year of death as being 796 A. H. (starts August 28, 1393, ends October 26, 1394): Ritter 1954: 8, Bausani 1979: 600, Gölpınarlı 1991: 733, Araslı 1998: 251 and 253, Bashir 2005: 37, 175. For deviating assessments, cf. Divshali/Luft 1980: 18 and 23, Halm 1988: 99, Roemer 1989: 80 and Schimmel 1990: 221. See also Huart/Tevfīq 1909: XIII. For his year of birth see Bausani 1979: 600, Gölpınarlı 1991: 733, Bashir 2002: 171.

Unified transcription system for Ottoman, Persian and Arabic

Letter	Ottoman	Persian	Arabic
ا	ā, a; nothing or ʾ	ā, a; nothing or ʾ	ā; nothing or ʾ
ب	b	b	b
پ	p	p	-
ت	t	t	t
ث	s̱	s̱	ṯ
ج	ğ	ğ	ğ
چ	č	č	-
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ
خ	ḫ	ḫ	ḫ
د	d	d	d
ذ	ẕ	ẕ	ḏ
ر	r	r	r
ز	z	z	z
ژ	ž	ž	-
س	s	s	s
ش	š	š	š
ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ
ض	ż	ż	ż
ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ
ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ
ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ
غ	ġ	ġ	ġ
ف	f	f	f
ق	ḳ	ḳ	ḳ
ك	k, ŋ, y/ğ, g	k	k
گ	g	g	-
ل	l	l	l
م	m	m	m
ن	n	n	n
ه	h	h	h
و	u, ū, o, ü; v	u, o, ū, ou; v	ū; v
ى	i, ï, ė, ī; y	i, ī; y	ī; y

and the more or less formalized religious movements that germinated from it[3] have been scrutinized from basically two different disciplinary angles. On the one hand, theologians and historians of religion have placed emphasis on the particular interpretation of the Islamic tradition proposed by the Ḥurūfīs.[4] On the other

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[3] For general information about the Ḥurūfiyya religion, see Ritter 1954, Gölpınarlı 1964, Gölpınarlı 1965, Binswanger 1974, Bausani 1979, Ḥayāwī 1379 H., Bashir 2005: 37, 175, Heß 2009: 49–78, Zelyut 2010: 169–178. Also still very useful despite its age is Huart/Tevfīq 1909.

[4] See for instance Kürkçüoğlu 1985, Bashir 2002, Bashir 2005.

hand, their activities have been placed in their broader historical and social context without penetrating deeply into Ḥurūfī theology.[5] To a certain degree, both scholarly approaches have always interacted. In fact, the necessity to connect the religious teachings of Fażlullāh and the Ḥurūfīs of at least the first century after his initial revelation[6] with their social and political environment is dictated by the very fact that they both had political ambitions and were active in the political sphere. The Ḥurūfīs' attempts to convert outstanding political leaders such as Timur, the Ḳaraḳoyunlu ruler Ǧahānšāh, and Meḥmed the Conqueror, as well as the overall tragic outcome of their political endeavors bear witness to the inseparability of the Ḥurūfīs' doctrine from their social and political action. However, despite the fact that Ḥurūfism was from the outset a political religion and that many modern scholars have dwelt on the societal, political, and economic causes and effects of its emergence, the fundamentally important question of the relationship between its complex theology and the historical realities in which it was embedded still remains to be defined for each stage of Ḥurūfī history. To some extent, this is due to a lack of sufficient source material, or to contradictory statements in the sources. An example of a failure to define the nature of this relationship precisely is Fażlullāh's attempt to convert Timur. According to one theory, Fażlullāh's aim in doing so was to stop the injustice inflicted by the Mongol ruler upon the people, i.e. he is ascribed a political motive.[7] However, according to the account of Fażlullāh's contemporary Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAskalānī (1372–1448), the real reason for Fażlullāh's execution on the orders of Timur by his son Mīrānšāh was the innovative religious teaching of the Ḥurūfī leader.[8] Certainly, the reasons for the ambiguities in the interpretation of the Ḥurūfiyya movement lie both in its own nature and in that of the sources it has left behind. Having been a relatively small and marginal organization, which was always persecuted by the ruling religious-political establishment, their motivations and attitudes are incompletely reflected in sources written by non-Ḥurūfīs. As to the Ḥurūfī sources themselves, at least in the first century of Ḥurūfī history these are almost exclusively concerned with religious questions that bear no relationship with the social and political realities of their time.[9] However, it would be premature to deduce from the silence of the Ḥurūfīs' own texts on these matters that they were not driven by political and social motives,[10] because the limitation of the Ḥurūfī texts to theological topics need not correspond to a limitation of their interests, but may be the consequence of a deliberate effort to gain acceptance first and foremost on the theological level.

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[5] For instance, Akçam 1995: 59–61. Cf. Araslı 1972, Guluzade 1973, Ibragimov 1973.

[6] There is disagreement amongst scholars as to the dating of the "manifestation of Divine Greatness" (*ẓohūr-e kibriyā*) in the person of Fażlollāh, which is usually regarded as the founding date of the Ḥurūfī religion. According to Bausani, it happened in 788 A. H. (starts February 2, 1386, ends January 21, 1387) or 789 A. H. (starts January 22, 1387, ends January 10, 1388), see Bausani 1979: 600. Cf. Gölpınarlı 1991: 733, who calls 1386 the year in which Fażlullāh started spreading his ideas. On the other hand, Bashir claims that the *ẓohūr-e kibriyā* took place in the month of Ramaḍān of the year 775 A. H. (starts February 14, 1373, ends March 15, 1374; Bashir 2005: 174). On the periodization of early Ḥurūfī history, see below p. 157.

[7] Usluer 2009: 20.

[8] Usluer 2009: 20.

[9] Usluer 2009: 17.

[10] Cf. Usluer 2009: 17.

At this point, it is suitable to open a short parenthesis in order to illustrate the scope and topicality of this question. There is an obvious parallel between the violent polemics surrounding Ḥurūfism in the Middle Ages and ongoing debates about the origins of Islam. Such a comparison is appropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, the current discussions, both among those who call themselves "believing Muslims" and those who do not, refer to exactly the same textual, legendary, and historical material as that taken up by the Ḥurūfīs, i.e. the Koran, the *aḥādīṯ*, and other constituents of early Islamic tradition.[11] Secondly, the essence of the pivotal question is the same in both cases, namely to define the relationship between a religious system of reference demanding absolute and unconditional submission and the world lying outside the adherents of this system. Thirdly, sadly, and due to both of the preceding reasons, the Ḥurūfic episode of the 14th/15th centuries resembles the debates around Islam and Islamism at the turn of the 20th/21st century in their being accompanied by widespread outbursts of violence. From these resemblances follows not only that the history of Ḥurūfism can potentially be viewed in terms of some premises similar to those formulated in the contemporary debates on Islam, but also that this historical episode in turn can teach us something about Islam in the modern world.

It is safe to say that the above-mentioned fundamental question of the relationship between the social and political aspects of the Ḥurūfī movement and its doctrine has not yet been addressed as such by modern scholarship. Soviet research has, it is true, given a set of stereotyped answers within the framework of Marxist-Leninist theory, viewing it as a "pantheist" movement involved in a struggle against feudalism.[12] Apart from the fact that this ideological perspective is not shared by the most other (i.e. non-Marxist) scholars it suffers from a tendency to reduce the religious aspect to secondary importance. Nevertheless, the deliberately materialist interpretation of the Ḥurūfī heritage introduced by Soviet scholarship still has persisting echoes in Turkey.[13] For instance, the Turkish sociologist and historian Taner Akçam subsumes Ḥurūfism under the umbrella category of "social opposition movements." Although he admits that this current possessed a certain "religious character," he nevertheless treats it first and foremost as a social movement.[14] In contrast, most of the authors quoted above that chiefly dwell on the religious dimension of Ḥurūfism fail to relate this information to the specific political and social circumstances in which it was articulated. In sum, there is a need to study the interaction between the religious and the socio-political aspects of the Ḥurūfī movement.

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[11] For a scholarly evaluation of these debates, see Nagel 2008 and Hagen 2009.
[12] For examples of Soviet interpretations of Ḥurūfism one may refer to Araslı 1972, Guluzade 1973, and Ibragimov 1973.
[13] Cf. Usluer 2009: 19.
[14] The quotes are from a chapter in which Akçam discusses a Ḥurūfī episode from 15th century Rumelia (Akçam 1995: 61): "It is a common property of all medieval societies that the movements of social resistance are of religious character. […] Beyond being *only* a religious belief, these [i.e. the movements of social resistance – M. H.] have also developed as *a form of social life*." (*Toplumsal muhalefet hareketlerinin dinî karakterde olması tüm Ortaçağ toplumlarının ortak özelliğidir*. […] *Bunlar* salt *bir dinî inanç olmanın ötesinde,* toplumsal bir yaşam biçimi *olarak da gelişmişlerdir*.; Akçam 1995: 59, emphasis by M. H.).

This article tries to contribute to this debate by looking at a late Ḥurūfī text from the 17th century. The importance of this Ottoman manuscript document lies in the insight it offers into the development of Ḥurūfi ideas long after the phase of open missionary activities had ended, in which the Ḥurūfi believers had tried to erect their own kind of *politeia*.[15] It illustrates the evolution of the original, radical, and millenarian religion into a slightly different system, which may also offer a bridge towards understanding how and why Ḥurūfi thought has survived, again changing its shape in many ways, until the present, as for instance among the Alevi community of Turkey.

2. About the text

The text discussed here is previously unpublished. It is contained in a manuscript kept in Istanbul's Süleymaniye Library.[16] The text is written in Ottoman, but with some insertions in Arabic, and, considerably less frequently, Persian. It gives its own title as *kitāb Muḳaddimat Kalām Sayyid Nasīmī*.[17] This can be translated as "Introduction to the theology of Seyyid ['İmādeddīn] Nesimi." According to the colophon, the writing of the manuscript was completed in 1033 A. H. (begins October 25, 1623, ends October 13, 1624).[18] On the last page of the manuscript, the author mentions his own first name, which is probably to be read as *Veysī*/*Veysi* (with *Veysi* being a phonetic alternative to *Veysī*) or perhaps *Vīsī*/*Vīsi*. The reading *Veysī*/*Veysi* seems more likely as it rhymes in one place with *Ḳaysi*.[19] The author ascribes to himself the attributes *bende* and *ḳul* "slave," which together with his interest in things concerning the *pādišāh* (which can be understood as referring to the Ottoman sultan) and the fact that he is to act "if ordered" (*fermān olïnursa*) may, but need not, point to his belonging to the Janissary corps.[20]

The text is written in prose and includes no longer extracts from poems, neither by Nesīmī nor any other poet, but only occasional verses (or rather rhymed lines resembling verses) strewn into the text for special rhetorical effect.[21] The style is quite colloquial and to a large extent free from complicated Arabic or Persian expressions. It is true that it does contain quite a significant number of religious, mystical, and Ḥurūfī technical terms in Arabic and Persian. But most of these are explained (or even translated) in the text itself. Also, the *muḳaddime* is fraught with many repetitions and pleonasms, which betray a strong didactic intention. For instance, a particular saying attributed to the prophet Muḥammad is presented twice in the initial section,[22] the story about the reduction of the number of obligatory prayers from fifty to

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[15] On the open missionary period cf. below p. 157.
[16] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461.
[17] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 1r. The pagination is my own, as the manuscript does not contain one.
[18] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 16f.
[19] See Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 8–10.
[20] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 3, 10–12. – On *ḳul/bende*, cf. Pakalın 1983, vol. 1: 203, s. v. *bende* and vol. 2: 314, s.v. *ḳul*.
[21] E.g. Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 8f.
[22] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 1r and 3r. (*nuzila'l-Ḳur'ānu 'alā sab'ati'l- ḥarf…*).

five is told twice,[23] and longer Arabic passages are provided with an Ottoman trans-lation introduced by *ya ‘nī* "this means… ."[24] This style makes the text recognizable as not belonging to any representative or official text genre (such as for instance *münše’āt*, official Ottoman chancellery prose), but as having been created for infor-mal use.

The writing is not ornate, but regular and legible, which reveals that the scribe had a certain degree of experience. The writer (and possibly, the author) has a good, but imperfect command of the orthographic rules of Ottoman. This indicates that he probably does not belong to the *‘ulemā* class, and certainly not to the top-class *münše’āt* writers who worked for the *pādišāh*. For instance, the obligatory marking of the 3rd person possessive suffix *murādї* "its purpose" is omitted,[25] obviously as a result of a confusion with the identically pronounced *iżāfe* vowel. Apparently, the writer supplemented his incomplete knowledge of the orthographic rules by conjec-tures, which in part seem to be based on hearing.

3. The first section of the *muḳaddime* in the light of the Ḥurūfiyya's historical evolution

The *muḳaddime*'s introductory section (fol. 1r-top to 4r) sets out some essentials of Ḥurūfī doctrine. In particular, it focuses on the importance of the first Quran surah (*Fātiḥa*). An explanation of the special Ḥurūfī meaning of the *Fātiḥa* with its seven *āyāt* (verses) is given which includes repeated references to the practice of the Mus-lim ritual prayer (in Arabic, *ṣalāt*). Already in the fifth line of the text (the title and a formulaic *besmele* line being included in the counting) the Arabic saying "There is no ritual prayer without the Opening (*Fātiḥa*) of the (Sacred) Book (i.e. the Quran)" is quoted.[26] In addition, the Arabic word for the Muslim ritual prayer is mentioned three more times until the beginning of fol. 4r.[27] However, it is not before fol. 4r that the more commonly used synonym of *ṣalāt*, *namāz*, is used for the first time.[28] This change of vocabulary marks a transition from the more formal and sublime realm of theological interpretation (with its characteristic "sacred" language Arabic) to everyday religious practice. For in contrast to *ṣalāt*, which is typical of expert and erudite language, *namāz* is the Ottoman (and still Turkish) colloquial default term for "ritual prayer," most notably in the phraseological verb (Ottoman) *namāz ḳїl-/* (Turkish) *namaz kıl-* "to perform the ritual prayer." Even if *namāz* is said to be of Iranian etymological origin,[29] it can nevertheless be regarded as the standard desig-nation for the ritual prayer, as no genuinely Turkic word is used with the same fre-quency in Ottoman. On the argumentative level, the desire to link up Ḥurūfī doctrine with the established everyday religious practice in the Ottoman Empire is evident from the textual reference to the seventeen *raka‘āt* (or ritual prayer sequences) in

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[23] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4r, l. 6–8 and 14–16.
[24] For instance, Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol.1r, l. 13 and fol. 2v, l. 2.
[25] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4v, l. 2.
[26] *Lā ṣalāta illā bi-fātiḥati'l-kitāb* (Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 1r, l.5).
[27] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 1r, l. 4; fol. 1v, l. 14 and 15.
[28] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4r, l. 6.
[29] Cf. Nişanyan 2009: 442, s.v. *namaz*.

connection with the (ordinary, not pertaining to the ill or to travelers) *namāz*.[30] For *seventeen* is also the number that the introductory section of the *muḳaddime* claims for the so-called "separated letters" (*ḥurūf-i muḳaṭṭaʿāt*), which are an essential component of Ḥurūfī theology.[31] In a historical perspective, this particular pattern of argumentation is typical of a late period of Ḥurūfī history. It is less emphasized in the initial phases of the religion. In order to illustrate the difference, it seems useful to briefly recapitulate these early stages.

The initial period of Ḥurūfī history can be termed "openly missionary." It started with the original revelation of Fażlullāh (1373/1374 or 1386/1387).[32] This phase lasted for about three quarters of a century, after which the last attempts of Ḥurūfī propagandists to convert political leaders failed. Probably the last documented case in point is a Ḥurūfī teacher who was burnt at the stake in the town of Edirne after trying to convert the Ottoman prince Meḥmed (the future conqueror of Constantinople) in 848 A. H. (begins April 20, 1444, ends April 8, 1445).[33] Around this time lies the end of the *open mission* phase of Ḥurūfī history and of all attempts to gain for Ḥurūfism a status similar to that of the established brands of Islam. Those adherents of Ḥurūfism who survived after this date probably did not entirely give up on the prospect of gaining political support for their ideas. But as a matter of fact, open proselytizing activities gave way to other, less extroverted, forms of transmission of Ḥurūfī thought. These were by necessity no longer dedicated to conquering a political foundation for the religion but were limited to attempts at spreading its ideas. For instance, we know that even after the execution of the last openly missionizing Ḥurūfī leader, Ḥurūfī ideas continued to be passed on by ʿAbdolmağīd b. Firišta (Firišteoğlu). He died in 874 A. H. (1469/1470) and was a disciple of Bāyezīd, who in turn had been instructed by Fażlullāh's pupil Sayyed Šams od-Dīn.[34]

The above periodization uses the Ḥurūfī believers' own actions as a criterion. Alternatively, Fatih Usluer has suggested a periodization that adds a geographical component. For him, the first phase of Ḥurūfī history ends with the death of Fażlullāh (i.e. at the latest in 1394) and the arrival of such figures as ʿAlī al-Aʿlā and Nesīmī on Anatolian and Syrian soil (around the year 1400).[35] According to Usluer, the second phase, which began in the six years bracketed by these two dates, lasted until at least the 17ᵗʰ century and therefore encompasses the manuscript discussed here.[36] However, there are two serious drawbacks to this periodization attempt. Firstly, while it does make sense to place a caesura after the death of Fażlullāh, who was a unique and irreplaceable figure and whose disappearance changed everything for the Ḥurūfī community, Usluer's geographical and chronological criterion (extending the mission to Anatolia and Syria) is of less obvious importance. For it is difficult to discern a radical shift in Ḥurūfī activity or doctrine after the time it reached Anatolia and Syria. Secondly and more importantly, Usluer's periodization

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[30] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4r, l. 11f.
[31] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 3v, l. 7.
[32] See above footnote 6.
[33] Babinger 1959: 34f.; Bausani 1979: 600.
[34] Huart/Tevfîq 1909: XIX.
[35] Usluer 2009: 9. The fact that this is not an exact periodization but one with an inherent discrepancy of up to six years is not discussed by Usluer.
[36] Usluer 2009: 9.

is not elaborate enough to grasp the profound and lasting change which affected the Ḥurūfī movement with the end of the open mission. The important change from an external mission with the aim of assuming political power to mere spiritual activity is not reflected in Usluer's periodization at all. The reason for this is obviously a certain Turkish nationalistic bias of his, as he states that both in the case of the Ḥurūfī propagandist Refīʿī (early 15th century) and later Ḥurūfī movements "the only way to spread Ḥurūfism in this new geographical area went through this philosophy [i.e. Ḥurūfism – M. H.] being expressed in Turkic/Turkish."[37] Accordingly, to his mind the fact that from around 1400 Ḥurūfism became more and more firmly integrated into the Turkic-speaking world is more important than the shift from a missionizing to a more introverted religion. However, the end of Ḥurūfī missionary activity is key to understanding the Ḥurūfism of the *muḳaddime*. Therefore, the historical periodization system mentioned first conforms more closely to historical reality than Usluer's.

Our knowledge of the time between the end of the open mission in the middle of the 15th century and the writing of the *muḳaddime* in 1623/1624 is only fragmentary. This is largely due to the clandestine status into which the surviving Ḥurūfīs were forced after their political projects had been thwarted. Therefore, we cannot exactly trace the evolutionary stages that lie between these two dates. What is clear from the text of the *muḳaddime*, though, is that the Ḥurūfism presented therein is on the one hand entirely different from the open missionary one of the founding phase, but on the other hand also somewhat different from a pure transmission of spiritual knowledge. The insistence of the *muḳaddime* on explaining the correct meaning of ritual prayer, for example, betrays a preoccupation with one of the central aspects of public Muslim religion in the Ottoman Empire, which means that the aim of the text is primarily to effect a gradual change of opinion and not to convert directly. Ottoman intellectual history had up to this point been marked by two opposing interpretations of the Muslim heritage. Greatly simplified, one may term the opposing sides as "formalists" versus "antinomists."[38] For the formalists, who had become politically dominant by the middle of the 16th century, visible religious practices, such as going to the mosque on Fridays, praying in public, using prayer beads, performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, etc., were of paramount importance. In contrast, the antinomists relativized the significance of such outward religious manifestations or discarded them altogether. Not rarely, they even went so far as to disregard formalist interdictions, e.g. regarding the consumption of alcohol. In this context, the *muḳaddime*, written in a time of formalist dominance, seems to articulate a position which can be characterized as outwardly assimilatory and crypto-missionary. The assimilatory aspect of the initial section of the *muḳaddime* is constituted by the fact that it addresses the topic of "the five daily ritual prayers,"[39] which is one of the themes of fundamen-

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[37] *Refi'î örneğinde olduğu gibi, bu yeni coğrafyada Hurufiliğin yayılmasının tek yolu felsefenin Türkçe ifade edilmesinden geçmekteydi.* (Usluer 2009: 9). The term *Türkçe* may refer both to Turkish and to other Turkic languages.

[38] For a more thorough account of these intellectual currents (but with different terminology), see Ze'evi 2006. Cf. Heß 2008.

[39] *Beş vaḳt ... namāz* (Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 4r, l. 6–10).

tal importance to the formalists and perhaps even one of their most distinctive features vis-à-vis the antinomists. To a formalist Muslim reader, the *muḳaddime* may therefore have appeared as a perfectly legitimate treatise on one of the tenets of the ruling (in the truest sense of the word) religion, and as implying no "heterodox" deviation whatsoever. On the other hand, the crypto-missionary element appears in the double sense of the number "17," being both the regular (formalist) number of times of daily *raka'āt* and a magical Ḥurūfī figure (at least according to the *muḳaddime*). Instead of openly challenging the ruling opinion (as the Ḥurūfīs did for instance in Nesīmī's times), the *muḳaddime* author adopts it, but then adds a new meaning to it.

In sum, if one compares the way Muslim ritual prayer is discussed in the *muḳaddime* to the open missionary phase of Ḥurūfī history, one can discern a marked change in the Ḥurūfīs' attitudes towards their audience. The classical missionary pattern – a small group believing themselves to have privileged access to an alleged transcendental truth in opposition to the others – is replaced by one in which the participants, in this case the author(s) of *muḳaddime* and its addressees or potential readers are more integrated. They are also more interactive, with the Ḥurūfīs adapting themselves to the ruling religious climate and toning down their activity from attempts at persuasion to more or less surreptitiously inserting elements of their belief system into the mainstream religious culture. There is a phenomenological change from the Ḥurūfism of the early stages to the one evident in the *muḳaddime*.

4. The *muḳaddime* and the decline of Ḥurūfism

At least in the Ottoman and Turkish context, the latest Ḥurūfī texts stem from the 17ᵗʰ century.[40] This means that despite its title the *muḳaddime* belongs to the very last texts of its genre. Against the background of the overall decline of Ḥurūfism, the overtly assimilatory and only secretly missionary tendency of the above-discussed section of the *muḳaddime* can also be interpreted as a symptom of the decline of Ḥurūfism first as a missionary religion and then as a discernible religious movement altogether. In the late 16ᵗʰ and early 17ᵗʰ centuries Ottoman Empire with its thoroughly fixed religious landscape, openly proselytizing in favor of a dissident religious opinion was an unpromising enterprise, in contrast to 14ᵗʰ and 15ᵗʰ century Iran and Azerbaijan with their political vacuum and instability.

5. The *muḳaddime* and its Ottoman context

As to the contextualization of the muḳaddime within Ottoman history, its copying year already offers an important clue. The *terminus post quem* of the copying, October 24, 1623, situates the work in a time when the Ottoman Empire was living through its worst crisis since the interregnum (*Fetret Devri*), which had ensued after Timur's invasion at the beginning of the 15ᵗʰ century. However, in contrast to the *Fetret* crisis, this second decline was not so much due to external factors, but primarily to internal ones. Widespread corruption, economic weakness, and a series of

[40] According to Usluer 2009: 9, 10, 12.

weak rulers such as Selīm II the Drunkard (1566–1574), Muṣṭafā I (1617 and again 1622–1623), and ʿOs̱mān II (1618–1622) had brought the still impressive Ottoman rule to a point where the signs of decay began to be recognized even in the interior. The most famous critique of the overall situation is a treatise (*risāle*) published by Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg in 1631.[41] If the author of the *muḳaddime* indeed belonged to the Janissary corps (as is possible but not proven), this would constitute proof that criticism of the empire's situation came from at least two different layers of the elite at that point of time, for Ḳoči Beg's anti-Janissary attitude[42] leaves no doubt that he did not belong to the corps himself. As stated above, we cannot be absolutely certain about the sense of the terms *ḳul* and *bende* in the *muḳaddime*, so this hypothesis cannot be verified.

At least as regards its contents, the *muḳaddime* can indeed be compared with Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg's critique, which it in fact anticipates. For instance, the *muḳaddime* stigmatizes "the temptation and depravity which manifests itself in every *pādišāh* of the age" (*her pādišāh-ï zamānda ẕuhūr ėden fitne vü fesād*).[43] As *pādišāh* is a standard term for referring to the Ottoman sultan, the addressee of this stark reproach must be the sultan himself. Given the dating of the manuscript and the historical circumstances, this might be Muṣṭafā I or ʿOs̱mān II. However, it is less likely to be the sultan who came to power after Muṣṭafā I in the very year the *muḳaddime* was written down, i.e. Murād IV (1623–1640), even if this is theoretically possible. Firstly, it would be highly unusual for a sultan to be attacked in such strong terms less than a year after his accession. Secondly and more importantly, we know that Murād IV, in contrast to his above-mentioned predecessors, was a strong and successful ruler. Among other things, he accomplished the conquest of Baghdad in 1638. In fact, one of the supposed reasons for Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg addressing his *risāle* to this new sultan was the hope that Murād IV would differ from his predecessors.[44]

Independent of the question whether the author of the *muḳaddime* was a member of the Janissary corps and which of the Ottoman sultans might have been the target of his criticism, the text reveals an affinity between certain Ottomans who were inclined towards Ḥurūfī thought and the political opposition. In fact, this offers a fresh perspective on what has been said about the mitigation and assimilation of Ḥurūfī thought in the course of the more than two centuries after Fażlullāh's great revelation. Apart from this being a consequence of the Ḥurūfīs' transformation from an openly missionizing to a secretly operating religion, the readiness to focus on such a typically "orthodox" issue as the number of ritual prayers might also have been a tactical move in order to bridge the gap between the more "heterodox" Ḥurūfīs and the Ottoman Sunni establishment and to unite them behind the project of fighting against "temptation and depravity." The implications of this new interpretation are quite significant, for it means that the Ḥurūfī religion was just as much an instrument of day-to-day politics as a matter of faith and principle. Perhaps the political aspect even dominated.

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[41] Cf. Kreiser/Neumann 2005: 204f., 239, 511. Editions: [Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg] 1939, [Muṣṭafā Ḳoči Beg] 2008.

[42] Cf. the quote from his *risāle* in Kreiser/Neumann 2005: 205.

[43] Süleymaniye Library Istanbul. MS Yazma Bağışlar 2461: fol. 48r, l. 3.

[44] See Kreiser/Neumann 2005: 239.

6. Conclusion

The particular Ḥurūfī text that has been analyzed marks the change from a religious movement which initially pursued aggressive missionary activities to one which was more subdued vis-à-vis the ruling authorities. The prominent thematization of ritual prayer (*namāz*, *ṣalāt*) in the text can be interpreted as a compromise. On the one hand, this allowed the Ḥurūfī-bred author to propagate his interpretation of the alleged numerical values attached to the number of ritual prayers. On the other hand, the topic was also popular with non-Ḥurūfī, "orthodox" Sunni Muslims in the Empire, thus allowing the *muḳaddime*'s author to make his Ḥurūfī theses seem more in line with the official, politically sanctioned cult.

However, the text as a whole reveals that religion was not its only topic of interest. The propagation of sectarian religious views is joined to an articulation of political dissent, directed at the monarch himself. One explanation of these overlapping interests could be that both religious and political dissent demanded secrecy.

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