

A
ESİN.E
SIX
1976

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY HALVETİ ŞEYH MERKEZ EFENDI AND HIS CIRCLE OF
DISCIPLES IN HIS LATER YEARS

237

DR. EMEL ESİN

Tek-Esin Vakfı

E. Esin, abstract of communication
to the Second international conference
on pre-Ottoman and Ottoman studies
held in Hamburg on September 5-10th 1976
(A Turkish abstract is also included)

E. Esin

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY HALVETÎ ŞEYH MERKEZ EFENDI AND HIS CIRCLE OF
DISCIPLES IN HIS LATER YEARS

On the 17th of Cemâzi-ul evvel H.959 (1551) the Şeyh-ul Islâm Ebûssu'ûd Efendi led the funeral prayers and pronounced the elegy of the Halvetî şeyh and professor Muşlihuddîn Merkez Mûsa Efendi, son of Mustafa, son of Kiliç Beg, son of Haydar. Four months later, on Şevvâl 9th, the vakfiyye donating Merkez Efendi's hammâm and other property near his zâviyye (monastery) outside Yeni Kapu in İstanbul was registered, notwithstanding Merkez Efendi's recantation, just before his death. The vakfiyye which we hope to publish brings some additional information, absent in works hitherto written on Merkez Efendi. The vakfiyye of Merkez Efendi states, for instance, beyond any doubt, that Merkez Efendi had been wed, sometime in his life, to Şâh or Şâhî Sultan, daughter of the Ottoman Sultan, Selîm I. This princess is better known as Merkez Efendi's devoted patroness and disciple. Around H.943 Şâhî Sultan was the wife of Luţfî Paşa, a grand-vizier and author of the Asaf-nâme. But she obtained a divorce by complaining to her brother Ş Kanûnî Sultan Süleyman about Luţfî Paşa's "spendthrift nature". Şâhî Sultan's own vakfiyye, dated H.977/1569, shows that at that later period she was the widow of a Hüseyin Paşa. It is however stated in Merkez Efendi's vakfiyye that Şâhî Sultan had borne a son called Ahmed Çelebi to Merkez Efendi. In any case, around H.943 Şâh Sultan had long been a staunch disciple of Merkez Efendi. Şâh Sultan had built a zâviyye for Merkez Efendi, adjoining her yalî (house on the sea) on the Golden Horn, at Eyyûb, as well as a medrese at Davud Paşa. Merkez Efendi had already built himself a tekke (monastery) outside the walls of İstanbul, at Yeni Kapu. Further, Merkez Efendi was the şeyh of the principal Halvetî hânkâh at Koca Mustafa Paşa. If the marriage between Şâh Sultan and Merkez Efendi had taken place after her divorce from Luţfî Paşa, around H.943, Ahmed Çelebi, born from the marriage of Merkez Efendi with Şâh Sultan, must have been very young when he died in H.963. He had translated into Turkish, under the title Pâbûs, the Kâmûs of Fîrûzâbâdî. Ahmed Çelebi had succeeded his father as şeyh of the Yeni Kapu tekke, but retired some months later to a solitary life in a village which must have been in the vicinity of Yeni Kapu, as his grave is there. The vakfiyye went over to the descendents of his daughter Selîme. The office of şeyh of the Yeni Kapu tekke was taken over by the husband and descendents of Ummî Hatun, daughter of Merkez Efendi. The only extant building in the tekke of Merkez Efendi which has apparently not

undergone extensive repairs, is the so-called library.

The disciples of Merkez Efendi were numerous. He not only commented the Kur'ân, after Bayzâvî, at the Mosques of Aya Sofia and Fâtih, but also directed the initiation of dervishes in all four tekkes. Ya'kûb Efendi, one of Merkez Efendi's successors at the principal hânkah of Koca Mustafa Paşa, reported that (like other mystics) Merkez Efendi had danced in religious ecstasy, during the Halvetî rites. Criticized on the subject by orthodox believers, he had replied that ecstasy overcame him as if it were a fit of fever.

Merkez Efendi was merciful to men and animals and tended the sick throughout his life, in his youth at Magnisa, in the hospital founded by the mother of Sultan Süleyman I, later in Istanbul at the Yeni Kapu tekke. He is reported to have invented a curative paste called mesîr and bathed the sick in waters with healing powers. Merkez Efendi also helped, perhaps in cases of mental illnesses, through spiritual methods, called halvet. While praying at the Yeni Kapu tekke, Merkez Efendi heard the secret call of underground water with healing properties, and dug a well. His çile-hâne (cell for meditation) was cut in the inner wall of the well. He meditated while fasting and in darkness, according to the rite of the Halvetî. While meditating in the somber cell within the well, spiritual horizons opened before Merkez Efendi, which he has expressed in an ilahî (religious poem) :

"O Lord of the worlds, grant a manifestation, grant consolation!
Moon of the constellation of hearts, grant a manifestation,
grant consolation!
The complaint in my bosom begs release from the claim of the ego.
Liberate from separation, grant a manifestation, grant consolation!"

