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ON THE ACTIVITY OF MU‘INIDDIN AL-HIRAVI, A QUR’ANIC EXEGETE OF THE TIMURID PERIOD

Abstract. *This article analyses, from the standpoint of source studies and codicology, the life, scholarly milieu and exegetical legacy of Mu‘iniddin Muhammad ibn Hoji Muhammad al-Farahi al-Hiravi (d. 907/1501), a major Qur’anic exegete (mufasssir), traditionist (muhaddith) and preacher (wa‘iz) of the Timurid period. The study offers a comparative analysis of such principal historical sources as Alisher Navoi’s Majolis an-nafois, Khondamir’s Habib us-siyar and Khulasat al-akhbar, and Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat’s Tarikh-i Rashidi. The scholar’s works Hadaqiq al-haqaiq, Bahr ad-durar, Al-Waziha fi tafsir al-Fatiha, Ahsan al-qasas and Ma‘arij an-nubuwwa fi madarij al-futuwwa are assessed as a scholarly heritage. The article illuminates the author’s exegetical methodology, his manner of harmonising transmitted report (riwaya) and reasoned understanding (diraya), his Sufi interpretations, his contribution to the Persian-language exegetical tradition, and his place in the exegetical school of the Timurid period. The influence of Mu‘iniddin Farahi’s legacy on the later Persian exegetical tradition is also assessed, and information about the repositories holding the manuscripts of his works is summarised. The results of the study serve as an important source for studying the history of the Qur’anic sciences of the Timurid period and the exegetical traditions of Central Asia.*

Keywords: *source studies, “Ma‘arij an-nubuwwa,” Mu‘iniddin Farahi, Sufism, tafsir, the Timurids, Persian exegesis, Qur’anic sciences, manuscripts, Herat.*

INTRODUCTION

The Timurid period (the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) has remained in history as a stage of high development of science, culture and spirituality in the history of Central Asia and Khorasan. In this period, the cities of Samarkand and Herat became

not only political centres but also the most prestigious hearths of the Islamic sciences. In the fields of tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), hadith, fiqh, kalam and Sufism in particular, hundreds of scholarly works were created. This process is assessed as a result of the patronage shown by the Timurid rulers to the people of learning, and of their cultural policy.

Among the major scholars who worked in the scholarly milieu of Herat, Mu'iniddin Muhammad ibn Hoji Muhammad al-Farahi al-Hiravi (d. 907/1501) occupies a special place. He was known as a preacher, exegete, traditionist, calligrapher and poet, and as one of the representatives of Sufism. His legacy encompasses Qur'anic exegesis, sira (prophetic biography), hadith, and ethical-didactic literature (Khondamir, 1975; Khondamir, n.d.). At the same time, the scholarly legacy of Mu'iniddin Farahi has not been sufficiently studied to this day. His exegetical method, his manuscripts, his system of sources, and the influence he exerted on the exegesis of the later period have been particularly little illuminated as a special object of research.

The aim of this article is to analyse, from a historical and source-studies standpoint, the life, scholarly milieu and exegetical legacy of Mu'iniddin Farahi, and his place in the development of the Qur'anic sciences.

MAIN PART

Speaking of the scholar's life and scholarly activity, it should be noted that he worked in various fields in the city of Herat during the Timurid period. It is well known that Herat had advanced considerably in the fields of the Qur'anic sciences, hadith, fiqh, literature and Sufism. The scholarly milieu that took shape, in particular, under the guidance of Abd al-Rahman Jami and Alisher Navoi exerted an influence on the entire Muslim East in the fifteenth century (Navoi, 1997).

Mu'iniddin Farahi is considered one of the scholars who came forth precisely in this intellectual milieu. In the sources his name also occurs in the forms "Mu'in Wa'iz," "Mu'in al-Miskin" and "Mavlonozoda Farahi." In certain sources his full name is given as Mu'in al-Din Muhammad Amin ibn Hoji Muhammad al-Farahi al-Hiravi (al-Hiravi, 1898).

One of the earliest and most reliable pieces of information about Mu'iniddin Farahi is given in Alisher Navoi's *Majolis an-nafois*.

Navoi describes him as a famous preacher of his time and gives information about his sermons from the pulpit, his skill in influencing the broad masses of the people, and his numerous disciples. He also notes that the scholar occupied himself with poetry and used the pen-name “Mu‘in Devona” (al-Hiravi, 1898).

In Khondamir’s *Habib us-siyar*, Mu‘iniddin Farahi is described not only as a preacher but also as an accomplished calligrapher. According to the author, he preached every Friday in the congregational mosque of Herat on the basis of Qur’anic verses and hadiths. After the death of his brother, Qadi Nizamiddin, he also performed the duty of qadi for a certain period; yet he placed learning and spiritual guidance (irshad) above state office (Khondamir, 1975).

In Khondamir’s *Khulasat al-akhbar*, Mu‘iniddin Farahi’s piety, his independence from the state officials and his refusal of the gifts they sent are emphasised. Only his esteem for the people of learning – in particular for Alisher Navoi – is specially noted. This circumstance vividly reflects the scholar’s moral virtues and social standing (Khondamir, n.d.).

Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat too, in his *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, writes that Mu‘iniddin Farahi delivered the Friday sermon in the congregational mosque of Herat for many years, occupied himself with the science of hadith, and acquired great authority in Khorasan. At the same time, his skill in the field of calligraphy is also specially mentioned.

A comparative analysis of the sources shows that, in the Timurid period, Mu‘iniddin Farahi was known not only as a preacher or exegete but also as a many-sided, encyclopaedic scholar. His exegetical activity was inseparably connected with hadith scholarship, Sufism, literature and calligraphy, and this characteristic is also vividly manifested in his works.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that Mu‘iniddin Farahi al-Hiravi was a major representative of the scholarly milieu of Herat that took shape in the Timurid period. The comparative analysis of the sources confirms that he was not merely a preacher or traditionist but an encyclopaedic scholar who worked productively in the fields of Qur’anic exegesis, sira, hadith, Sufism, calligraphy and literature.

The analysed sources show that such works of Mu‘iniddin Farahi as *Hadaïq al-haqaiq*, *Bahr ad-durar*, *Al-Waziha*, *Tafsir sura al-Fatiha* and *Ma‘arij an-nubuwwa*

are an important specimen of the Persian-language exegetical school of the Timurid period. In these works one observes the harmonisation of transmitted exegesis (*tafsir bi-l-riwaya*), lexical analysis, Sufi allusions and an ethical-educational approach. This means that the scholar's exegetical method encompassed, alongside traditional transmission, an intellectual and gnostic (*irfani*) analysis as well. Moreover, the fact that many of Mu'iniddin Farahi's works are still preserved in manuscript form shows the need to study them deeply from the source-critical and codicological standpoints. In particular, a comparative analysis of the manuscript copies preserved in the libraries of Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan and Europe will make it possible to illuminate the scholar's scholarly legacy still more fully.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the comparative source analysis confirms that Mu'iniddin Farahi al-Hiravi was an encyclopaedic scholar and a leading representative of the exegetical and preaching tradition of Timurid Herat, whose Persian-language *tafsir* works harmonised transmitted report with reasoned and Sufi interpretation. Since a considerable part of his legacy survives only in manuscript, its further source-critical and codicological study – above all the comparison of the copies dispersed across the libraries of Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan and Europe – remains an important task for the study of the history of the Qur'anic sciences and the exegetical traditions of Central Asia.

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