



Document of the Month 3/26: A Mystical Homily

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“Whoever Places the Hand of Good Actions in the Circle of Chivalry”: A Homily in the *Jawānmardī* Mystical Tradition

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This month’s document, Firuzkuh 3, is a well-preserved folio discovered in the Firuzkuh area of Ghur, Afghanistan, together with about 100 other Firuzkuh Papers. This very short text in elegant rhymed prose appears to be a homily produced by one of the local mystical circles (Figures 1 and 2). Although such texts are conventionally described as “Sufi,” using the term Sufism inclusively, there is reason to make a distinction for this particular homily. After all, it begins with the words (recto, lines 1–2): “Whoever places the hand of good actions in the circle of chivalry” (*har ki dast-i nīkūkārī dar ḥalqa-yi jawānmardī zad*), specifically mentioning the name for the *jawānmardī* tradition of mystical chivalry, which was independent of the Sufi tradition in origin at least.¹ Furthermore, this initial statement emphasizes “good actions” (*nīkūkārī*), which are prioritised in that tradition ahead of mystical theory.

Mystical traditions reflected in Firuzkuh 3

The *jawānmardī* tradition of course did not exist completely separately, and indeed already by the twelfth century efforts had been made to integrate it into Sufism, making the distinctions often unclear.² One way to gauge the degree of these traditions' influence on the homily in Firuzkuh 3 is to identify distinctive terminology and concerns that represent the separate approaches. Although the term *ولایت* is used early in the text (recto, line 3), it is not being used in the technical Sufi way for "Friendship with God" (*walāya*), but rather simply to mean a "realm" or "station" (*wilāya*). This leaves this homily remarkably void of specifically Sufi terminology, the main exception being the use of *ma'rifā* "gnosis" (recto, line 3). This latter term is used in the second instance of the repeated expression "places the hand of... in the circle of..." (*dast-i... dar ḥalqa-yi... zad*), after the abovementioned use of *jawānmardī* (recto, line 1), suggesting that the homily belonged to a mystical circle that integrated the traditions together to some degree. However, the lack of further terminology of this kind, not to mention allusions to mystical theory in general, further mark this homily out as one which emerged from a circle shaped mostly by the *jawānmardī* tradition.

Khurasan is generally presented in Sufi historiographical texts as the geographical origin of the *jawānmardī* tradition, with one of the tradition's earliest texts written by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) of Nishapur.³ Sulamī also wrote about another prominent Khurasanian mystical tradition called the *malāmatiya* ("People of Blame"), to which his maternal grandfather Ibn Nujayd (d. 365/976) had belonged.⁴ Through these thematic writings about the tenets of these respective traditions and also by including many of their members in his highly influential work of Sufi historiography, the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, Sulamī played a major role in integrating the *jawānmardī* and *malāmatī* traditions with the mainstream Sufi tradition represented by Abū I-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 297/910) and his followers in Baghdad.⁵ The homily in Firuzkuh 3 shows the distinctive focus on inner sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*), which was shared by both *jawānmardī* and *malāmatī* traditions, such as in the statements: "Whoever recognises the false claim (*da'wī*) attains the true meaning (*ma'nī*)" (recto, lines 8–9) and "Whoever has left behind the path of pretension (*da'wī*) finds the route to true meaning (*ma'nī*) clear" (recto, lines 12–13). While the *malāmatī* tradition advocated hiding one's piety in order to resolve this problem, the focus in *jawānmardī* circles was on ethical behaviour or good deeds (*nīkūkārī*) and service to others (*khidma*), corresponding to the content of this homily. One can also witness in this homily the use of accessible, non-technical language in general, another distinctive trait of discourse in the *jawānmardī* tradition, which was not as closely integrated with scholastic traditions as the main Sufi tradition.

استقامت در راه
 هر که دست از نام برسد آرد لنت بر وجه
 دست هر که دست نماند در دامن حضرت
 از فضیلت خدای رسیده هر که دست از اخلاص
 در حلقه تنها کند روز بدر آه و صبا که رسیده
 هر که دست نماند در حلقه توبه زد فلان هر که
 از ادبی رسیده هر که دست اجتهاد در حلقه
 خدمت مقام پیروز رسیده هر که دست نماند
 در حلقه سنت زد بیساط نرد بای رسیده
 هر که دست در حلقه مداوت رسیده بعضی
 بدر فتیاری رسیده هر که دست در حلقه
 برهیزکاری زد بنیاد بر ورستی کار رسیده

Fig. 2: *Firuzkuh 3 verso* (image courtesy of Nabi Saqee). Full details of the document, including a transcription and English translation can be found in the [Invisible East Digital Corpus](#)

Scriptural sources

As most Muslim homilies, this particular one from the *jawānmardī* tradition can also be seen as inspired originally by scripture, in this case from the *sunna* of the Prophet Muḥammad. A great many mystical homilies share the form of expression originally found in the influential saying of the Prophet of Islam: “Whoever knows himself knows his Lord” (*man ‘arafa nafsah fa-‘arafa rabbah*). It is also very common to include a sequence of statements using the same form repetitively, as can also be seen throughout *Firuzkuh 3*. In many cases, they are clearly direct commentaries on that famous *ḥadīth*, such as the following one attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) in Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 430/1038) *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’*:

Sahl was asked about the saying, “Whoever knows himself knows his Lord.” He answered, “Whoever defines himself for the sake of his Lord, his Lord defines him for the sake of Himself.”⁶

While the brief homily in *Firuzkuh 3* is not a direct commentary on this saying of the Prophet Muḥammad, the popularity of homilies using the same expression repeatedly in Persian is attributable to the pithy and poetic form of that original Arabic saying.

Concluding remarks

The reason behind the preservation of this homily in writing is probably related to its frequent use in a *jawānmardī* circle. It is not only written in elegant rhymed prose, but it concisely summarizes key tenets of the tradition. Therefore, it would have served as an ideal homily for members of the circle to recite together at gatherings in order to reinforce shared values and give encouragement for perseverance with ethical behaviour, avoidance of pretence, and detachment from worldly things, through reminders of the universally appealing goals that can be attained by following the path, such as liberation (*āzādī*, recto, line 10) and joy (*shādī*, recto, line 11, verso, line 11).

Notes

- 1 See M. Zakeri, “Javānmardī”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/javanmardi/>
- 2 Ibid. See also L. Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi Futuwwat in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2010).
- 3 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb al-Futuwwa*, ed. Süleyman Ateş as *Kitabu’l-futuwwa* (Ankara: Ankara University Press, 1977).
- 4 R. Hartmann, “As-Sulamī’s *Risālat al-malāmatijā*”, *Der Islam* 8/3–4 (1918), pp. 157–203.
- 5 See further J. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, chapter 1 (Richmond: RoutledgeCurzon, 2001).
- 6 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’ wa-Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā’*, vol. 10, p. 201 (ed. Cairo, 1938).

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Transcription

Afghanistan National Archives, *Firuzkuh 3*, N. Saqee, A. Azad and M. Arghandehpour, unpublished transcription and translation available online through the Invisible East programme, with slight adaptations by the author.

Recto

1. هرک دست نیکوکاری در حلقه جوانمردی

2. زد بحقیقت آشنائی رسید هرک دست

3. انقطاع در حلقه معرفت زد بولایت راستی رسید [A]

4. [*] هرک دست راستی در حلقه وفاداری زد

5. [۴] بمیدان دوستی رسید [۷] هرک دست آزادی در

6. حلقه شادی زد بعرفات مستی رسید

7. هرک دست یگانگی در حلقه بی خودی زد

8. بروز نیستی رسید هرک دعوی بشناخت

9. بمعنی رسید هرک دنیا بگذاشت بعقی

10. رسید هرک ترس گزید بازادی رسید هرک

11. امید گزید بشادی رسید [۷] هرک قیمت دنیا بشناخت

12. با طلب عقی پرداخت هرک طریق دعوی

13. بگذاشت راه معنی باز یافت هرک

14. [**] هرک دوست گزید بدوست رسید

* indicates text is in margin

[۷]: possible pause marks for recitation purposes

Verso

1. هرک دست استقامت در دامن انابت زد از آفت بی وفایی

2. رست هرک دست فاقه در دامن دوست زد

3. از فضیحت خدای رست هر کی دست اخلاص

4. در حلقه شهادت زد بر راه رهایی رسید

5. هرک دست ندم در حلقه توبه زد بمنزل

6. ازادی رسید هرک دست اجتهاد در حلقه

7. خدمت زد بمقام پیروزی رسید هرک دست تسلیم

8. در حلقه سنت زد ببساط نزدیکی رسید

9. هرکی دست امید در حلقه مداو[م]ت زد بعز

10. پندرتکاری رسید هرک دست ترس در حلقه

11. پرهیزگاری زد بشادی و رستگاری رسید

Translation

Afghanistan National Archives, Firuzkuh 3, N. Saqee, A. Azad and M. Arghandehpour, unpublished transcription and translation available online through the Invisible East programme.

Recto

1. Whoever places the hand of good actions upon the circle of chivalry
2. attains the truth of friendship. Whoever places the hand
3. upon the circle of knowledge, reaches the station of righteousness. [*]
4. [*] Whoever places the hand of righteousness upon the circle of sincerity,
5. reaches the place (*maydān*) of friendship. [γ] Whoever places the hand of freedom upon
6. the circle of happiness, reaches the final stage of bewilderment.
7. Whoever places the hand of oneness [with God] upon the circle of rapture
8. reaches the day of unbeing. Whoever recognises the false claim
9. understands the true meaning. Whoever has renounced this world
10. appreciates the next world. Whoever chooses fear [of God] reaches liberation. Whoever
11. chooses hope, attains happiness. [γ] Whoever understands the value of this world,
12. embarks upon the pursuit of the other world. Whoever has left behind the path of pretension,
13. finds the route to true meaning clear. Whoever
14. [***] Whoever chooses the Beloved, reaches the Beloved.

* indicates text is in margin

[γ]: possible pause marks for recitation purposes

Verso

1. Whoever grasped the hem of repentance with steadfastness, has
2. escaped from the calamity of disloyalty. Whoever reached out with neediness to the Friend,
3. has escaped from disgrace in the eyes of God. Whoever places a hand of sincerity
4. on the circle of martyrdom, has reached the path of salvation.
5. Whoever placed the hand of regret on the circle of repentance, has arrived at the place
6. of freedom. Whoever strove diligently in the circle of
7. service, has reached the station of victory. Whoever submitted

8. in the circle of the *sunna*, has attained intimacy [with God or the spiritual master].
9. Whoever held onto hope in the circle of perseverance, has reached the honour
10. of divine acceptance. Whoever placed the hand of fear on the circle
11. of piety, has reached joy and salvation.

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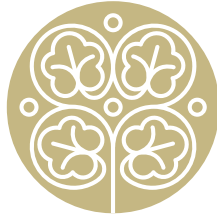
About the author

Jawid Mojaddedi is Professor of Religion at Rutgers University. His area of research is early and medieval Sufism. He began his research with a focus on early Sufi historiography, which culminated in the publication of his book *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2001). His other books include an unabridged verse translation of all six volumes of Rumi's magnum opus, *The Masnavi*, in the Oxford World's Classics series (Oxford University Press, 2004–25), as well as a monograph on Rumi, *Beyond Dogma: Rumi's Teachings on Friendship with God and Early Sufi Theories* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

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