Az adelik Vilayeti:  
The Sufi World of Rumelia

Amina Šiljak-Jesenković, PhD  
University of Sarajevo - Oriental Institute

Summary
In this paper, we tried to point out the poets’ territory of freedom in the verses of poets who lived and worked in early Ottoman Rumeli, from 15th to 17th centuries. This territory of freedom was presented through a new doctrine which is the result of an individual experience, i.e. personal cognition. From Yazıcıoğlu brothers – Ahmet Bican and Mehmed Yazıcıoğlu and Hayreti from the region now belonging to Greece, through the works of Albanian poets such as Suzi Çelebi and Taşlicalı Yahya, to Bosniak poets Sulejman Mezaki and Zekerijja Sukkeri, we notice how Islam, or tasawwuf as a way of spiritual cognition, presents spiritual landmarks of these parts of the Empire.

Key words: Rumelia, the land of freedom, mystical space, slave of love, state of Love

Forget about mosques and schools, build men!  
Building men has the merits of rebuilding the Ka’ba.  
Why think of stone blocks and timber, my king,

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Building men has the merits of rebuilding the Ka’ba.  
Why think of stone blocks and timber, my king,
To build people is what brings honour to kings.\(^1\)
\begin{align*}
\text{Mekteb u mescidi ko, adem yap} \\
\text{Kabe yapmakcadur adem yapmak.} \\
\text{Taş ağaç kaydı ne lazım şahum} \\
\text{Yaraşur şehlere alem yapmak.}\(^2\)
\end{align*}

In Attar’s \textit{Mantiku’т-Tayr}, in the story of Shaikh Sanan, the land of Rum (Byzantium), as a place outside the Islamic world, represents the area in which a “scholar of his own time” experiences conversion, leaves “his atavistic faiths” that is a product of reached knowledge and accepts a new doctrine which is the result of an individual experience, i.e. personal cognition. In this area – “non-place-place” - Adored is replaced by Beloved, achieved knowledge is replaced by experienced cognition.

There are similarities between Attar’s land of Rum where one’s inherited religion is being questioned, and the Early Ottoman Rumelia as depicted in the works of the Ottoman Sufis. The Early Ottoman experience in Rumelia, depicted for example in the works of Mehmed Yazicioglu and his brother Ahmed Bican, is both a real place of real battles and a mystical space where one struggles to gain an insight into the inner world.

Mehmed Yazicioglu’s \textit{Envaru’т-asikin}, as well as other works composed by him and his brother, have a clear purpose of guidance\(^3\) in not only preserving the faith of the Rumelian gazis, but also to assist the aforementioned struggle on the path of continuous conversion. The main target of the early Ottoman conquest, the Rumeli also becomes perceived and described as a place similar to Attar’s Rum, i.e. a place where faith is not only defended and the Ottoman territory expanded, but where faith is also continuously regained and adopted anew.

It is well known that knowledge as well as military, legal, administrative and governmental positions became available to the new Muslims.

\(^2\) Ibidem, p. 146.
\(^3\) In his memoirs, Konstantin Mihajlović describes how the Ottoman soldiers always carried with them small books, ilm-hals.
Since other colleagues will focus on eventful history, the worldly aspects of conversion, and the history of institutions, cities and social, cultural and religious landscape, I will focus on the history of the Sufi Rumelia and the Rumelia of poetry.

Rumelia became a place with two histories: one of the conquest of the physical space and the other, parallel to the former, of the mapping of its Sufi world and the articulation of the Ottoman piety in general. What brings these two histories together are the people who were born or lived in early Rumelia, defining its political boundaries and articulating it as a place of learning and worshiping, thus turning it into a core region of the Empire.

Also, the said facts are approved by many writers of early Ottoman Rumelia who bore significant influence on further authors and scholars not only in the Ottoman areas, but also in the wider area of the Islamic world. For example, we can mention Sudi Bosnevi, a commentator of Persian classics. He was born in the village of Sudici near the kasaba of Čajniče in Eastern Bosnia, and his comments on Hafiz and Gami were the primary literature in reading and studying those Persian classics until the end of the 20th century.

An example of a dual world of actual military struggle and inner spiritual struggle can be found in the mesnevi Gazavat name-i Mihal Oğlu Ali Bey written by Suzi Celebi, originally from Prizren (died in 1524). Throughout this poetic work, the author alternates verses which describe the real military struggle during the Valachian campaign and the inner, spiritual struggle.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Girüp Erdel yolına düşdiler germ} \\
\text{Gaza şevkile her dil mum-veş nerm} \\
\text{They set on the road to Erdel, enflamed} \\
\text{Every heart was softened like a candle by the passion for gaza.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Bu yolda hanüman terk eylediler} \\
\text{Ne hanüman ki can terkeylediler} \\
\text{On this path they abandoned hearths} \\
\text{What hearths! They abandoned themselves!}
\end{align*}
\]

\[4\] Büyük Türk Klasikleri, 3. cilt, page 235.
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....Hicabundur bu ten tefit hicabı
Toğa dersen ki devlet afıtabı
This body is your veil, remove the veil,
If you want the Sun of fortune to appear

Bu tenden tutdı pas ayine-i can
Gider pası görünsün nakş-i Canan
The bodily roust covered the mirror of the soul
Remove the roust so that the picture of the Beloved appears.

Uçur canı bu cism-i pür hevesden
Halas et mürg-i lahuti kafesden
Let the soul fly from the body of passion
Free the bird from the transitory cage.

Bu yolda yara kurban eylemek can
Yeğ andan kim içesin ab-i hayvan
To sacrifice the soul to the Beloved on this path
is better than to drink the Water of life.

Bosnian poet Mezaki (d. 1676) unites and equalizes the two passions:
one for love and the other for martyrdom. Behind these two passions
there is one that includes the desire for self-annihilation.

Sende yog ise arzu-yi zevk-i sehadet
Maydan-i mahabbetde tek utaz idemesin
If you don’t poses the desire for the passion of martyrdom
You cannot advance on the battlefield of love.

A part of such dual history is offered in the poem by Mustafa Ali,
where he returns to the place of early efforts of the Yazıcıoğlu brothers,
Gallipoli, his hometown. In this poem he both describes the place and
its geographical setting and also reconstructs the poetic genealogy,
listing his predecessors in the region where the Ottoman world began
to appear on the map.

Vatanum kışver-i Geliböl'i'dur
Rehgüzerdü Arab Acem yoldur

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My homeland is the land of Gallipoli
The route of Arabs, the road of Persians.

_Evliyasından ol diyarun hem_
_Nice zat-ı yegane var a’zam_
And among the men of God in my land
So many are greats of their own kind.

_Yazıcızade mürşid-i devran_
_Hem karındaşı Ahmed-i Bican_
Yazıcızade, *murshid* of the world and the times
And his brother Ahmed-i Bican.

_İki kamil veliy-i vasıldur_
_Sözleri nazm u nesri şamildür_
Two perfect men of God, who achieved true Oneness
Their words are both poetry and prose.

_Birisinin Muhammediye temam_
_Biri Envar-ı Aşkin’e heman_
One of them has an entire *Muhammediye*
And the other “Lights of the Amorous” (*Envar-ı Aşkin*).

_Dü birader yahud dü peykerdü_
_Nur-ı ilm-i ledünne mazhardur_
Two brothers, or two faces
That show the light of knowledge of divine secrets.

_Oldı asude hem iki budala_
_Tekke Baba ile Ali Baba_
Two more *abdals* found their peace
Tekke-baba and Ali-baba.

_Her biri mazhar-ı kerametdür_
_Server-i kışver-i vilayetdür_
Each of them is the pillar of revelation of divine gifts (*keramat*)
A champion of the land of God.
Amina Šiljak-Jesenković

Ben fakir oldum evvela evlad
Mustafa oldı nam-ı mader-zad
My child, I was born poor
At birth, Mustapha I was named.

Ad-ı sani Muhammed oldı bana
Ehl-i dil hoş-nüvis ü hub eda
And my second name was Muhammad
A sufi, a calligrapher, a man of manners.

The Rumelian homeland is in the centre of another famous author of the 16th century, the famous poet Taşlıcalı Yahya. He incorporates the pre-Ottoman history of Arnavutluk into the broader history of Islam, and brings forward the memory of his family – the Dukaginis, in the poem that describes his life. The short autobiographical account in this poem also praises the Ottoman path of learning, which in the offspring of an old Albanian family (to which he adds old Arab origins)5 unites the talents and upbringing with the “seas of knowledge” offered in the Ottoman lands.6

The Sufi world of Rumelia, which was – to use the words of Hayreti from Vardar Yeniçesı – another âzâdelik vilayeti (the land of freedom), can be best described through his biography and poems. An inhabitant of that world, Hayreti lived and wandered through many of its parts (Vardar Yeniçesi, Istanbul, Belgrade, frontier regions). That Sufi land of freedom, as described in one of his gazels, is neither defined by resistance to the worldly power nor by the lack of humility:

5 Arnavudun hâsları vü begleri
Nesl-i kadımüm Dukakin begleri
Noblemen and champions Albanian
Are my ancestors, the beys of Dugakin.
Mülk-i Arab’dan ki firâr etdiler
Taşlu vilâyetde karâr etdiler.
Who left the lands of Arabia
And settled in the Town of Stone (today Pljevlja, Montenegro).

6 Hemdem olup âlim ü danałara
UGHradi yolüm nice deryalara
Many wise and learned men I befriended
And crossed many oceans as I journeyed.
**Azâdelik vilâyetinün pâdişâhîyüz**  
**Biz hanedan-ı Şah-ı Velayet esiriyüz**  
We are the kings of the land of freedom  
We are the slaves of the dynasty of the shah of the holiness.

**Baş eğmezüz ererse göğe başı cahîlûn**  
**Ariflerüz efendi zarafet esiriyüz**  
We will not bow our head to the head of the ignorant even he reaches the sky  
We are **arîfs**, we are the slaves to gracefulness.

In Hayreti’s land of freedom the worldly power is met with indifference:

**Ne Süleyman’a esirüz ne Selim′ün kuluyuz**  
**Kimse bilmez bizi bir şah-ı kerimün kuluyuz**  
We are the slaves neither of Suleyman nor of Selim  
Nobody knows us, we are the slaves of a Noble Shah.

**Kul olan aşka cihan beglerine egmez baş**  
**Başka sultan-ı cihanuz gör a kimün kuluyuz**  
The one who is the slave of love does not bow to the worldly lords  
Look whose slaves we are, we are different sultans of this world.

Like other attributes of self, in Hayreti’s world of freedom confessional differences fade away:

**Ehl-i aşka küfr ü iman bir olur**  
**Vasl u hicran derd ü derman bir olur**  
For the people of Love blasphemy and belief become One  
Meeting and farewell, pain and cure become One.

**Mülk-i aşk içre kamu bay u geda**  
**Bende-i ferman u sultan bir olur**  
In a state of Love all the rich and the poor  
A servant (slave) of a **firman** (an imperial edict) and sultan become One.
A poet from 17th century Sarajevo, Zekeriyya Sükkeri, expresses the same concept:

Işkunla çü küfr ü din ser-ber-zededür
Hep Gebr ü Müselman arası arbededür
'Uşşak behişt ü duzehi fark itmez
Ol Ka’be ise n’ola bu ateş-gededür

With Your Love Non-belief and Belief are unified
There is always a conflict between non-Muslims and Muslims.
Lovers do not make difference between Paradise and Hell
So what if it is Ka’ba, the fire-worshiping temple it is.

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