

An Unpublished Inscription from Bidlīs

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In Memoriam İsmail Kaygusuz (1944-2022)

Context

Bidlīs is important in the history of the Ottoman Empire and especially its south-eastern frontiers. It has already delivered some Persian and Turkish inscriptions, but as in other parts of the Empire, unpublished inscriptions appear from time to time. The present inscription, which commemorates the building of a complex in the 16th century, is engraved on an outcrop of the Sharafiya to the centre of Bidlīs.¹ The Sharafiya has been carried out during the time of Sharaf Khan I, the Kurdish emir who ruled Bidlīs from 909/1504 to 940/1533.² The monumental complex was built during his alliance with the Ottomans when he governed his territory without the interference of the Ottoman Empire. The complex, at the confluence of the Ribāt and Kuchūr streams in the city centre of Bidlīs, is formed of a mosque, a mausoleum, a fountain, a madrasa with a covered market, a *qaysārīya* (bazaar), a bath-house and a *zāwīya* with a minaret.

The stones carrying the present inscription are of limestone and are formed of many parts. The surface of the stones is well prepared to receive the inscription. The text is completely preserved. Except an Arabic line to recall respect for this building by Sharaf Khan I in 935/1528, the other lines are in Persian, in cursive thuluth. The *basmala* or invocation to God is twice mentioned. Following this *basmala*, the name of Prophet Muḥammad occurs eight times.³ There are also two squares that each one contains four

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¹ For a detailed description about the site, see Arık (1971: 118), Goodwin (1971: 309), and especially Açıkyıldız (2018). Compare also Kâtib Çelebi (1824: 414), and I'timād al-Saltana (2010: 774).

² For the life and career of Sharaf Khan I, see Scheref (1860: i, 400-423).

³ Some scholars have suggested that such inscriptions were not meant to be read as individual statements, but rather, that the repetition of sacred names was comparable to verbal repetitions in the Sufi *dhikr*. See Golombek and Wilber (1988, 210).

identical words-the Persian word *mubāarak bād* 'be blessed'. The main text includes four Persian hemistiches.

Persian poetry used in the inscription epitomizes the taste for an iconography in which the functional and the literary elements are thematically unified. The poem is written in *rubā'ī* or quatrain which has an extremely rigid metrical scheme. To be more precise, it is a Persian poem consisting of four lines with a modified form of the *hazaj* meter. The inscription is over a doorway. Hence the allusions to doors (closing and opening of doors, the doors of heaven) in the poem.

Keywords: Inscription, Bidlīs, Ottoman, Kurdish, 16th century, Persian, Sharafiya

Transcription

Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm

Muḥammad Muḥammad Muḥammad Muḥammad

Muḥammad Muḥammad Muḥammad Muḥammad

Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm

mudabbirī ki asās-i dar-i bihisht nahād (Fac. 1)

mubāarak bād mubāarak bād mubāarak bād mubāarak bād

nabast hīch darī tā digar darī nagushād (Fac. 2)

amara bi- 'imārat hādha al-masjid Amīr Sharaf Bak 935 (Fac. 2)

dar-i bihisht bi-rūy-i kasī gushād ū ki (Fac. 2)

mubāarak bād mubāarak bād mubāarak bād mubāarak bād

dar-īn kharāba-yi fānī darī bi-khayr gushād (Fac. 3)

Translation

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Muḥammad, Muḥammad, Muḥammad, Muḥammad

Muḥammad, Muḥammad, Muḥammad, Muḥammad

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

A prudent person who based the foundation of the door of Paradise

Be blessed! Be blessed! Be blessed! Be blessed!

He did not close any door unless he opened another door

Amir Sharaf Beg ordered the foundation of this mosque, 935

He opened the door of Paradise to a person who

Be blessed! Be blessed! Be blessed! Be blessed!

Opened a door to the goodness in this mortal wreckage

Facsimiles

Fac. 1



Fac. 2



Fac. 3



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