

A Plea for Chivalry in *Hašt Bihišt* VI: Restoring Sermon 11 of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib

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ABSTRACT

The important role that the *Hašt Bihišt* VI of Idrīs Bidlīsī (1457–1520) and the detailed accounts he devoted to the reign of Murād II (1421–1444; 1446–1451) played in the development of early modern Ottoman historiography cannot be denied. Although the work was popular in the Ottoman world, especially its court circles, where its handsome copies were avidly produced, it was never prepared as a critical edition in its original Persian in the modern Ottoman studies departments. The following discussion concentrates on an editorial emendation that shows the carelessness of Bidlīsī in the transmission of his quotations. The formation of the Sufi and Shiite elements within Book VI of *Hašt Bihišt* is only briefly discussed.

KEYWORDS

Idrīs Bidlīsī, *Hašt Bihišt* VI, Murād II, Ottoman, Persian, Arabic, *Nahḡ al-Balāḡa*

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In Memoriam Ghassan El-Rouayheb (1978–2023)

کاش که در قیامتش بار دگر بدیدمی

کانچه گناه او بود من بکشم غرامتش

INTRODUCTION

The religious situation in Bidlīs (in eastern Anatolia), the hometown of Idrīs Bidlīsī, was diverse. Its population included Armenians, Muslims, and Assyrians. A passage found in the *Istivānāma* is particularly important for our discussion. According to al-Astarābādī, the people of the region, including Bidlīs, were either Sufis or Ḥurūfīs (whose teaching was a complex of Shiism and Sufism)¹. This Ḥurūfī text, penned in the first half of the 15th century, shows traces of the spread of Ḥurūfī/Shiite teachings in Bidlīs². In addition, other sources specifically mention groups of Bidlīsīs of high ranking origin who were interested in Shiite doctrines³. They probably differentiate between the interest in Shiite doctrines of the inhabitants of Bidlīs, especially those of the Bidlīs ruling family, and the interests of the Bidlīsī intellectuals, because the former took place in central Bidlīs itself, while the latter took place outside Bidlīs and were not what al-Astarābādī and other sources seem to envisage as examples of Shiite followers. In the latter category we find the father of Idrīs, Ḥusām al-Dīn ‘Alī Bidlīsī, who became a pro-Shiite at least after his contacts with Nūrbahāşīya (with great interest in Shiite and Sufi doctrines). Some of the works composed by Ḥusām al-Dīn ‘Alī relate to Sufism and to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib; both mainly deal with non-orthodox groups, not with Sunni Muslims⁴.

The purport of the above-mentioned material and similar pieces of evidence is clear: Idrīs enjoyed the admiration of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (in both his Sufi and Shiite appearances). There is considerable evidence about the Sufi and Shiite tendencies that Idrīs inherited from the Bidlīs region and from his father⁵. In particular, Idrīs’ own works point to several two-sided issues, through which the possibility of his non-orthodoxy can be considered stronger. The mention of Shiism as his religious doctrine, a creed certainly not practiced by his patrons, was, according to the political and cultural code of the Ottoman period, an insulting (and no doubt false) allusion to non-orthodox descent. Perhaps he accepted dissimulation (*al-taqīyya*). This is, of course, a simple solution regarding the dilemma of Idrīs’ religious affiliation but unacceptable as a historical fact. The linguistic, artistic, and historical arguments advanced by those pieces of evidence which support the possibility of the Shiism of Idrīs would require several detailed articles to elucidate. The following episode in the *Hašt Bihīšt* VI provides only a primary textual basis for the prospect that exalted Sufi (and possibly Shiite) concepts may have existed in Idrīs’ worldview. At the same time, it should be highlighted that he was not the only person in or around the

¹ See al-Astarābādī, Ghiyās al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Istivānāma*, Istanbul, Millet Kütüphanesi, AEfrs 269, fol. 38r.

² See al-Astarābādī, *Istivānāma*, fols. 40v and 80v.

³ See, for instance, Dehqan and Genç 2015; Dehqan and Genç 2022: 158.

⁴ See Bidlīsī, Ḥusām al-Dīn ‘Alī. *Şarḥ-i Huṭbat al-Bayān-i Amīr al-Mu‘minīn*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 1777; idem. *Kanz al-Ḥaḫfi fī Bayān Maqāmāt al-Şūfī*, Ankara, Milli Kütüphanesi, Nevşehir ÜR 201/3. In addition to Ḥusām al-Dīn ‘Alī, Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbahāş, the founder of Nūrbahāşīya, mentions the names of several Kurdish disciples in his *Risālat al-Hudā* who came to Rayy from Bidlīs. When Ḥusām al-Dīn ‘Alī returned to his hometown before 1465, he continued to disseminate the Nūrbahāşī teachings in the *zāwīya* he founded in his own name. See, for instance, Genç 2019: 23–27.

⁵ See, for instance, Genç 2015; Genç 2019: 15–30, 114–143.



Ottoman court in the first decades of the 16th century who had a mixed worldview of various orthodox or heterodox religious doctrines and rituals.

Lastly, when talking about Idrīs's Shiite trends, one should refer to the Alid loyalism in the court of the Aqqyunlu, where Idrīs had spent many years of his life. Since the early Islamic periods, some intellectuals thought that the all-essential *'ilm*, and the conscience and command over the community, was retained in the line of Alids only. Thus, there was always in existence a tendency towards Shiism and its cultural and religious differentiations. If we accept Judith Pfeiffer's interesting analysis, there was a 'confessional ambiguity' which makes it difficult to distinguish between Sunni and Shiite scholars and intellectuals. Idrīs' Shiisms, however, are much stronger than a mere Alid loyalism, but this issue is also applicable here.⁶

MURĀD II AS SPIRITUAL MODEL OF MASCULINITY

In the conclusion to Story XIII, *Hašt Bihišt* VI, Idrīs gives a brief account of his critical historical methodology, concluding with the unidentified words of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib:

iḏā qadarta 'alā 'aduwwika fa-ḡ'ali l-'fwa 'anhu šukran li-l-qudratī'

When you gain power over your adversary pardon him by way of thanks for being able to overpower [him]

This is a quotation (sermon 11) from *Nahḡ al-Balāḡa* ('The Path of Eloquence'), a collection of orations, sermons, and letters attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, fourth Rashidun Caliph, first Shiite Imam and the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. Idrīs mentions at this point Karamanoğlu İbrahim (d.1454), a brother-in-law of Murād II, instead of his Christian adversaries (*kuffār-i la'īn*) in general. The reason for this quotation is that the beloved (*muḥtaram va mu'azzaz*) sister of the sultan asked him to show mercy for her husband who revolted against her brother and was linked to the Christians by alliance, friendship, and foster brotherhood. The sultan resisted this request and even refused to accept the envoys of Karamanoğlu İbrahim. But when his sister added that (if the sultan does not forgive her husband) he has failed in chivalry, Murād II pardoned the governor of Karaman.

The quotation is, of course, problematic: the last word *alayhi* is missing here. Sermon 11 in the *Nahḡ al-Balāḡa* and all sources derived from it or based on it have the complete wordings: *iḏā qadarta 'alā 'aduwwika fa-ḡ'ali l-'fwa 'anhu šukran li-l-qudratī alayhi*⁸. It is possible to say that such a discrepancy is simply a mark of Idrīs' poor memory but one may keep in mind that due to the following interpretations, sermon 11 is probably a special 'sacred' quotation. The author should be very sensible that there is no place for carelessness, conjecture or emendation in the sacred text.

It should be added that the missing word in the quotation disappeared in all significant manuscripts, including Nuruosmaniye 3209, which with some exaggeration is accepted as the fair

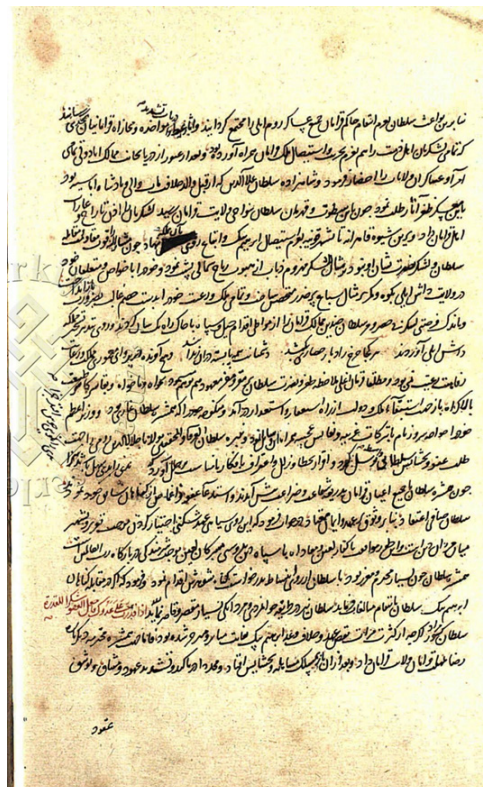
⁶ For details, see Hodgson 1974: 260, 372; Pfeiffer 2014.

⁷ See Bidlisi, Idrīs ibn Ḥusām al-Dīn. *Hašt Bihišt*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Esad Efendi 2199, fol. 345v.

⁸ See, for instance, al-Ġāhiz, Amru ibn Baḥr. *Mā'at Kalimat Imām 'Alī*, Qum, Kitābhāna-yi Āyat Allāh Mar'āšī, 18782/8, fol.48v.; Anon. *Kalamāt-i Qiṣār-i Imām 'Alī*, Qum, Kitābhāna-yi Gulpāygānī, 2685/3-14/135, fol. 1r.; and compare Rašīd Waṭwāt, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. *Maṭlūb Kull Ṭālib min Kalām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, Ed. Maḥmūd 'Abidī (Tehran: Bunyād-i Nahḡ al-Balāḡa, 1986), 45–46: *čun šudī bar 'adū-yi ḥud qādir / 'afv rā šukr-i qudrat-i ḥud sāz*.



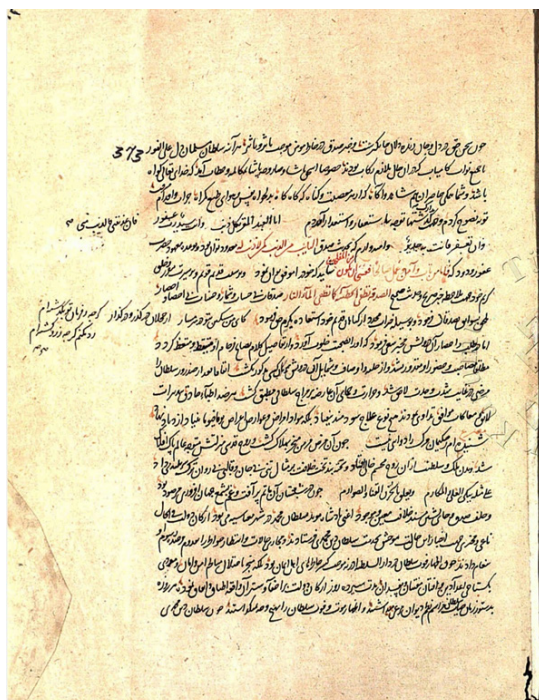
copy or ‘autograph’ of *Hašt Bihišt*⁹. It is true that Esad Efendi 2199 is a draft copy but I would like to stress that it is the best and the earliest manuscript. On the principle that the more difficult reading is to be preferred, something can no doubt said for the originality of Esad Efendi 2199. Of course, when talking about Book VII or Book VIII or the other additions that Idris later made to the *Hašt Bihišt*, we cannot ignore Nuruosmaniye 3209 as a base text. But when we are dealing with Book VI or, for example, Book V, Nuruosmaniye 3209 has only secondary importance as a variant. In my opinion, even in the case of later additions, such as what was added to Book VII, the very fundamental importance of Esad Efendi 2199 should not be neglected. There is no doubt that Esad Efendi 2199 is an autograph in the true sense, all of which was written by Idris himself, while Nuruosmaniye 3209, in my opinion, was written by a number of scribes under Idris’s supervision, and only small parts of it were written by him. Therefore, the validity and accuracy that is in Esad Efendi 2199 is not in Nuruosmaniye 3209. But the reason why most researchers stay away from Nuruosmaniye 3209 is exactly what they said, it is a ‘draft version’ that is very difficult to read. Unfortunately, in order to make things easier, some researchers have restricted this manuscript and exaggerated the fairness of Nuruosmaniye 3209.



MS Esad Efendi 2199, fol. 345v (Courtesy of Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul)

⁹ Only its conclusion and the colophon are written in Idris’ hand, cf. Fallahzadeh 2014.





MS Esad Efendi 2199, fol. 373r (Courtesy of Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul)

Much of the work on modern *Hašt Bihišt* Turkish translations has consisted of a single manuscript, normally Nuruosmaniye 3209. It is not a problem that they have used a single manuscript as the main basis for a translation. The main problem is the loss of method. Commonly, this took the form of choosing as a translation ground a ‘best manuscript’ and translating its readings as authoritative even where simple common sense (not necessarily a classical education) showed that they could not be authentic. In other words, the emendation of minor mistakes and missing words will indeed not contribute to great changes in historical narratives, but it sometimes places the text in a new context¹⁰. Even if this is not the case, should we not be loyal to Idris’ text as to any other text? Should we not be trustworthy in transmitting his text? It is certain that until the critical edition of *Hašt Bihišt* is available, its translation will not be without limitations. It is certain that these tiny mistakes find their way into the translations of *Hašt Bihišt*, and even if they are not important, they move the translations away from Idris’ own *Hašt Bihišt*.

The interpretations of sermon 11 I want to discuss come from widely different reflections of the quotation. They do have features in common, however. They all occur in the work of a single author. The decision in each case seems to turn not just on the manuscript evidence – though

¹⁰ Compare, for instance, Bockholt 2020, 2022.

that will weigh very heavily – but also on the context, that is, on what Idrīs seems on the whole to be trying to say.

A typical interpretation of sermon 11 used by Idrīs is its rhetorical importance. Surprising as it may seem, especially in comparison with other Arabic citations and passages used in the *Hašt Bihišt*, the Arabic orations and sermons of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib have received little attention from Idrīs. Its Shiite reputation may be one reason; its ubiquitousness, which derives from the apophthegmatic nature of ‘Alī’s sermons may be another. For Idrīs, however, the purpose of this quotation is mainly to provide a rhetorical credit for his own history, especially as a hyperliterate text. According to Ibn Abi l-Ḥadīd, the author of an in-depth commentary on the book, the eloquent language used in the *Nahḡ al-Balāḡa* is ‘above the words of men and below the words of God’¹¹. This is why Idrīs (as an early modern *adīb*) and many others paid literary and linguistic attention to this book.

Another interpretation is mainly due to the variant readings of the quotation. The three important variants I consulted for the present study transmit the same problematic wording in which the word *alayhi* still is a significant omission. However, all these variants attribute the unidentified sermon 11 to *šāh-i mardān va pīšvā-yi ḡavānmardān*, which clearly is a reference to ‘Alī¹². The first title, *šāh-i mardān* ‘the king of men’ is frequently mentioned in the discussion of ‘Alī as a martial model of masculinity and sometimes his role in Shiism¹³. The second, *pīšvā-yi ḡavānmardān* ‘the leader of young men’ derives from *ḡavānmardī* (literally, ‘youngmanliness’); its precise meaning is difficult to comprehend. What is certain is that *ḡavānmardī* or *futuwwa* refers to a wide variety of amorphous associations with initiation rituals and codes in the Islamic world including altruism, magnanimity, liberality, and unquestioning loyalty to fellow members of the association¹⁴. In the present case, it is also a possible reference to Imam (and not Caliph) ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib who is *pīšvā-yi ḡavānmardān* here. This is a Persian equivalent of ‘Alī’s epithet *sayyid al-fityān*, a well-known account of a divine utterance: ‘lā fatā illā ‘Alī’ (There is no young brave man but ‘Alī)¹⁵.

Significantly, with regard to the Shiite interests of Idrīs, another important unidentified quotation is mentioned in another section which Idrīs cites from Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Biyhaqī al-Kaydurī (d.c.1180). According to this section (*Hašt Bihišt* VI, Story XXIV), after a discussion of Murād II’s repentance in his last days Idrīs mentioned two Arabic verses which are attributed to Imam ‘Alī, in al-Biyhaqī al-Kaydurī’s *Anwār al-‘Uqūl min Aš‘ār Waṣī al-Rasūl*, known as *Dīwān al-Imām ‘Alī*.¹⁶ In fact, al-Biyhaqī al-Kaydurī and his earlier sources

¹¹ See Ibn Abi l-Ḥadīd, Abū Ḥāmid ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn Habat Allāh. *Šarḥ Nahḡ al-Balāḡa*, Ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Namrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1999), iv, 112.

¹² For earlier significant variants with the same omission, see Bidlisī, Idrīs ibn Ḥusām al-Dīn. *Hašt Bihišt*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Nuruosmaniye 3209, fol. 308r.; idem. *Hašt Bihišt*, Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Hazine 1655, fol. 344v.; and idem. *Hašt Bihišt*, Tabriz, Kitābhāna-yi Markazī-yi Tabriz, Maḡmū‘a-yi H. Hussein Nakhdjvani, 1874, fol. 262v.

¹³ See, for instance, Sa‘dī Širāzī, Muṣliḥ al-Dīn. *Būstān*, Ed. Ġulām Ḥusayn Yūsifī (Tehran: Ḥū‘arazmī, 2017), 83: *ḡavānmard agar rāst ḥ‘āhī valist / karam pīša-yi šāh-i mardān ‘Alist*.

¹⁴ For these, especially from a Shiite point of view, see, for instance, Corbin 1971.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Ṭabarī 1987: 120.

¹⁶ For this unidentified quotation in Idrīs’s *Hašt Bihišt* VI, see Bidlisī, *Hašt Bihišt*, Esad Efendi 2199, fol. 373r: *ana l-‘abdu l-muqirru bi-kulli ḡanbi / wa anta sayyidu rabbu ḡafūru [sic] / fa-in ‘aḡabtani fa l-ḡanbu minnī / wa in taḡfir fa-anta bihi ḡadīru*. For its original source, see al-Biyhaqī al-Kaydurī, Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn. *Dīwān al-Imām ‘Alī. Anwār al-‘Uqūl min Aš‘ār Waṣī al-Rasūl*, Ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Ḡubbūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Maḡḡa al-Bayḡa and Dār al-Rasūl al-Akram, 1999), 211: *ana l-‘abdu l-muqirru bi-kulli ḡanbi / wa anta l-sayyidu*



received these two verses from Abū Nuwās (d.c.814)¹⁷ and transmitted them (with minor changes) as a poem of Imam ‘Alī. However, as the Shiites have known this poem from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib since the 12th century, it may be possible to conclude that Idrīs’ unidentified reference to *Nahḡ al-Balāḡa* was not accidental.

CONCLUSION

In order to arrive at an editorial decision one may weigh this testimony. The sophisticated language of the *Hašt Bihišt* requires editors who desire to tackle it to gain a solid knowledge of Iranian philology, scribal practices common to copyists of Persian, the linguistic usages common to Idrīs’ period, and the classical quotations of the text in ancillary sources. For editors of the *Hašt Bihišt*, much of this learning comes gradually from practical experiences with earlier manuscripts of the text.

We may conclude that Idrīs’ present quotation includes a somewhat corrupt version of the original saying. Idrīs was combining some different interpretations which he had in mind about the masculinity and chivalry of Murād II into one coherent quotation; he probably unintentionally mentioned sermon 11 (as what he had sympathy with) concerning the morality of Murād II. We may conclude that he was able to choose a less unorthodox quotation but this one was a multidimensional citation in which eloquence, Sufism, and Shiism all were involved. It should not be forgotten that Idrīs wrote his history for a Sunni patron and in a Sunni environment that did not show favour to either Sufism or Shiism.

On the whole, when Idrīs mentions some unidentified Shiite passages or verses, this probably goes beyond a simple quotation, as demonstrated by the evidence analysed above. A comparison between these references and the religious background of his father and hometown (Bidlis) gives a rather unlimited idea of the Shiite affiliation of Idrīs.

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l-rabbu l-ḡafūru / fa-in ‘aḍabtāni fa l-ḡanbu minnī / wa in taḡfir fa-anta bihi ḡadīru. For the same Arabic verses and their verse Persian translation composed by a 15th century poet, see Mawlānā Šawqī. *Dīwān-i Aš‘ār-i Mansūb ba Ḥaḍrat-i Amīr al-Mu‘minīn ‘Alī ‘Alayhi l-Salām*, Ed. Sayyida Maryam Rawḍatīyān (Tehran: Anḡuman-i Aṭār va Mafāḥir-i Farhangī, 2004), 60: *manam banda muqirr bar har ḡunāhi / tu baḥšāyanda ‘i ḡurmam bibaḥšā / ‘aḍābam gar kunī hast az ḡunāham / va gar baḥši tavānā ‘i bar ānhā.*

¹⁷ See Abū Nuwās, al-Ḥasan ibn Ḥānī. *Dīwān*, Ed. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Maḡīd al-Ḡazālī (Cairo: Maṭba‘a Miṣr, 1953), 610: *ana l-‘abdu l-muqirru bi-kulli ḡanbi / wa anta l-sayyidu l-mawlā l-ḡafūru / fa-in ‘aḍabtāni fabsū ‘fi ‘lī / wa in taḡfir fa-anta bihi ḡadīru.*



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