

THE *MAWLID-I NABĪ* BY SÜLEYMÂN ÇELEBÎ AND ITS TWO VERSIONS

Among the Turkish manuscripts in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies is a late eighteenth-century copy of a *mathnawî* poem written by the Turkish poet Süleymân Çelebî (Sulaymân Chalabî; 1351—1410) and known by the title *Mawlid-i Nabî*. The manuscript has a leather binding with a gold imprint in the centre — a medallion with floral ornamentation — and a border of small rosettes (on the outer side of the binding) with a fully gilded impressed drawing on the inner side. The dimensions of the folios are: 21.0 × 16.4 cm. The text occupies a space of 14.0 × 10.0 cm and is copied in black Indian ink in two columns framed by a gold border. The text is vocalised and each page contains 11 *bayts*. In all, the copy contains 1,204 lines of poetry. The manuscript was acquired in 1962 from relatives of the collector and Orientalist S. M. Shapshal [1].

The title of the work is given in the manuscript directly beneath the *unwân* in red ink in the form *Mawlūd-i Nabî*. The paper is European, with watermarks; it is thin and glossy. The handwriting is *naskh*. The manuscript consists of 30 folios. The end of the work is on fol. 29b. Folio 30a contains a prayer of good wishes marked with the date 27 Ramaḍān 1250/27 January 1835 (the month is indicated only by the letter *rāʾ*).

The work, written at the very beginning of the fifteenth century, has survived in numerous copies from various times. It is dedicated to the life of Muḥammad, more specifically, to glorifying him as the greatest and last of the prophets. The modest manuscript kept in the St. Petersburg collection is of interest as it represents one of the last in a series of copies going back to the oldest surviving manuscript. This oldest copy dates to 920/1514—15 and is held in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum in Istanbul. The distinctive feature of this oldest copy and the version it contains is the presence of a concluding section dedicated to Muḥammad's daughter, Fāṭima.

We know that the autograph of Süleymân Çelebî's poem has not survived. The Turkish scholar A. Ateş, the author of a scholarly edition of the poem, based his edition not on the oldest manuscript but on a later copy dated to 967/1558—59, now held in the library of the Mehmed Fatih Mosque in Istanbul. The manuscript chosen by A. Ateş for his edition lacks the section dedicated to Fāṭima [2]. In the view of the scholar, this section of the poem, present in the oldest copy, is obviously an interpola-

tion and could not have belonged to Süleymân Çelebî himself [3]. The absence of the section on Fāṭima is a basic feature which marks one of the two extant versions of the poem. A. Ateş observes that this section is written in a different poetic meter than the main body of the work and differs from it lexically. Not intending to take issue with the scholar's conclusion, we note only that the whole of the text published by Ateş is diverse both in the poetic meters employed and in its linguistic features. In a study which precedes the publication of Çelebî's poem, Ateş stresses also the distinctly Sunnî character of the text created by the poet. This element, more than any other, seems to compel the scholar to doubt Süleymân's authorship of the section which tells of Fāṭima and 'Alî, although he nowhere postulates this directly.

Taking into account that the section in question is, in essence, the key element in distinguishing the two extant versions of the poem, it is important to pay special attention to the origins of the supposed interpolation and the time of its possible incorporation into the text of the poem. It should be noted that the independent and persistent existence of two versions over a long period of time, along with the lack of the autograph, as well as the presence of an oldest copy which supposedly does not represent the author's version, make the task of reconstructing the original text practically insoluble. To this one should add the extremely scarce information on the author and the fact of the work's great popularity. The text of the poem exists not only in an enormous number of copies, but has been maintained in oral form as well. It is obvious that the exceptional popularity of the poem contributed to the appearance of various additions, changes and interpolations, and variant groupings of the text's parts. Taken together, these factors played an important part in creating a new hypertext, which differs substantially from what was once written down by Süleymân Çelebî.

With all due credit to the thorough work performed by A. Ateş, whose aim was to reconstruct an original text, one must say that the critical text he in effect presented seems to remain far from that of the original — the field for interpolations and editorial corrections was too broad. In these conditions, it would be more fruitful to study all of the component parts of the extant hypertext as represented by all of the existing copies of the poem. While this may not bring researchers any closer to solving the problem of