

RE-READING OF THE AKHLĀT PĀSHĀ KHĀTŪN INSCRIPTION: TOMBSTONE OF A FOURTEENTH- CENTURY RŪZHAKĪ PRINCESS

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Abstract:

Interest in the group of inscriptions now referred to as Akhlāt tombstones was mainly revived in 1972 by the reading and interpretation of some inscriptions of the tombstones at Akhlāt Meydanlık Cemetery. These readings, accompanied by breakthroughs in the decipherment of the script, allowed the inscriptions to be read for the first time. Although some inscriptions are complete, the reading and linguistic content of the majority of the inscriptions remain largely obscure. In this brief note, a re-reading is put forward concerning the tombstone of Pāshā Khātūn, a fourteenth-century Rūzhakī princess of Bidlīs. It underscores the importance of the inscriptions and tombstones found in Bidlīs for cross-verifying information with other contemporary sources.

Keywords: Akhlāt, Bidlīs, Lake Van, Rūzhakī, Sharaf-nāma

Ahlat Paşa Hatun Mezar Taşını Yeniden Okumak: Bir 14. Yüzyıl Rojki Hanedanı Kadın Mensubunun Mezar Taşı

Öz

Ahlat mezar taşları olarak adlandırılan yazıtların ilgi görmesi, 1972 yılında Ahlat Meydanlık Mezarlığı'nda ki bazı mezar taşlarının okunması ve yorumlanmasıyla canlanmıştır. Mezar yazıtlarının deşifre edilmesi onların ilk kez okunabilmesini sağlamıştır. Her ne kadar bazı yazıtlar eksiksizse de, çoğunluğu hala okunmamıştır ve dilbilgisel içerikleri büyük ölçüde belirsizdir. Bu kısa yazıda, Bidlis'in 14. yüzyıl Rojki hanedanı kadın üyelerinden Paşa Hatun'un mezar taşı üzerine bir yeniden okuma önerilmektedir. Bu yeniden okuma, yazıtın önemini vurgular. Bu kısa yazı, Bidlis'te bulunan bu tür yazıtların, çağdaş kaynaklardaki bilgilerin doğrulanması hususunda ne denli önemli olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ahlat, Bidlis, Van Gölü, Rojki, Şerefnâme

Introduction

Apart from some small cemeteries here and there in Akhlāt, there are six main cemeteries of historical importance named Harabe Şehir Cemetery, Taht-ı Süleyman Cemetery, Kırklar Cemetery, Kale Cemetery, Merkez Cemetery, and Meydanlık Cemetery¹. The last one is the main cemetery, with thousands of tombstones made of reddish volcanic turf in the middle of a large huge field. The tombstones breathtaking, as high as 4 meters, and richly decorated with geometric, vegetal and stylized scripts. Analysis of the Meydanlık cemetery tombs with stelae indicates phases of production between the late twelfth and the early sixteenth centuries with some tombstones of Kurdish emirs of Bidlīs that correspond to fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In addition to the emirs of Bidlīs, there are also some tombs of the Bidlīsī fourteenth-century notables: e.g. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Bidlīsī (d.702/1303), ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Alī b. al-Şadr Muwaffaq al-Dīn Mas‘ūd Bidlīsī (d.703/1303), and Mas‘ūd b. Abūbakr al-Bidlīsī (d.792/1389-90). These Kurdish tombs are concentrated in the northwestern section of Meydanlık cemetery and indicate that the expansion of the burial ground generally occurred from the north to the south. The tombstone of Pāshā Khātūn appeared in the last quarter of the fourteenth-century and became a rare female tombstone not only in Akhlāt but also across the region.

The *Sharaf-nāma* and other Kurdish sources do not give information about Pāshā Khātūn, for only in the *Sharaf-nāma* do we find mention of her father and ancestors as emirs of Bidlīs and Şaşun (see below)². Pāshā Khātūn as a fourteenth-century princess from Rūzhakī tribe of Bidlīs, curiously, is not mentioned in the *Sharaf-nāma*. Sharaf Khan mentions a Pāshā Khātūn whose name should not be confused with what is given in the following inscription. This is a second Pāshā Khātūn whose name, as *khātūn*, refers to a bridge and a mosque at central Bidlīs³. As a daughter of Malik Muḥammad of Ḥakkārī, she formed an essential component of many pious foundations, known as *vakf-ı Paşa Hatun*⁴. Certainly copying earlier popular names must have played an important role in the naming of second Pāshā Khātūn, but other factors including a quest for fame or remembering a powerful regional princess, may have spurred Malik Muḥammad of Ḥakkārī to name her daughter as Pāshā Khātūn, a later wife of Shams al-Dīn Dushwār and a Kurdish Ḥakkārī woman in the Bidlīs emirs’ harem.

After the death of Malik Ashraf, who appeared to have been one of the ancestors of the emirs of Bidlīs, his brother Malik Majd al-Dīn succeeded him. According to Sharaf Khan, the descendants of Majd al-Dīn, i.e. ‘Izz al-Dīn, Mīr Abūbakr, Amīr Sheikh Sharaf and Amīr Dīyā’ al-Dīn, ruled Bidlīs respectively⁵. Although Sharaf Khan does not give detailed information about them, yet he demonstrates that his chronicle is a reliable source even for the fourteenth-century.

Pāshā Khātūn, who died sometime between 1389 and 1397, was a daughter of Amīr Sheikh Sharaf, son of Amīr Abūbakr, son of Amīr ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Rushakī. At the same time, she was the sister of Amīr Dīyā’ al-Dīn, whose name was mentioned in the *Sharaf-nāma*, and the aunt of Timur’s contemporary Amīr Ḥājji Sharaf. It should be noted that the orders of the names engraved on the tombstone and the sequence of the emirs of Bidlīs who succeeded Malik Majd al-Dīn in the *Sharaf-nāma* are exactly the same. Thanks to this tombstone, we can now construct an uninterrupted chronology and pedigree of emirs from the second half of the thirteenth-century to the end of the seventeenth-century.

In his introduction to the *Sharaf-nāma*, Sharaf Khan clearly states that he narrated most of his information from

1 For these cemeteries, numerous underground burial chambers, and tomb towers, see Haluk Karamağaralı, “Ahlat’ta Bulunan Tümülüs Tarzındaki Türk Mezarları”, *Önasya*, 5 (1970), 59-60; Haluk Karamağaralı, “Ahlat Kazıları (1967-1991)”. in: Oktay Belli (Ed.), *II. Van Gölü Havzası Sempozyumu* (Bitlis: Bitlis Valiliği İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü Yayını, 2007), 83-104; Recai Karahan, et al., *Ahlat Selçuklu Meydan Mezarlığı ve Mezar Taşları* (Ankara: Privately Published, 2019); Oya Pancaroğlu, “Looking for Urban Agency in a City of Memorials: Tomb Towers of Late Thirteenth-Century Ahlat”, *Medieval Worlds*, 14 (2021), 117-154.

2 See Scheref, “*Scheref-nameh ou Histoire des Kourdes*”, ed. V. Véliaminof-Zernof (St.-Petersbourg: Commissionaires de l’Académie Impériale des Science, 1860-62), vol. I, 192, 364-369.

3 See Scheref, *Scheref-nameh*, 208, 340. The first is certainly identical with the Khātūniyya Bridge at the foot of the citadel and at the point of confluence of two rivers: Iskandar and Ävikh. The mosque in question usually occurs as Khātūniyya School (a primary school) in later sources. See Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, vols. I-VI, ed. A. Cevdet; vols. VII-VIII, ed. K. Rif’at; vols. IX-X, ed. Anonymous (Istanbul: İkdâm, 1896-1938), vol. IV, 91, 122; Robert Dankoff, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis: The Relevant Section of the Seyahatname* (Leiden: E.J. Brill: 1990), XV, 69, 73.

4 See BOA, TT. d. 202, fol. 57v.: “Paşa Hatun binti Melik Muhammed vâlide-i emîreyn-i kebîreyn Emîr Şeref Han ve İbrahim hâkim-i Bidlis, h. 870/1465-66”; and compare BOA. TD. 413, fol. 205r.

5 See Scheref, *Scheref-nameh*, 362-372; Oktay Bozan, “Celâleddin Harezşah’ın Ahlat’ı Muhasarası ve Yankıları”, *Dicle Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2 (2012), 133-159.

old and reliable individuals. It is clear that the oral sources mixed the information they conveyed to Sharaf Khan with some inaccuracies, exaggerations and legends. However, it should not be deduced that the chronicle is completely unreliable for the earlier centuries. The tombstone of Pāshā Khātūn is an indication of the reliability of the *Sharaf-nāma*.

Text and Translation

The classical source for the Akhlāt Pāshā Khātūn inscription which contains a reading is a Turkish publication by Beyhan Karamağaralı. In her book, she highlights a collection of inscriptions from Akhlāt Meydanlık Cemetery, specifically referencing three graves dating from the late 14th to the early 15th century, associated with the Diyādīnī dynasty of the Bidlīs emirate. Referring to *Sharafnāma* she repeatedly states that the patronymic “Roṣki” appearing on all three tombstones belongs to the emirs of Bidlīs. However, while suspecting the Kurdish origin of the dynasty, she conveys the need for further investigation regarding the lineage of the emirs of Bidlīs and their connection to Akhlāt. Though not explicitly stated, her implication suggests a belief in the potential Turkish origins of the dynasty. Additionally, alongside various exaggerated assertions regarding the early Turkish settlements in Akhlāt, the author has sought to portray the two inscriptions of dynasty members in a more Turkish context. She claims a connection between Roṣki dynasty and Turkishness, based on the Turkish names he reads, such as Birmiş and Tekin, surprisingly found on two of the existing three graves. According to her, the usage of Turkish names like Birmiş and Tekin among the members of the dynasty is a point that needs to be emphasized. However, all of these misinterpretations and inaccurate conclusions were rooted in her misreading the names mentioned in two inscriptions. Intentionally or unintentionally, she reads Emir Birmiş and Tekin instead of Amīr Pīr Hasan and Abūbakr⁶, respectively, potentially attributing a Turkish identity to the dynasty as a result.

Whilst those of other inscriptions are sufficiently simple to have been read correctly, the cumbersome Arabic spelling of the personal names used in the present inscription has given rise to the intentional Turkification as to its correct form and meaning. The inscription of Pāshā Khātūn, the subject of this academic note, may be read as follows:

اللهم تعطف برحمتك ورأفتك على ساكنة هذا اللحد السعيدة الشهيدة المرحومة القصير العمر المحتاجة إلى رحمة الله تعالى هذا مزار پاشا خاتون بنت الأمير الكبير المرحوم أمير شيخ شرف ابن الأمير الكبير أمير أبو بكر بن أمير عز الدين الروشكي توفيت في شهر صفر سنة خمس* وتسعين وسبعماية⁷

Allāhumma ta‘ātaf bi-rahmatika wa ra‘fatika ‘alā sākinah hadhā al-laḥd al-sa‘īdah al-shahīdah al-marḥūmah al-qaṣīr al-‘umr al-muḥtājah ilā raḥmat Allāh Ta‘ālā hadhā mazār Pāshā Khātūn bint al-Amīr al-Kabīr al-marḥūm Amīr Sheikh Sharaf ibn al-Amīr al-Kabīr Abū Bakr bin Amīr ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Rūshakī tuwuffiyat fī shahr Ṣafar sanat khams wa tis‘īn wa sab‘miah.

O Allah, in Your greatness, mercy, and compassion, bestow Your mercy upon the blessed, martyred and the deceased one who lived a short life, now resting in this grave, and who was in need of the mercy of the Almighty Allah. This is the grave of Pāshā Khātūn, the daughter of the Great Amīr the late Amīr Shaikh Sharaf b. the Great Amīr, Amīr Abūbakr b. Amīr ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Rūshakī [who] passed away in the month of Ṣafar, the Year 795 AH.

6 See Beyhan Karamağaralı, *Ahlat Mezartaşları* (Ankara: Güven Matbaası, 1972), 238-242.

7 The dating of the inscription is not fully preserved. Although the dating (79[?]) cannot be fully read, a range can be given roughly between 791/1389 and 799/1397, which is very compatible with the appearance of the name of its constructor, Qāsim b. Ustād ‘Alī, on two other tombstones (dated 1396 and 1412). In Ahlat Meydanlık Cemetery, among five graves referencing Qāsim b. Ustād ‘Alī, as grave artisan, the presence of the Rūshakī patronymic on three of them has attributed to the identification of the founder of the “Rojkan School”. See, Recai Karahan and others, *Ahlat Selçuklu Meydan Mezarlığı ve Mezar Taşları*, 74-78.

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