



**Marlene Kurz.** *Ways to Heaven, Gates to Hell: Fazlizada 'Ali's Struggle with the Diversity of Ottoman Islam.* Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2011. 294 pp. \$34.08, paper, ISBN 978-3-86893-058-0.

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In the year 1740, Marlene Kurz tells us, an obscure Ottoman preacher declared that the end was near. The world was in revolt—crime, disease, and famine stalked the land; stones wept bloody tears; women dominated men; infidels took airs and defecated in the streets. The empire's moral and social fabric had come utterly undone. The man behind these claims, one Fażlızāde 'Alī, called on listeners to heed his warnings and repent before it was too late. And to this end he wrote a huge jeremiad in Turkish denouncing the corruption of his day and urging moral renewal. It is primarily this work that Kurz explores in her book, *Ways to Heaven, Gates to Hell: Fażlızāde 'Alī's Struggle with the Diversity of Ottoman Islam*, a fine contribution to Ottoman intellectual history and to the study of the early modern empire in general.

*Ways to Heaven* reconstructs Fażlızāde's mental universe by treating his work and ideas in proper context. Focusing on issues that mattered most to Fażlızāde, Kurz uses his diatribe, the *Mirror of Hearts and Declarer of Character Traits* (*Āyine el-qulūb ve mübeyyinet el-ahlāq*), "to outline some facets of the more general religious and intellectual life of the Ottoman Empire" between the late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries (p. 15). Her results are as diverse as they are startling. Kurz depicts a rich marketplace of ideas and

activities that Ottomans used to find meaning in the world, ranging from popular ethics, revivalism, and Sufism to alchemy, numerology, and Paracelsian medicine. The fact that Fażlızāde stood against so many of these practices brings them into better contrast, Kurz argues, as does his opposition to contemporary social trends. The empire that Fażlızāde condemned in the early 1700s was more outward-looking, sociable, and materialistic than in earlier times. His calls for reform grew from disillusionment with mainstream Ottoman society, whose growing diversity, openness, and social fluidity seem to have left him an isolated, embittered figure. That his opus survives in only one manuscript in Berlin seems to confirm that his pleas fell on deaf ears. Through this analysis, then, Kurz not only enriches our view of Ottoman intellectual life but also sheds sidelights on an era—the so-called "Tulip Age"—that is still poorly understood.

Kurz devotes each of five chapters to Fażlızāde's "intermingled worlds of meaning" (p. 17). Chapter 1 tackles the preacher himself and tries to relate the *Mirror of Hearts'* apocalyptic themes to social, economic, and cultural changes in the early modern empire. We know little about Fażlızāde 'Alī as a person. He mentions only one teacher—a figure named Qā'imī—and does not seem to have been a religious scholar (*'ālim*) or

Sufi, though he had some training in law, theology, and mysticism. Kurz posits that he was a preacher and non-ecstatic mystic, perhaps a Nakṣbandī. What is clear is that Faḏlīzāde felt the empire had sunk into decadence under the grand vizier (and, he claimed, “Antichrist [*deccāl*]”) Nevşehirli İbrahim Paşa (d. 1730), and that God had sent him to save the Muslim community. His *Mirror of Hearts*, the fruit of this mission, fits in well with earlier Islamic “Portents of the Hour” literature. However, Kurz shows that Faḏlīzāde used stock topoi from this genre as a way to attack his own society. His criticism of rampant “fornication,” for example (pp. 36-45), seems to reflect the growing freedom of movement and visibility of elite women in places like parks, gardens, and picnic grounds—an eighteenth-century sociability that scholars such as Shirine Hamadeh and Dana Sajdi have discussed elsewhere.[1] His warnings about the encroachment of infidels and heretics on Ottoman society speak to a new openness to Europe, it is true, a classic topic of “Tulip Age” historiography, but also to sustained literary and intellectual interest in Persia. Indeed, Faḏlīzāde’s strong distaste for “Shiite philosophy” (which he blamed for much of the empire’s corruption) is a sign that Ottomans of his day were looking to the East just as they were to the West.[2]

In chapters 2 through 5 Kurz uses Faḏlīzāde to explore specific subjects like ethics, Sufism, science, and philosophy, locating his views within a wide spectrum of practice and interpretation. Faḏlīzāde’s cosmology and view of Islam clashed with some of the more eclectic systems then current in the empire, for instance. People’s ideas on the here and hereafter had become hopelessly confused, he said. He disagreed with Birgevi Mehmed (d. 1573) and İsmā’il Haqqı Bursevi (d. 1725) that sinners who died in the faith would be saved—Faḏlīzāde claimed that to sin was to become an infidel and abjure God’s mercy—and he rejected Sufis who denied things like bodily resurrection, the Questioning, and the Balance (pp. 72-78). He also denounced popular angelologies

by the likes of Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240), Rūmī (d. 1273), and Suhrawardī (d. 1191), people who, he said, “mill around and bumptiously speak of angels” (p. 67).

Faḏlīzāde’s main concern in the *Mirror of Hearts* was ethics and the seeking of piety, or *taqvā*, as Kurz points out, and his take on these subjects also differed from peers. Faḏlīzāde drew partly on Quranic categories and partly on the philosophical tradition of Miskawayh (d. 1030) and al-Ṭūsī (d. 1066/67) in his ethics, aiming to subdue the carnal soul and become the acme of human virtue, a so-called Perfect Man (*insān-i kāmīl*). Kurz reveals how this approach related to other forms of moral and spiritual discipline in the empire. Faḏlīzāde was no scholar, for one. Where the famous Birgevi Mehmed had preached a “deontology”—an ethics of duties and rules based on the law—Faḏlīzāde proposed a “transformative virtue ethics.” His system did not aim at obedience alone, but at a wholesale transformation of man’s nature. Yet Faḏlīzāde’s interest in moral purification also parted with Ottomans who defined the “Perfect Man” in gnostic, monist terms as someone who had reached full oneness with God. And he would have excoriated Sufis like Selim Baba (d. 1756), who in the work *The Proof of the Gnostics* (*Burhān al-‘arīfīn*) declared the transformation of character as inferior to the pursuit of divine love and not the true aim of the mystically inclined (pp. 98-102, 156-57).

Some of the book’s more interesting sections come where Kurz shows just how out of touch Faḏlīzāde was with the Ottoman mainstream. For instance, Faḏlīzāde took an extreme, overly broad stance on the concepts of infidelity (*kufṛ*) and sinful innovation (*bid‘at*) (pp. 98-99). He considered works—that is, “performing the acts prescribed by the Sharia” (p. 81)—to be the most important element of faith (*īmān*), if not faith itself, and was perhaps closer in this regard to Shiite and Mu‘tazilite than to Sunni views. Nor did Faḏlīzāde think that God would accept a religious act with-

out an almost paranoid degree of ritual purity; his standards, as Kurz notes, would have meant that “none of the prayers performed in the great Sultan mosques was valid” (p. 86).

Fazlīzāde carried this overdeveloped piety into the realm of nature and science as well, rejecting most ways of dealing with the phenomenal world. Following the Māturīdī school of theology, many Ottomans gave wide scope to human reason (*‘aql*) as a tool to distinguish right from wrong, to discern God’s existence from creation, and to gain knowledge about the world. Kurz, in fact, corroborating European travelers, depicts a bustling intellectual scene in the mid-eighteenth century: Ottomans dabbling in the rational sciences as well as drawing on philosophical systems like those Avicenna, Ibn al-‘Arabī, and Suhrawardī to speculate on causes and patterns in the universe.[3] To Fazlīzāde, however, such efforts were sheer blasphemy. The use of reason for anything more than acknowledging God’s omnipotence was prideful, sinful, and vain—this included fields like medicine, geomancy, astrology, alchemy, and the occult arts (pp. 176-78, 234). Fazlīzāde for the same reason shunned all causal systems and the search for any sort of regularity in the universe. He was so extreme that he even denied the notion of “God’s custom” (*‘ādat Allah*), a widely accepted idea that reconciled an almighty Creator with visible cause and effect, as he felt that it limited God’s omnipotence (pp. 192-94). Fazlīzāde was thus a strict fatalist.

*Ways to Heaven* is an excellent piece of scholarship. Kurz has made creative use of material, not least of which is Fazlīzāde’s 364-folio *Mirror of Hearts*, but also unpublished theological treatises and catechisms in Berlin, Paris, and Vienna and a range of edited texts and secondary sources. The work is not beyond reproach. Kurz might have enlarged her bibliography even more with recourse to Istanbul’s manuscript riches, for example. She might also have made the book slightly easier to access: while Kurz translates from

Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, she leaves the reader to parse French and German block quotations in the original and has completely omitted an index. The work also contains a few errors and awkward phrasings, for example, “Angle of Death” and “heavenlies” (p. 77); “Pharao” (p. 153); “memoires” (p. 198); and “Salomon” (p. 229).

These quibbles aside, however, Kurz’s book deserves to be much better known among Ottoman and Middle East historians as one of the few to tackle the empire’s intellectual scene with a wide lens, to try to assemble parts into a whole. For Fazlīzāde is ultimately a foil: his fruitless rage better helps us to see the impressive scale and variety of early modern Ottoman intellectual life as well as important sociocultural currents in the empire. “No wonder that Fazlīzāde was terrified of the times,” writes Kurz. “Torrents of devilish knowledge were raging around him, relentlessly washing away all that he believed constituted the true Islamic spirit” (p. 247).

#### Notes

[1]. Shirine Hamadeh, *The City’s Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007). Ibn Budayr lamented similar social changes in Damascus; see Dana Sajdi’s *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[2]. See Can Erimtan’s critique of the “Tulip Age” periodization: *Ottomans Looking West? The Origins of the Tulip Age and Its Development in Modern Turkey* (London: IB Tauris, 2008).

[3]. Ethan L. Menchinger, “Free Will, Predestination, and the Fate of the Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77 (2016): 445-66.

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