

Excerpts from the *Velāyetnāme* of Otman Baba

The First Chapter of the *Velāyetnāme* of Otman Baba, the Pole of the Poles (*Der Beyān -i ibtidā'-i kutb'ul-aktāb sultān Otmān Bābā*)

O faithful disciples of *velāyet*, o loving servants of *abdālan*, friends of Truth, following the year 833 AH (1403 CE) a *kutb'ul-aktāb* appeared in the province of Rūm. He proclaimed that he embodied the Prophets Muhammad, Jesus, Moses and Adam. His name was known to be Hüssām Şāh among the friends of God (*evliyāu'llāh*) but people called him Otman Baba. He spoke the Oghuz language. He was broad-shouldered with light-brown eyes, reddish skin, majestic and solid stature. He was dignified in his stance, strong-looking on the outside and infinite on the inside. The mystery [of his being]¹ could not be unraveled. “My secret cannot be grasped even by other masters (*sultān*), so how could you?” he would say to his *abdāls*. “I am the iron pole from the earth to the sky. Only a strong person as magnificent as I am can slice a chip,” he would say. Not a single soul knew, either in this world or in the hidden one, where he had come from and been wandering [C21b]. He would drift from the mountains to the countryside, from rattraps to lodging houses, from ruins to places

1 The word *sirr* can variably be translated as secret, mystery or hidden. Inferred from what is hidden in the interior of our existence, it often refers to the soul.

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Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural is an open access journal published by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH.

Aydoğan, Zeynep. 2021. “Excerpts from the *Velāyetnāme* of Otman Baba”. *Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26225/kvwwg-1587>

of worship. Nobody knew where and in which state he would have been. His outer appearance was extremely wretched and deprived of any sign [of sainthood]. The hadith says: “*evliyā’i tahŕe kabā’i lâ ya’rifehum ğayrî* (‘the *evliyā* are under my dome, nobody knows who they are but me’).” This hadith confirms why he did not manifest any sign [of sainthood].

[C23a] ... The storyteller relates the following: One day the *kān-ı velāyet* (‘mine of sainthood’)² appeared on the shore of the Black Sea. He was noticed by an imperceptive (*bî-basîret*) man who immediately got off his horse. Thinking he is a fugitive the man tied [Otman Baba’s] hands behind his back, wrapped a cord around his neck and brought him to his village. When they entered the village the whole village mobbed around them and asked the man where he had found that madman (*delü*). The man replied that he was not a madman but a fugitive. The *kān-ı velāyet* strikes one among them with his glance. When his gaze [of sainthood] fell upon him this person’s [spiritual] sight became unveiled. He fell at [Otman Baba]’s feet [AG11a], dispersed the crowd and started crying sobbingly. The people who witnessed this incident were struck by oddity and bewilderment (*‘ibrete ve hayrete varurlar*).³

[C23b] ... One day the *kān-ı velāyet* (‘mine of sainthood’) disappeared (from sight, “*ġā’ib olur*”). He reappeared (*zāhir olur*) somewhere called Sa’id Çukürü next to the Mount of Ağrı in the province of Azerbaijan and stayed there for a while. The master at that convent was called Er Hâcî. One day with his perfect humanity he [Otman Baba] told them that he was heading back to Rûm. He mounted a cloud, made a bolt of lightning his whip, and disappeared (*ġayb olur*). He reappeared (*zāhir olur*) on a hill overlooking İstanbul and said: ‘I came to conquer this city and recite the prayer of Muhammed³ in the great churches [of the city]. For forty days the *kān-ı velāyet* (‘mine of sainthood’) stayed on that hill, his face turned towards İslâmbol [C24a]. Near that place there was a man of perception (*basîret sahibi*), a friend of God who was called Şâh Kulı Baba. He was the *ġözcü* of that clime.⁴ He (fore-)saw

2 The term “*kān-ı velāyet*” is predominantly used to refer to Otman Baba.

3 “Bāng-ı Muhammedî” may be related to the concept of *gülbāng*, ‘the song of the nightingale’ in Persian. In Turkish usage, *gülbāng* is applied either to the call for prayer or to the war-cry (*Allāhu Akbar* and *Allāh Allāh*). The term is also used in the Bektashi and Mevlevi rituals. Ed. s.v. “Gülbāng”, *EI*², vol. 2, p. 1135.

4 *Gözcü*, ‘watchman’, is one of the twelve positions in the Alevi *cem* rituals. In the early usage as in here, the beholder of this title is bestowed with the ability to foresee. In the *Velāyet-nâme of Hacı Bektâş*, Karaca Ahmet is referred as the watchman of the *abdâlan* of Rûm. Hamiye Duran, *Hacı Bektâş Velî ve Velāyetnâmesi*, PhD Thesis (Ankara Gazi Üniversitesi, 1995), p. 86.

three men arriving at Rūm. One of them was extremely imposing and sturdy (*be-gāyet heybetlüve salābetlü*), from the *kutbu'l-aktāb* level. When Şāh Kulı Baba turned his gaze towards the direction from where they came, he understood that they all descended from the sky. People who heard all this from that holy man were struck by oddity and bewilderment.

[C24b] ... If they ask: “The phrase *ene'l Hakk* (‘I am God’) is blasphemy. Why did the *kān-ı velāyet* utter such a phrase?” The answer is as follows: Neither on earth or in the heavens, he [Otman Baba] does not see anything else but God. [United] with God he becomes God. There is nothing else but God which is transfigured in his heart. Even if they try to kill him in no way they can. One saintly figure once said: “*leyse fi cübbeti siva'lāh.*” That is to say, God is under my kaftan. The kaftan is not the one worn as an ornament in this world. That kaftan is the one upon which befalls the look of God the Greatest seventy times a day with all His magnificence. Another holy man once said: “*mā fi'l-vücūdu siva'l-lāh.*” That is, the sun of two worlds is inside my existence. With the divine name of God’s Unity (*vahdāniyyet*) Oneness becomes manifest (*zāhir*). Whoever intends to kill those whose heart and soul is with God [C25a] in fact attempt on their own life.

[C78b] ... The Account of the Arrival of Otman Baba to the Balkan Mountain and His Manifestation of Signs [of Sainthood] in the city of Kiligra (*Der beyān-ı kadem nihāden-i ān kān-ı velāyet ber kūh-ı Balğān ve alāmethā zāhir şoden-i der şehr-i kiligra*)

That standard-bearer of sharia, the forerunner of *tarikāt*, the secret commander-in-chief of *ma'rifet*⁵, the mine of sainthood and the point of truth (*hakikat*) [Otman Baba] left the convent of *Mūsā Beg* and set off for the Balkan Mountain with the army of *abdālān*. After reaching the top of the mountain he [Otman Baba] retreated to rest. That night a story occurred to his mind. There is a city called Kiligra on the shore of the Black Sea. Sarı Saltuk had arrived in that city together with Ulu Abdāl and Kiçi Abdāl after having crossed the sea without a vessel, and killed a dragon (*ejderhā*) there with the help of a wooden sword and the power of sainthood. In those times there was a ruler in that country whose name was Dobra Han. He was

5 *Ma'rifet* (or *ma'rifā*), ‘knowledge’, ‘cognition’ came to signify in Islamic mystical thought the cognition of divine nature by means of ‘proving indications’ that constitute the proof of the Creator. *Ma'rifā* is realized only for those who are revealed something of the hidden (*al-ghayb*) and considered to be one of the four stages of the mystical path along with *sharia* (exoteric path), *tarika* (esoteric path) and *hakika* (truth). R. Arnaldez, “ma'rifā,” in *EI*², vol. 6: 568–71; Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000), p. 238.

informed one day that the dragon disappeared from the fortress [C79a] and three people were seen walking around the surroundings of the fortress. The ruler came and saw three people sitting on a mound and holding wooden swords. He asked them who they were, where they came from and how they showed up there. They answered him by saying that they crossed the sea from one side to the other and that they killed the dragon in the fortress. The ruler upon hearing this dispatched a note to the holy monk living in that country and summoned him. He asked the monk what kind of person would be girded with a wooden sword. [AG47a] “This one [Sarı Saltuk] is more exalted and stronger than the other two,” he said. He also said, incorrectly, that these were probably wizards (*cādū*). Following the advice of the monk the ruler ordered that the holy man be tied to a millstone by the neck and dumped at sea. Just then, the chief sultan of sainthood appeared at the shore and came out from the sea. [C79b] In this manner, he thwarted the infidels and those daemons who did not believe in his sainthood, and they all became dizzy and confused (*māt u ser-gerdān eyledi*). The third story was thus where the mine of divine mystery (*kān-ı sırr-ı hikmet*) was released to the sea. In the fourth one, Sarı Saltuk asked the ruler whose advice he had been acting on. Upon hearing that the ruler was following the instructions of a holy man (*evliyā*) in his court he asked the ruler to summon him. He proposed that they both be put inside a boiling cauldron on fire. Dobra Han liked this idea. So they brought a cauldron, filled it with water and put it on a fire. When the water boiled up Sarı Saltuk grabbed the monk by his wrists and plunged into the boiling water like he was diving into the sea. When the ruler and all the people there saw this sign [of miraculous power] (*‘alāmet*) they were struck by oddity and bewilderment and all became dizzy and wonder-struck (*‘ibrete ve hayrete varub ser-mest ü hayrān*). The storyteller related the following. At that moment Hünkār Hācı [C80a] Bektaş Velī (God bless his exalted soul⁶) was sitting by the side of a spring. As he was sprinkling water on a piece of marble the holy men asked him why he was doing so. The pole of the poles (*kutb’ul-aktāb*) told them about Sarı Saltuk and his having been put in a boiling cauldron by the infidels. Thus [AG47b] he was sprinkling water to prevent Sarı Saltuk from passing out. Just as the infidel ruler was waiting in wonder, Sarı Saltuk came out from the cauldron in one stroke. Sound and alive, he looked like the wall of Alexander. When those infidels saw this sign of saintliness (*velāyet*) they fell at the feet of the mine of sainthood. They saw that there was nothing left of their monk’s body and that his bones were boiling up. All of them submitted to the chief of *velāyet* straight away and became his loving servants... [C80b] ... That same night when the *kān-ı velāyet* was at the Balkan Mountain, the relics of Sarı Saltuk which were located in

6 “*kaddesallāhu sırr-e’l-‘alā*” is a prayer phrase specifically used for saintly figures after their passing. Süleyman Uludağ, s.v. “*kaddesallāhu sırrahu*”, *DİA*.

the fortress of Kiligra, his sacred footprints on a stone and the hoof prints of the horse of Prophet Hızır who had come to Sarı Saltuk's aid, flew away to the sea as a sign of sainthood of the *kān-ı velāyet* and his power. The inhabitants of Kiligra upon witnessing (*müşābede ile*) this became extremely scared. Even the fortress trembled by his magnificence. When the people of Kiligra witnessed such holiness they were struck by oddity and bewilderment. "You did not create an earthquake or strike a bolt of lightning, what kind of miracle is this then?" they wondered.

SOURCE: Küçük Abdal, *Otman Baba Velāyetnāmesi*, edited by Filiz Kılıç, Mustafa Arslan and Tuncay Bülbül (Ankara: 2007). The critical edition is based on the manuscripts preserved in the Ankara Cebeci Public Library, MS. 495 (C) and Ankara General Library, MS. 643 (AG).

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