

A Chronogram Dating the Construction of the Mevlevi Lodge in Gelibolu

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Keywords:

Chronogram, Gelibolu, Mevlevi lodge, Ağazade Muhammed Efendi, ‘Ayānī,
17th century

Cite this article:

Kocatürk, Saba Dilşad. “A Chronogram Dating the Construction of the Mevlevi Lodge in Gelibolu” *Keshif: E-Journal for Ottoman-Turkish Micro Editions* 2/1 (Winter 2024): 48-52.

Available under <https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-24-01-07>.

Article DOI [10.25365/kshf-24-01-07](https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-24-01-07)

Published online March 18, 2024

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Context

The chronogram (Tr. *tārīḥ*) examined in this article can be found in a collection of correspondence in the Halet Efendi Collection at the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library under the catalog number 264369.¹ Chronograms are dates hidden within texts based on the numerical values of the Arabic alphabet and are usually penned in the form of couplets. They signify notable events such as an enthronement, the birth or death of an influential person, or the construction of a monument or building.² The chronogram in the above-mentioned document was written by a poet with the pseudonym ‘Ayānī and marked the date of the construction of Gelibolu Mevlevi Lodge by Ağazade Şeyh Muhammed Efendi. Deciphering the last line of the second couplet by adding up the numerical values of the letters reveals the date of 1020 AH (1611-12 AD), and it overlaps with the construction date noted in the document.

Shortly after this chronogram was recorded, the historian Mustafa Safi referred to Gelibolu as “the lock of the Aegean Sea” (*deryā-yı sefīdīñ kilidi*), as the city played a crucial role during the early modern Ottoman period due to its strategic location in the northern entrance to the Dardanelles.³ The founder and head (*postnişin*) of Gelibolu Mevlevi Lodge was Ağazade Şeyh Muhammed Efendi, as stated in the document. According to Esrar Dede’s collection of biographies (*tezkiye*) on Mevlevi poets, Ağazade Muhammed was born in Gelibolu as the son of a janissary agha. In addition to his role at Gelibolu Mevlevi Lodge, he was also the head of Beşiktaş Mevlevi Lodge in Istanbul for a while. The Beşiktaş Mevlevi Lodge in Istanbul was built by Ohrili Hüseyin Pasha.⁴ After the Pasha was executed, Ağazade Muhammed left his post in Beşiktaş and stayed in Gelibolu, where he died in 1063 AH / 1652-1653 AD.⁵ Although the exact date of its

¹ Anonymous *Mecmū ‘a-i Münşe’ât*. Süleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, Halet Efendi Koleksiyonu nr. 264369. vr. 3a.

² Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, “Chronogram, Persian.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Devin J. Stewart, accessed 23.12. 2023.

³ Feridun Emecen, “Gelibolu,” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/gelibolu>, accessed 23.12.2023.

⁴ Esrâr Dede, *Tezkire-i Şu‘arâ-yı Mevleviyye*, ed. İlhan Genç, (Ankara: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2018), 27-28.

⁵ Ş. Barihüda Tanrıkorur, “Gelibolu Mevlevihanesi,” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*,

establishment is unknown, as the foundation certificate-charter (*vaḳfiyye*) has not survived, Tanrıkorur argues that the foundation of the Mevlevihane predated 1621, the date when Ohrili Hüseyin Pasha assumed the position of grand vizier.⁶ His estimate does not contradict the date of 1020 AH / 1611-12 AD given in the chronogram.

In the light of the transcribed document, it can be ascertained that ‘Ayānī, the poet who penned the couplets, was a 17th-century poet who lived during the reign of Sultan Ahmed I. ‘Ayānī may be the same person as Beyānizāde (son of Beyānī) ‘Ayānī, one of the poets of Sultan Ahmed I’s reign, whose ghazals Ahmet Sevgi came across in a miscellany in the Konya Manuscript Library.⁷ The fact that Cārullāhzāde Beyānī was a Halveti sheikh who had spent some time in a convent (*zāviye*) in Gelibolu⁸ and a reference to the city found in Beyānizāde’s ghazals both lend weight to this theory.

Transcription

Tārīḥ-i binā-yı Mevlevihāne-i

Gelibolu be-zāt-ı

Ağazāde Şeyḥ

Meḥemmed Efendi

Devr-i ‘adlinde şeh-i baḥr u berr Aḥmed Ḥāniñ

Sā ‘ī-i ḥayr-ı cemil oldı Meḥemmed Ağa

Söyledi añā ‘Ayānī-yi süḥan-dān tārīḥ

Mevlevihāne-i i ‘lā’ cinān-āsā cā

1020

<https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/gelibolu-mevlevihanesi>, accessed 23.12.2023.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ahmet Sevgi, “Beyānizāde Ayānī’nin Gazelleri,” *Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 34 (2015): 90.

⁸ Mustafa İsen, “Beyani”. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Devin J. Stewart, accessed 24. 12. 2023.

Translation

Chronogram of the construction of
the Gelibolu Mevlevi Lodge by
Ağazade Sheikh
Mehemmed Efendi

In the reign of justice of Ahmed Khan, the sultan of sea and land
Mehemmed Agha was zealous (in his pursuit) for good deeds.

The eloquent ‘Ayānī said its chronogram,
The exalted Mevlevi lodge, a place like the heavens
1020

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