

‘Alī Şīr Nevāyī’s Letter of Recommendation for the émigré poet Başīrī

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Context

This micro-edition article explores one of three letters associated with the émigré poet Başıri (d. 1534–35). The letter presented here is a recommendation letter written by ‘Alī Şir Nevāyī (1441–1501) in support of Başıri, who navigated between the cultural spheres of Herat and Istanbul. By presenting and contextualizing this letter, the study highlights the critical role of correspondence in shaping reputations and facilitating intellectual and cultural mobility.

These letters were appended to the *Menâziru’l-inşâ*’ between folios 149b and 152a.¹ The manuscript is a treatise on “the art of letter writing”, composed in Persian and written in *Nesta’lîk*, cataloged in the Süleymaniye Library’s Fatih Collection (no. 04020).² The manuscript’s metadata in the database attributes the authorship to Maḥmūd b. Muḥammed el-Geylânî al-Hindî (d. 1483) and the scribal (*müstensih*) role to Muḥammed b. Aḥmed. In addition, the information on folio 2a suggests that the work may have been written in the orthography of Mevlânâ Bâsiri: “*Molla Bâsiri ḥaṭṭıyladur.*” Furthermore, a comparative analysis reveals that the handwriting in the three appended letters does not differ from that of the main text. For this reason, the note recorded at the beginning of the text should be regarded as a critical piece of information that warrants careful examination in further studies.

Başıri’s full name is recorded as Meḥmed bin Aḥmed b. Ebu’l-Me’âlî el-Murtaẓâ.³ Although his exact date of birth and birthplace⁴ remain unknown, certain details can be

¹ The remaining letters, along with the letter located in Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Çorlulu Ali Paşa (no. 231484) 14a, and the texts found in 15a, are currently being prepared for publication. These texts provide valuable insights into Bâsiri’s connections with the Herat-Istanbul intellectual and cultural milieu.

² Hâce-i Cihân, Mahmūd b. Muhammed el-Geylânî el-Hindî. *Menâziru’l-İnşâ*. İstanbul: 04020. <https://portal.yek.gov.tr/works/detail/242399>

³ Çavuşoğlu, Meḥmed. “Başıri.” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*. 1992. Accessed 19 December, 2024. <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/basiri>

⁴ Regarding his birthplace, Sehî Beg (d. 1548), in his *tezkire* (biographical dictionary) *Heşt Behişt*, edited by H. İpekten and G. Kut (Ankara, 2017), identified Başıri as originally being from ‘Acem. (152) In contrast, Laṭîfî (d.1582) in the *Tezkiretü’ş-şu’arâ’ ve Tabşiratü’n-nuzamâ* edited by Rıdvan Canım (Ankara, 2000) offered a more specific account in which he stated that Başıri hailed from Baghdad. (148) Differing from both Sehî Beg and Laṭîfî, ‘Aşık Çelebi (d. 1572), in his *Meşâ’irü’ş-şu’arâ’*, edited by Filiz Kılıç (Ankara, 2018), asserted that Başıri was from Khorasan. (180)

gleaned from Sehī Beg's (d.1548) account of his arrival in Istanbul.⁵ According to Sehī Beg, "He was in the service of Uğurluoğlu Mehemmed Emīr. When Uğurluoğlu traveled to 'Acem and assumed rulership there, he sent Başıri to Sultan Bāyezīd as an envoy. Upon his arrival in Rūm, Uğurluoğlu encountered unforeseen circumstances that prevented [Başıri] from returning to 'Acem. Consequently, he settled in Istanbul, where he eventually married."⁶ This passage not only situates Başıri within the broader context of political and cultural exchanges but also provides a glimpse into the factors that influenced his relocation and subsequent integration into Rūmī cultural milieu.

Başıri's patron Aḥmed Göde (d.1497), who was raised in İstanbul, was a member of the Aqqoyunlu dynasty. Aside from Sehī Beg's account, it is also possible that Başıri independently traveled to Istanbul to join Aḥmed Göde's circle, without ever serving in any formal envoy role. Regardless of the specific circumstances surrounding his relocation, Başıri appears to have ultimately settled in Istanbul, particularly after the death of his patron, Uğurluoğlu Aḥmed Göde, in 1497. Following this turning point, Başıri secured the patronage of prominent figures such as Tācīzāde Ca'fer Çelebi (1452-1515), Mü'eyyedzāde 'Abdurrahmān Çelebi (1456-1516), and İskender Çelebi (d.1535). These connections seem to have ensured his continued engagement within Istanbul's vibrant literary and cultural milieu.⁷

Başıri appears to have spent a significant portion of his life in Istanbul, where he cultivated relationships with prominent Rūmī poets and honed his craft in composing poetry in Ottoman-Turkish (*Türki*): Despite his integration into the literary scene of Rūm, Sehī Beg felt the need to justify Başıri's inclusion in his *tezkiye*, framing it as evidence of Başıri's embrace of a Rūmī identity.⁸ Similarly, Laṭīfi (1490/91-1582) remarked

⁵ This study will only examine the *tezkires* of Sehī Beg, Laṭīfi, and Aşık Çelebi. The rationale behind this selection is to limit the analysis to the biographers who were chronologically closest to Bāsirī's lifetime, thereby maintaining historical proximity while preventing an unwarranted expansion of the study's scope.

⁶ "Uğurluoğlu Mehemmed Emīr-zānuñ hizmetinde olurdu. Uğurluoğlu 'Aceme varup pādişāh olduğda merhūm Sultān Bāyezīde elçilik tārīkı ile gönderdi. Bunda Rūma geldükde ol esnāda Uğurluoğlu vākı'aya uğrayup diyār-ı 'Aceme gitmek müyesser olmayup bunda İstanbulda te'ehhül eyleyüp kaldı." (Sehī Beg, ed. H. İpekten and G. Kut, 152).

⁷ Çavuşoğlu "Başiri.", Sohrweide "Dichter und Gelehrte" 282-283.

⁸ Sehī Beg, 152.

on the profound influence the stylistic traditions of *Rūmī* poets had on Baṣīrī, highlighting his exceptional skill in composing and reciting poetry in *Türki*.⁹ In contrast, ‘Āṣiḳ Çelebi (1520-1572) presented Baṣīrī as a respected poet of Herat, emphasizing his prominence by noting that he was esteemed enough to be mentioned in ‘Alī Şīr Nevāyī’s *Mecālisü’n-nefā’is*.¹⁰ In addition to that, before recounting anecdotes from Baṣīrī’s life or providing excerpts from his works, ‘Āṣiḳ Çelebi draws attention to the following depiction: “His charm was at ease among the prosperous, and he was the delight of every banquet, his words mixed together like milk and sweetness. He cursed the affluent yet wore their robes with ease. He masked poison in humor, leading dignitaries to drink it [willingly] while partaking in their feasts.”¹¹ Through this vivid characterization, ‘Āṣiḳ Çelebi implies that the notables of the period played a significant role in supporting Baṣīrī and securing his enduring place within the cultural legacy of *Rūm*.

‘Āṣiḳ Çelebi presents Baṣīrī as a figure deeply connected to the Timurid court of Hüseyin Bayḳarā (1438-1506), where he not only served the court but also interacted with leading cultural and intellectual figures of the period. Among these were the renowned poet and mystic ‘Abdurrahmān Cāmī (1414-1492) and his student, patron, and vizier, ‘Alī Şīr Nevāyī—both of whom were instrumental in shaping the literary and intellectual currents of their era. Notably, ‘Abdurrahmān Cāmī was held in high regard by the Ottoman court. During the reign of Meḫmed II, considerable efforts were made to invite Cāmī to the Ottoman Empire, including the provision of an annual stipend of 1,000 flo-

⁹ Laṭīfī, 148.

¹⁰ This information provided by ‘Āṣiḳ Çelebi, has been refuted both by Hanna Sohrweide and Mehmet Çavuşoğlu. Çavuşoğlu “Basîrî.” Hanna Sohrweide: “Dichter und Gelehrte” 282. The mentioned *tez-kire* belongs to Ḳazvīnī, not to ‘Alī Şīr Nevāyī. The Persian translation of *Mecālisü’n-nefā’is* titled *Terceme-i Mecālisü’n-nefā’is*, completed by Muḫammed b. Mübārek Şāh el-Ḳazvīnī between 1521 and 1523 in Istanbul, was presented to Selim I. In this translation, Ḳazvīnī stated that “Mevlānā Baṣīrī, from ‘Acem, is a famous poet and he is full of the virtues of knowledge and contentment. He is satisfied with the world and he does not go around the houses of the masters of the world.” He will not be a slave to inferior people for the sake of two loaves of bread. Süleymaniye Library, Esad Efendi Collection no. 03877, 179b: مولانا بصیری عجمی شاعری مشهورست و جامع فضیلة علم و قناعتست چه از دنیا بکفافی قناعت کرده و کرد در خانه ارباب دنیا نمیگردد و بجهة دو نان بنده دونان نمیشود و شعر خوب میگوید و این از جمله اشعار اوس I extend my heartfelt gratitude to İbrahim Shafiei for his invaluable assistance.

¹¹ “Aşhāb-ı devlet ile laṭīfesi barışur ve her meclisün nemegi olup sözleri şīr ü şeker gibi çarışurdu. Erbāb-ı devleti çonadur, yine çaftānların giyer ve a’yān-ı cāh u rütbeta laṭīfe yüzinden zehrler içürür, yine ni’metlerin yirdi.” (ed. Filiz Kılıç, 180)

rins.¹² This engagement with the Ottomans gained further significance during the reign of Bāyezīd II, a period coinciding with Başīrī's arrival in Ottoman territories. During this period, Başīrī was portrayed as someone who arrived from Baykarā's court in Herat and facilitated the circulation of Cāmī's poetry. Such a depiction would have undoubtedly contributed to his gaining a prominent position within the literary world and among the *Rūmī* elite.¹³

'Alī Şīr Nevāyī's poetic legacy is of enduring importance, especially the profound impact of his work on *Rūmī* literary traditions.¹⁴ The works of 'Alī Şīr Nevāyī began to gain prominence and circulate more widely during the reign of Bāyezīd II.¹⁵ The two *tezkiye* authors mentioned above seem to portray Başīrī, who was present in Istanbul during a period aligning with the dissemination of the *dīvāns*, as a key figure in initiating and facilitating its circulation. Laṭīfī also mentions that Başīrī carried 'Alī Şīr Nevāyī's letter of recommendation in addition to the works he brought with him. Although the authenticity of this letter cannot be definitively verified, it is evident that both of the *dīvāns* Başīrī brought with him and the letter of recommendation he personally received from 'Alī Şīr Nevāyī held symbolic function: Hüseyn Baykara's court was highly admired and emulated, and it can be inferred that the *dīvāns* and the letter must have played a significant role in his acceptance within the court and literary circles.

It remains unclear whether Başīrī's favor at the Ottoman court arose from his association with Aḥmed Göde, the influence of his recommendation letter from 'Alī Şīr

¹² Hamid Algar. "Jami and Ottomans," d'Hubert, Thibaut, and Alexandre Papas, eds. *Jāmī in Regional Contexts*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 01 Jan. 2018)
doi: <https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1163/9789004386600>: 77.

¹³ *Ibid.* 83-84.

¹⁴ See Köprülü, Mehmet Fuat. "Ali Şīr Nevâî ve Te'sirleri". *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Hakkında Araştırmalar*. İstanbul: Kanaat Kitabevi, 1934: 257-266; Kleinmichel, Sigrid. "Mir Aliser Navâ'î und Ahmed Pasa". *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 17, (1999): 77- 211. Kurnaz, Cemal. "Osmanlı Şairlerinin Nevâyî Referansı". *Türk Dili: Dil ve Edebiyat Dergisi*, Ankara: TDK Yay. Sayı 617, (2003): 509-513; Sertkaya, Osman Fikri. "Osmanlı Şairlerinde Ali Şīr Nevayî Tarzı ve Nevayî'ye Anadolu'da Yazılan Nazireler". *Ali Şīr Nevâyî'nin 560. Doğum, 500. Ölüm Yılı Dönümlerini Anma Toplantısı Bildirileri*. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 2004: 129-140; Çavuşoğlu, Mehmet. "Kanunî Devrinin Sonuna Kadar Anadolu'da Nevâyî Tesiri Üzerine Notlar". *Gazi Türkiyat Dergisi*. Bahar, Sayı: 8, (2011): 23-37.

¹⁵ Eleazar Birnbaum, "The Ottomans and Chagatay Literature ", *Central Asiatic Journal*, C. XX, (1976): 157-190.

Nevāyī, or his pivotal role in introducing the poetry of ‘Abdurrahmān Cāmī and ‘Alī Şīr Nevāyī into *Rūmī* literary circles. What is evident, however, is that Başırī’s presence marked a confluence of Chagatai and ‘*Acemī*’ poetic traditions with the burgeoning *Rūmī* literary culture, shaping its trajectory in subtle but significant ways. His ability to bridge these intellectual and artistic worlds seems to have ensured that his legacy endured, even as the specific dynamics of his rise at court remain obscured by history.

Transcription

Şüret-i nāme-i Nevāyī ki ez haṭṭ-ı şerīfeş naḳl şode

*erbāb-ı başıretğā rūşen ü mübeyyen bolğay kim aşhāb-ı nazmniñ çeşm-i başırı yār-ı enīs
Mevlānā Başırī bu diyārğā kilüb aḳrān u emşāldin münferid bolub maḥlaşı tig fazlı vuzūh
taptı ol ecildin bizğā lāzım boldı kim āḥar fāzilığā bir nāme yibarub Mevlānā-i müşārün-
ileyh nāmığā bir mu ‘ammā ḥāṭırğā ḥuṭūr ḳılğay*

Elā közleri ‘ayn-ı vefā-yı yār

Közümniñ üstiğā baş [sic] kim yeri bar¹⁶

V’allāhu başırun bi- ‘ibādihī¹⁷ ve Hüve’l- ‘alimü’l-ḥabīr bi-l-icābeti cedīr.

keşirü’ t-taḳsīr

‘Alī Şīr

Translation

Copy of Nevāyī’s letter, compiled from his esteemed and noble autograph.

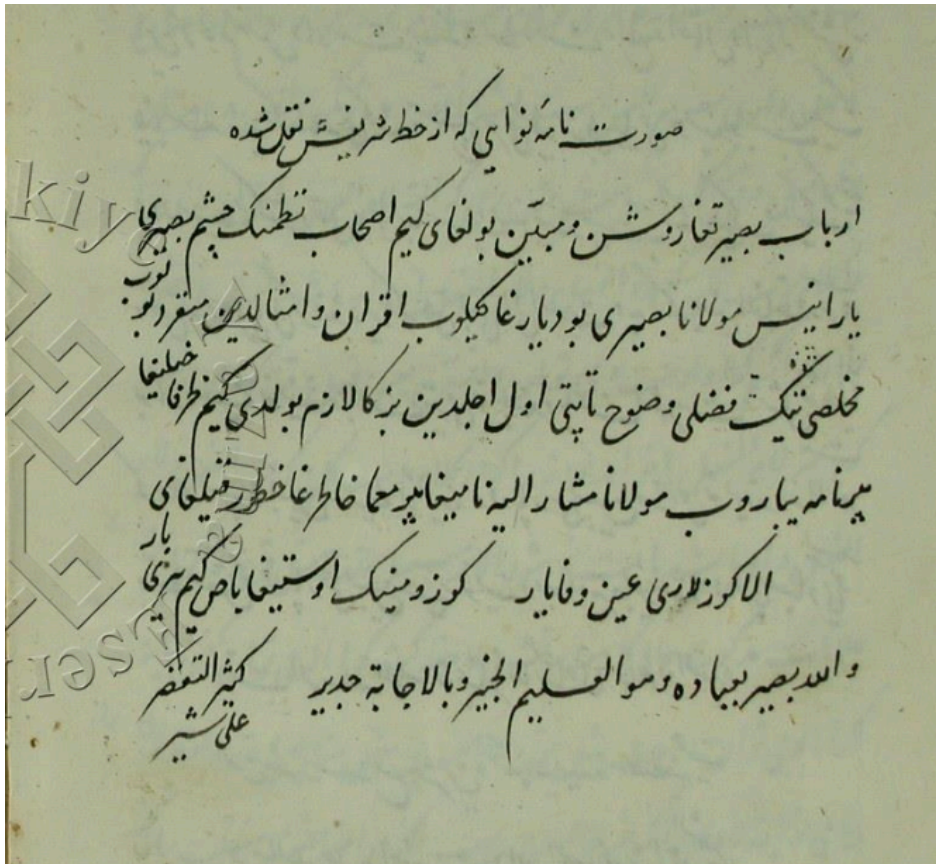
It should be apparent and evident to men of perspicacity that Mevlānā Başırī, the clairvoyant eye of poets and a trusted companion, arrived in this realm and he distinguished himself from his peers and equals, and the virtue of his pen-name became manifest. Thus, it became necessary for us to send a letter to the [an]other esteemed [ones] with a *mu ‘ammā* [riddle] that lingers in the mind for the sake of the aforementioned *Mevlānā*.

¹⁶ This *beyt* (couplet) is composed in the *hezec* meter (*mefāilün mefāilün feülün*). While the second hemistich fully conforms to this meter, the word “vefā” in the first *mısrā’* is considered problematic.

¹⁷ The Quranic Arabic Corpus. "Translation of Quran 3:15." Accessed January 30, 2025. <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=3&verse=15>.

His hazel-eyes are the wellspring of fidelity, the friend,
 He has a well-welcomed place, like my head¹⁸ resting upon my eyes.¹⁹
 And God sees His servants, and He is All-Knowing and Acquainted and His Worthiness
 is the answer.
 'Alī Şīr, the one full of flaws.

Facsimile



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¹⁸ The word "baş" in the text has been interpreted as "baş".

¹⁹ An expression is referenced here: the Turkish version is "başımın üstünde yeri var," while the English equivalent is "the door is always open."

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The Quranic Arabic Corpus. "Translation of Quran 3:15." Accessed January 30, 2025. <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=3&verse=15>.

Süleymaniye Library, Esad Efendi Collection no. 03877