

International Symposium on Molla Fanārī, 4-6 December 2009, organized by the Faculty of Theology, Uludağ University & Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, Bursa-Turkey.

An “International Symposium on Molla Fanārī” was held in Bursa, Turkey on 4-6 December 2009. While Mullā Fanārī (d. 834/1431) was one of the leading thinkers of the early Ottoman period, he has up till now received little attention. Although this may give the impression that he was not so influential a thinker, this is clearly not the case as shown by the various contributions of the present symposium. S. H̄usayn Naşr, an important contemporary scholar of Islamic thought, was impressed by his thought, as M. Kara indicated, while A. Godlas made clear how even today Mullā Fanārī might remain a vivid source of spiritual inspiration.

To understand a thinker, it is important to grasp the historical circumstances in which he lived. Mullā Fanārī lived during the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the only great Islamic state of the period, as M. el-Geadi stressed. Although the Ottoman rulers generally held scholars in high esteem, tensions occasionally arose, as can be seen in the controversy between İwaç Pasha and Mullā Fanārī, a fact highlighted by S. Pay and İ. Oruçođlu. As H. Gülgen explained, the actual existence of the Mullā Fanārī Mosque, founded by the scholar himself, and the inscriptions on the many gravestones permit a more precise and detailed understanding of what was going on in his day. Also noteworthy is the fact that Mullā Fanārī was the founder of an important family, which played an important role for centuries in the area of Bursa. This was dealt with in two contributions by Saraçođlu and S. Maydaer.

In classical times, there was no sharp division between “philosophical” and “scientific” thought. Hence, one may wonder whether Mullā Fanārī has contributed to both fields? T. Görgün insisted that he may perhaps be considered the founder of the “second classical period” of thought in the Islamic world while O. Benaissa qualified his work as the result of the epistemic (in Foucault’s sense) event of the mystical fever of his days.

Hence, the importance of the mystical dimension is no surprise. As T. Yücedođru emphasized, this is already true in the very concept of the universe, which is a sign of Allah while being absolutely separate from Him. As M. Aşkar argued, Mullā Fanārī’s explicit dealing with

and particular understanding of Ibn ‘Arabī’s conception of the “unity of being” and his enduring influence on later Ottoman thought remains of indubitable significance. Despite his pivotal role, however, Mullā Fanārī’s Sufi-identity is far from obvious, a fact rightly noted by A. Tek. S. Çift pointed out that in late Ottoman Sufi-compilations, Mullā Fanārī’s name is sometimes not included, most likely because his mysticism includes a philosophical dimension. Indeed, J. Janssens noted the presence of elements inspired by Avicenna in his theory of emanation but at the same time stressed a major difference between Mullā Fanārī and Ibn Sīnā in its basic understanding.

Nevertheless, Mullā Fanārī was not only a mystic. He was also a great jurist and “theologian” (*mutakallim*). R. Cici offered an encompassing picture of his role as jurist, and O. Ş. Koloğlu discussed his contributions as a theologian. In particular, A. Kozalı showed how Mullā Fanārī, as a member of the Ḥanafī/Māturīdī school, dealt in a balanced way with the problem of divine power (i.e., omnipotence) while U. M. Kılavuz focused on his dealing with the issue of the divine names.

Mullā Fanārī also paid great attention to the study of the Qur’ān. M. Öztürk emphasized the syncretistic character of his Qur’ān exegesis and its combination of philology, law (*fiqh*) and mysticism. M. Çiçek concentrated on the issue of the specific language, structure and revelatory mode of the holy text.

Mullā Fanārī’s interests were not limited to the religious sciences alone. A. Kayacık mentioned his important contributions to logic, and İ. Fazlıoğlu and J. Ragep discussed his influence in mathematics and astronomy, respectively. In all three cases, the contributions of Mullā Fanārī were presented in a broader historical context.

Generally speaking, Mullā Fanārī appears largely as a “commentator”. H. Eichner explored the strategies he uses within this literary genre.

A final question remains: are all works attributed to Mullā Fanārī indeed his? K. Gömbeyaz tried to distinguish between authentic, spurious and wrongly attributed works based largely, although not exclusively, on manuscript evidence.

From this brief survey, the historical importance of Mullā Fanārī as a great thinker –in the broad sense of the term– is obvious. We hope

that the various contributions will give rise to a wide variety of further studies evaluating in a much more precise way his real significance in each of the domains mentioned above. Overall, the Bursa symposium delivered a major contribution to the study of Mullā Fanārī's multifaceted thought.

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