

SYNOPSIS OF SELECTED SUFI WORKS WRITTEN DURING THE TIMURID PERIOD

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Abstract

This article examines selected Sufi works composed during the Timurid period and analyzes their significance as primary sources for the study of the religious, intellectual, and cultural history of Central Asia. Particular attention is devoted to hagiographical, biographical, and doctrinal works associated with the Khwajagan Naqshbandiyya tradition, including Maqamat Baha al Din Naqshband, Risalai Unsiyya, Risalai Qudsiyya, Anis al Talibin, Maqamat Sayyid Amir Kulal, Nafahat al Uns, Rashahat Ayn al Hayat, Takmilat al Nafahat, and Majalis al Ushshaq. The article highlights the contribution of prominent Sufi scholars and shaykhs such as Baha al Din Naqshband, Khoja Muhammad Parsa, Yaqub Charkhi, Ubayd Allah Ahrar, Abd al Rahman Jami, Ali Safi, and Abd al Ghafur al Lari to the preservation and transmission of Sufi teachings. It further demonstrates that these works provide valuable information on the spiritual life, social history, intellectual traditions, and moral values of Transoxiana during the Timurid era. The study concludes that Timurid Sufi literature constitutes an indispensable source for understanding the development of Islamic spirituality and the formation of religious and cultural identity in Central Asia.

Keywords: Timurid period, Sufism, Khwajagan Naqshbandiyya, Central Asia, Baha al Din Naqshband, Khoja Muhammad Parsa, Abd al Rahman Jami, Rashahat Ayn al Hayat, Nafahat al Uns, Sufi literature, hagiography, Islamic spirituality, manuscript heritage, intellectual history.

Introduction

In addition to historical chronicles, the period of Amir Timur and the Timurids witnessed the composition of treatises elucidating Sufi teachings as well as hagiographical works describing the activities of Sufi masters. Such sources provide valuable insights into the spiritual and intellectual life of the era. One of these works is Maqamat Baha al Din Naqshband by Abu al Muhsin Muhammad Baqir, which contains information on the life, miracles, and contemporaries of the founder of the Naqshbandi order¹.

The activities of Baha al Din Naqshband were also documented by his khalifah Mawlana Yaqub Charkhi (1359–1447) in his treatise Risalai Unsiyya (Treatise on Friendship). According to the author, through his conversations with Baha al Din Naqshband he received instruction concerning the spiritual lineage and fundamental principles of the Naqshbandi order. The treatise describes the educational methods of Khoja Baha al Din

¹ Abu al Muhsin Muhammad Baqir. Maqamat Baha al Din Naqshband. Edited by M. Hasani. Tashkent, 2019.



and the spiritual tasks he assigned to his disciples. It also presents accounts of his life, virtues, teachings, and reforms within the path of spiritual wayfaring.

This treatise is also known as *Silsilai Naqshbandiyya* and contains the spiritual chain of transmission extending from Baha al Din Naqshband through Abd al Khaliq Ghijduwani and ultimately to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Yaqub Charkhi also included a number of his master's counsels and admonitions².

Another khalifah of Baha al Din Naqshband, Khoja Muhammad Parsa (1349–1420), compiled his master's wise sayings and teachings in the work *Risalai Qudsiyya*. Parsa's *Maqamat Shaykh Ala al Din Attar* is likewise an important source, containing valuable information regarding Ala al Din Attar (d. 1400), one of the foremost successors of Baha al Din Naqshband³.

Another significant source for the history of Sufism during the Timurid period is *Anis al Talibin* (The Companion of the Seekers), written by Salah ibn Mubarak al Bukhari (late fourteenth–early fifteenth century), a contemporary of Muhammad Parsa. The author states that he relied upon such sources as *Nawadir al Usul* and *Sharh al Bidaya* in composing the work.

Anis al Talibin contains information concerning the life and Sufi activities of Baha al Din Naqshband, his conversations with various Sufi masters and shaykhs, his miracles, and the final period of his life. The work also records historical events, including the invasion of the Bukhara region by a large army from Dasht i Qipchaq, as well as detailed accounts of Baha al Din Naqshband's second pilgrimage to Mecca. The author emphasizes that much of the information was transmitted to him by Khoja Ala al Din Attar.

The activities of Khoja Ala al Din Attar are further described in the treatise *Manaqib wa Shamail Hazrat Khoja Ala al Din Attar*, written by another contemporary of Parsa, Abu al Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Masud al Bukhari (fifteenth century). The author notes that the information contained in this work was derived from the treatise of Khoja Muhammad Parsa. Among other matters, the treatise describes Khoja Ala al Din Attar's journey from Chaghaniyan to Bukhara in 795/1393 and his death in Chaghaniyan in 802/1400⁴.

Another important Sufi work produced during this period is *Maqamat Sayyid Amir Kulal*. Its author was Shihab al Din ibn Bint Amir Hamza ibn Amir Kulal (fifteenth century). Shihab al Din, the grandson of Amir Hamza through his daughter, provides information about the life of his illustrious ancestor Sayyid Amir Kulal. In doing so, he also records historical events that took place in Transoxiana during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and offers valuable information concerning the spiritual life of the region.

The work contains accounts of the early life of Sayyid Amir Kulal, his discipleship under Muhammad Baba al Sammasi, his later acceptance of Jalal al Din Kashi as a disciple, and his meeting with Amir Timur, during which he prayed for Timur's future greatness and success.

The author also includes narratives concerning the lives of Sayyid Amir Kulal's sons—Amir Burhan, Amir Hamza, and Amir Umar—as well as one of his daughters. Shihab al Din further explains his own connection to the Khwajagan Naqshbandiyya spiritual lineage through his

² Manuscript copies of *Risalai Unsiyya* are preserved in the Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies under catalogue numbers 5825/6, 500/1, 505/2, 517/2, and 3410/3.

³ The scholarly legacy of Khoja Muhammad Parsa will be discussed separately in a subsequent section.

⁴ manuscript copy of this treatise is preserved in the Manuscript Collection of the Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies under catalogue number 11399/III.



grandfather Amir Hamza. The work also contains a detailed account of Baha al Din Naqshband's initiation as a disciple of Sayyid Amir Kulal⁵.

The history of Sufism in Transoxiana during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was likewise documented by the shaykhs of the Khwajagan Naqshbandiyya order in their own writings. Among the most notable examples are the following treatises authored by Khoja Ubayd Allah Ahrar Wali (1404–1490):

- 1) Faqarat al Arifin (also known as Faqarat Hazrat Haqiqat al Haqaiq Khoja Ahrar)⁶.
- 2) Risalai Hawraiyya⁷.
- 3) Risalai Walidiyya⁸.

In these treatises, Khoja Ubayd Allah Ahrar presents the fundamental principles of Sufism, particularly those of the Khwajagan Naqshbandiyya tradition. He emphasizes the requirements of the spiritual path, noting that a disciple should faithfully observe its teachings while also engaging in a lawful profession sufficient to provide for daily needs. He further stresses the importance of moderation in food and drink and the necessity of maintaining constant remembrance of God through dhikr.

These treatises thus provide a clear exposition of the essential doctrines and practices of Sufism, especially those associated with the Khwajagan Naqshbandiyya order.

Among the works devoted to the history of Sufism, the lives of Sufi masters, and the activities of Sufi communities during the Timurid period, one of the most important is Nafahat al Uns min Hazarat al Quds⁹, authored by the renowned literary figure and Naqshbandi shaykh Abd al Rahman Jami (1414–1492).

The work contains brief biographical accounts and selected sayings of renowned Sufi figures, including Dhu al Nun al Misri, Maruf al Karkhi, Ibrahim ibn Ahmad, Sultan Bayazid al Bistami, Husayn ibn Mansur al Hallaj, Shaykh Abu al Hasan al Kharraqani, Khoja Abd Allah Ansari, Khoja Yusuf Hamadani, Ibrahim ibn Shammās al Samarqandi, Shaiq al Balkhi, Muhammad ibn Ali al Hakim al Tirmidhi, Abu Bakr al Warraq al Tirmidhi, Abu al Qasim al Hakim al Samarqandi, Abu Dharr al Tirmidhi, Ghaylan al Samarqandi, Muhammad ibn Hamid al Tirmidhi, Abu Jafar al Farghani, Abu Bakr al Shibli, Ibrahim al Marghinani, Abu al Muzaffar al Tirmidhi, Abu al Husayn al Marwarudi, and many others.

A shortened and supplemented Turkic adaptation of Nafahat al Uns, entitled Nasayim al Muhabbat min Shamayim al Futuwat¹⁰, was composed by the great poet Alisher Navai. In this work, additional information is provided concerning several shaykhs of the Khwajagan

⁵ Several manuscript copies of this work are preserved in the collection of the Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies under catalogue numbers 91, 96, 97, 400/III, 7560, and others.

⁶ Multiple manuscript copies of Faqarat al Arifin are preserved in the same institute under catalogue numbers 507/2, 503/8, 2967/2, 84/5, and others.

⁷ Several manuscript copies of Risalai Hawraiyya are also housed in the collection of the Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies (507/I, 1883/II, 890/V, 516/II). The oldest manuscript, catalogue number 507/I, dates approximately to the fifteenth century and is therefore close to the author's own lifetime, while the remaining copies were transcribed during the nineteenth century.

⁸ Several manuscript copies of Risalai Walidiyya are likewise preserved in the institute's collection (507/III, 516/I, 8237/III). The oldest surviving manuscript, catalogue number 507/III, dates approximately to the fifteenth century, the period of the author's life, and consists of fourteen folios.

⁹ The Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies also preserves dozens of manuscript copies of Nafahat al Uns, including catalogue numbers 1331/2, 2136, 1976, 2996, 1755, 633, 11054, and many others.

¹⁰ Several manuscript copies of this work are preserved in the collection of the Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies under catalogue numbers 5420, 1828, 3415, and 857. The oldest surviving manuscript dates from the eighteenth century.



Naqshbandiyya tradition. In particular, it contains accounts of the lives and spiritual contributions of the Central Asian Turkic masters Khoja Ahmad Yasavi, Hakim Ata, Ismail Ata, Ishaq Ata, Khoja Bayazid, Khoja Khalil, and Qorqut Ata.

Scholars interested in the history of Central Asian Sufism and the Timurid period are well aware that one of the principal sources concerning the lives and activities of Naqshbandi shaykhs is *Rashahat Ayn al Hayat* (Drops from the Fountain of Life), authored by Ali Safi ibn Husayn Waiz Kashifi (d. 939/1532)¹¹.

Since Ali al Safi was himself a disciple of the celebrated Naqshbandi master Khoja Ahrar, he devoted considerable attention to his spiritual guide's life, as well as to his social, political, and Sufi activities. Much of the information contained in the work was collected through the author's direct participation in the gatherings and conversations of his master.

In addition, *Rashahat Ayn al Hayat* provides valuable information on the principal figures who played a decisive role in the establishment and dissemination of the Naqshbandi order. Following Khoja Baha al Din Naqshband, the work discusses such prominent figures as Khoja Muhammad Parsa, Mawlana Muhammad Faghnavi, Mawlana Yaqub Charkhi, Khoja Ala al Din Ghijduwani, Shaykh Siraj al Din Kulal, Khoja Ala al Din Attar, Mawlana Hisam al Din Parsa Balkhi, Sayyid Sharif Jurjani, Mawlana Nizam al Din Khamush, Mawlana Sad al Din Kashghari, Mawlana Nur al Din Abd al Rahman Jami, and Hazrat Khoja Ahrar Wali, all of whom were among the most influential Sufi masters of the Timurid era¹².

Following the composition of *Rashahat Ayn al Hayat*, additional works devoted to the history of Sufism during the Timurid period continued to be produced. These sources are particularly valuable because they preserve original information concerning the activities of Naqshbandi shaykhs of the subsequent generations.

One such work is *Takmilat al Nafahat* (Supplement to *Nafahat al Uns*), also known as *Hashiya bar Nafahat al Uns*, authored by Abd al Ghafur al Lari (d. 912/1506), a distinguished disciple of Abd al Rahman Jami¹³.

In *Takmilat al Nafahat*, al Lari provides explanations of difficult passages found in Jami's *Nafahat al Uns*. The work also contains information regarding Sufi masters who were not included in Jami's original compilation, as well as accounts of events that occurred during the final years of Jami's life.

In addition, Abd al Ghafur al Lari composed *Maqamat Abd al Rahman Jami* (also known as *Manaqib Abd al Rahman Jami*), in which he presents Jami as a spiritual master of the Sufi path. The work records Jami's spiritual lineage through Sad al Din Kashghari and traces its connection through Nizam al Din Khamush and Khoja Ala al Din Attar to Khoja Baha al Din Naqshband. The treatise also includes selected counsels and sayings of the aforementioned shaykhs.

¹¹ Additional manuscript copies of *Rashahat Ayn al Hayat* are preserved in the same collection under catalogue numbers 1788, 2155/II, 1908, 100, and others.

¹² Fakhr al Din Ali Safi. *Rashahat Ayn al Hayat*. Translated by Domla Khudaybergan ibn Bekmuhammad. Edited by Mahmud Hasani and Bahridin Umurzaq. Tashkent: Abu Ali ibn Sino Publishing House, 2004, pp. 85–265.

¹³ The Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies also preserves several manuscript copies of this work under catalogue numbers 1874, 2305/II, and 756.



Another source containing accounts of the teachings and exemplary lives of the Sufi masters of the Timurid era is *Majalis al Ushshaq* (Assemblies of the Lovers), written by Sultan Husayn Mirza in 908–909/1503–1504. Through a series of narratives and anecdotes, the author seeks to elucidate the nature of divine love and the essential principles of Sufism.¹⁴

As is evident, the sources relating to the history of Sufism during the Timurid period, many of which were written directly by prominent Sufi scholars and masters, constitute invaluable materials for the study of the spiritual and cultural history of the peoples of Central Asia. Sufi scholars, particularly the shaykhs of the Naqshbandi order, not only served as practical models of virtuous conduct and moral excellence but also devoted themselves to educating younger generations through personal example and spiritual guidance. At the same time, they produced significant scholarly works that articulated the theoretical foundations of spirituality and ethical refinement.

These valuable sources continue to serve as important materials for the study of the history of Uzbekistan and Central Asia. Furthermore, they provide an intellectual and moral foundation for fostering spiritual maturity, ethical consciousness, and cultural awareness among contemporary generations.

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¹⁴ Furthermore, additional manuscript copies are held in the Institute's collection under catalogue numbers 3476, 65, 1361, 4366, and 3476.



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