JEFF EDEN (TRANSL. AND ANNOT.)

THE LIFE OF MUḤAMMAD SHARĪF

A CENTRAL ASIAN SUFI HAGIOGRAPHY IN CHAGHATAY
WITH AN APPENDIX BY RIAN THUM AND DAVID BROPHY

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INTRODUCTION

The *taẕkira* of Muḥammad Sharīf, composed in Chaghatay, exists in at least sixteen manuscript copies held in collections around the world. It is one of the most widely-circulated—and perhaps one of the best-known— Chaghatay texts from East Turkistan, and it is the focus of ongoing debates among scholars of Islamic Central Asia. It is, moreover, a lively and appealing narrative, full of memorable episodes and vivid details. Its translation into English is long overdue—a trait it shares with most key sources from the corpus of Chaghatay literature.[1]

Other than this *taẕkira* of unknown authorship, very little has come down to us about Khwāja Muḥammad Sharīf. Although he is presented in the text as the Ṣūfī master (*pīr*) of ʿAbd al-Rashīd Khān,[2] the Central Asian ruler to whom the *Tārīkh-i Rashīdi* is dedicated, there is no mention of Muḥammad Sharīf in any source from his lifetime (the 16th century) of which I am aware. He is mentioned in a 17th-century chronicle by Shāh Maḥmūd Churās, however (as is his successor, Muḥammad Valī Ṣūfī), as well as in the 18th-century *Tārīkh-i Kāshghar*.[3] There is also a versified elaboration of the present *taẕkira*, composed by the poet Ẕalīlī in the first half of the 18th

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[1] The *taẕkira* has previously been translated into Japanese by Hamada Masami (*Hagiographies du Turkestan Oriental: Textes čaġatay édités, traduits en japonais et annotés avec une introduction analytique et historique* [Kyoto: Kyoto University, 2006.]; I am grateful to David Brophy for providing me with a copy of this work); and it has been translated into Russian by V.P. Iudin ("Anonimnoe tiurkoiazychnoe sochinenie vtoroi poloviny XVI v. iz Vostochnogo Turkestana 'Tazkira-ii Khodzha Mukhammad Sharif" (Istoriko-istochnikovedcheskoe vvedenie, perevod, kommentarii)" in *Voprosy istorii i kul'tury uigurov* [Alma-ata: Nauka, 1987]: 4–40; see also Iudin's partial translation and a brief description of the rest of the narrative in *Materialy po istorii kazakhskikh khanstv XV-XVIII vekov (izvlecheniia iz persidskikh i tiurkskikh sochinenii)* [Alma-Ata, 1969], 232–36;533–35).

[2] Ruler of Kashghar from 1533–1560. The year of his death is uncertain, as a range of dates are offered across various sources (the earliest being 967/1559–1560 and the latest being 978/1570–71); cf. Iudin, "Anonimnoe tiurkoiazychnoe sochinenie," 5n1. On the basis of the chronology offered in the present *taẕkira*, ʿAbd al-Rashīd could not have died as early as 967/1559–1560 because he would have predeceased Muḥammad Sharīf, whose tomb he is said to have visited for the remaining years of his life.

[3] See the appendix to the present volume.

century.[4] Finally, one may visit Muḥammad Sharīf's shrine in Yarkand, a description and analysis of which is included in the appendix to this volume.[5] At the present time, these sources constitute the full extent of known materials concerning Muḥammad Sharīf himself.

There is, moreover, little evidence linking the initial composition of Muḥammad Sharīf's *taẕkira* to the 16th century. Our information about the original 16th-century shrine community comes entirely from the *taẕkira* itself, and none of this information has yet been corroborated by any other contemporary source.[6] In this light, it is certainly more illuminating and

[4] The date 1742 is cited by Abliz Orxun and Sugawara Jun (eds., *Mazar Documents from Xinjiang and Ferghana*, vol. 2 [Tokyo: Research Institute for the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2007; Studia Culturae Islamicae No. 87], 16). Ẕalīlī's text has been published in modern Uyghur transcription: *Zälili Divani*, ed. Imin Tursun (Beijing: Millätlär Näshriyati, 1985), 478–555. The introduction to this edition gives two possible dates for the work: 1155/1742–43 and 1157/1744–45 (ibid, 2). An edition of Ẕalīlī's work has apparently also been published in Japanese (with facsimile) by Hamada Masami, but I have been unable to obtain a copy of it: "Hoja Muhanmado Sharifu geika go-ichidaiki (Taẕkira-yi Hazrat-i Khwaja Muhammad Sharif-i Buzurgwar)," *Kagaku-kenkyu-hi kenkyu (kiban-kenkyu [B]) seika hokokusho* 1 (2001): 269–283, with Arabic script facsimile on pp. 1–20 (cf. Thierry Zarcone, "Le culte de saints au Xinjiang de 1949 à nos jours," *Journal of the History of Sufism* 3 [2001]: 134). Other copies of this work apparently include at least one manuscript in the Jarring Collection in Sweden (MS Jarring Prov. 76; cf. Thum, "The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History," 54n71) and one manuscript held by the Bodleian Library, titled the *Manāqib-i Khwāja Muḥammad Sharīf* and dated to 1165/1751–52 (cf. Günay Kut, *Supplementary Catalogue of Turkish Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library with Reprint of 1930 Catalogue by H. Ethé* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 79–80: MS Ind. Inst. Turk. 13/2, ff. 113b-147b). I believe that this last item is very likely to be a copy of Ẕalīlī's work, as some of the concluding couplets quoted in the catalogue are identical to those which appear at the conclusion of the published edition of the poet's text: compare the lines from f. 147b offered in Kut, 80, with *Zälili Divani*, 546.

[5] Cf. also Rahilä Dawut, *Uyghur Mazarliri* (Ürümchi: Shinjang Khälq Näshriyati, 2001), 81–83; Alexandre Papas, *Mystiques et vagabonds en islam: portraits de trois soufis qalandar* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 152–53.

[6] Along these lines, Devin DeWeese observes that the text "bears few marks of having been compiled in the context of, or even with cognizance of, a functioning, ongoing Sufi community linked initiatically with the sixteenth-century saint… [T]he communal venue in which the work was most likely circulated and transmitted should be sought in the shrine's 'constituency,' comprising those who supported, visited, and profited from the shrine (that constituency may also have included, and may in fact have constituted, familiar groups claiming natural descent from Muḥammad Sharīf" ("The 'Competitors' of Isḥāq Khwāja in Eastern Turkistan: Hagiographies, Shrines, and Sufi Affiliations in the

probably more appropriate to align the text with the era for which we have substantial evidence of renewed interest in the shrine, namely the 18th century, during which time—as the appendix to this volume shows—the shrine was renovated, patronized, and clearly held a significant place in the sacred landscape for local rulers. The contents of the text translated here, in other words, may well date to the 18th century, and I see no reason at present to rule out the possibility that the suriving prose versions are in fact based on Ẕalīlī's 18th-century versification of the narrative, though an older "original," perhaps in Persian, may still come to light. In any case it seems most profitable, as Devin DeWeese suggests, to read the *taẕkira* as a source confirming and lending prestige to "privileges and benefits associated with the shrine establishments and the constituencies they served," while extending the range of these constituencies to include also those members of the political elite in a position to bestow or take away such privileges.[7] In this effort, the work of David Brophy and Rian Thum in the appendix to this volume is a crucial accompaniment to the *taẕkira* itself, showing us something of the liaison between the Muḥammad Sharīf shrine complex, local power networks in the 18th century, and the present hagiography which served to apportion and validate religious prestige. These 18th–century developments had a lasting impact: the *taẕkira* continued to be recopied and circulated for the next two hundred years, and the shrine of Muḥammad Sharīf remains a place of pilgrimage for Muslims today.

While a definitive dating of the Muḥammad Sharīf *taẕkira* must await further evidence, the text offers us, at least, a clear identification of its subject's death-date, as well as many allusions to events that occurred in the 16th century, providing some historical context for the events of the narrative. Most copies report that Muḥammad Sharīf died in 973/1565–66, and that he was 95 years old at the time of his death, though this age-of-death is most likely a formula of the genre. So, while we cannot confidently pinpoint the year of Muḥammad Sharīf's birth, we can assume he was born in the late-15th or early-16th century, and his birthplace is identified in the *taẕkira* as Sayrām.

Late Sixteenth Century," in *Horizons of the World: Festschrift for İsenbike Togan / Hudûdü'l-Âlem: İsenbike Togan'a Armağan,* ed. İlker Evrim Binbaş and Nurten Kılıç-Schubel [Istanbul: İthaki Yayınları, 2011], 156–57).

[7] Ibid, 157. I am grateful to Florian Schwarz for his observations and suggestions on these points and on the dating of the *taẕkira*.

Known in many medieval sources as Isfijāb, Sayrām has a long and prestigious history in the annals of Central Asian Sufism. The town was a frontier outpost in the Sāmānid era, playing host to military fortifications (*ribāṭ*) which probably served as points of departure for campaigns against neighboring non-Muslims.[8] We can thus perceive an affinity between the town's historical role on the frontiers of the medieval Islamic world and its attribution as a place of prominence in the biographies of numerous "Islamizing" Ṣūfī saints. By the 16th century, Sayrām had been associated with figures like Isḥāq Bāb and Isma'īl Atā, and some sources claimed it as the birthplace of Khwāja Aḥmad Yasavī.[9] Sayrām likewise appears in some sources as the birthplace of Khiżr, a point worth bearing in mind, as this figure is identified at least once in Muḥammad Sharīf's *taẕkira*, and may be evoked (albeit in nameless guise) on two other occasions as well.

Nearly the entirety of the *taẕkira*'s narrative takes place beyond Sayrām, however. Muḥammad Sharīf travels from Sayrām to Samarqand, and from there to Kashghar. He then ventures from Kashghar to Hindustan en route to Mecca. Thereafter he travels from Mecca back to East Turkistan (again via Hindustan), and visits a number of towns and villages there. He finally settles in the vicinity of Yarkand, where he lives out the rest of his days. Each of these different locales appears as a setting for a distinctive episode in the narrative, and each of these episodes demonstrate an instance of Muḥammad Sharīf working a miracle or performing a meritorious act. Most often these miracles involve his communicating with the spirits of saints, some of whom he "discovers" in their hidden places of interment, thereby occasioning the construction of shrines in their honor. Rian Thum has noted that the discovery of such sacred places is a recurring theme in East Turkistani hagiographical literature, and he elegantly describes how these hidden saints, eternally present and eternally powerful, may be seen as analogues to the Prophet Muḥammad, who is often depicted in Ṣūfī literature as having these same traits.[10] We might add that the land's "hidden" Islamic sacrality also has

[8] Cf. Devin DeWeese, "Sacred History for a Central Asian Town: Saints, Shrines, and Legends of Origin in Histories of Sayrām, eighteenth-nineteenth Centuries," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditeranée* 89–90 (2000), 245–295. On *ribāṭ* and frontier warfare in the Sāmānid period more generally, see Jürgen Paul, "The State and the Military: The Samanid Case," *Papers on Inner Asia* No. 26 (Bloomington: Indiana University, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1994).

[9] DeWeese, *op cit*.

[10] Thum, "The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History," 166–71.

interesting implications if we read it as a narrative comment on the region's historical "Islamization": the motif suggests that even at the frontier regions of the Islamic world, sacred ground was right beneath the Muslims' feet all along, and that a given region may well have an "Islamic history" even if that history was not immediately evident; the *terra sacra* needed only to be uncovered by a divinely-gifted individual. Many of the present text's episodes demonstrate Muḥammad Sharīf's ability to find holy terrain that had been hidden in plain sight.

The motif of grave-discovery (a phenomenon termed "*kashf al-qubūr"* in broader Ṣūfī tradition) is prominent also in at least one other Yarkand-centered *taẕkira*, the widely-disseminated hagiography of the "Seven Muḥammads,"[11] in which a Ṣūfī master gains supernatural knowledge of the Yarkand burial site of the seven eponymous saints, who had formerly been summoned from heaven by the Prophet Muḥammad himself, healing his daughter Fāṭima in Medina and later traversing the globe in search of a suitable resting-place. As with most of the motifs employed in the Muḥammad Sharīf *taẕkira*, however, the theme of *kashf al-qubūr* is not limited to East Turkistani literature; Hamada Masami has provided an important overview of this motif, ranging from East Turkistan to the Middle East.[12] The ability to accomplish a miraculous communication with buried saints is widely presented in Ṣūfī narrative tradition as the mark of a saint's advanced spiritual development, and his ability to ascertain the qualities of the dead naturally hint at a parallel sensitivity to the traits and needs of living disciples—a hallmark of aptitude as a Ṣūfī master.[13]

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[11] Cf., for example, MS Jarring Prov. 13, ff. 1a-10a; MS Jarring Prov. 414, 18b-35a. Ẕalīlī composed a versification of this *taẕkira* too: cf. *Mazar Documents from Xinjiang and Ferghana*, vol. 2, ff. 80b-90b.

[12] Hamada Masami, "Le pouvoir des lieux saints dans le Turkestan oriental," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales* 59 (2004), 1019–1040; cf. his comments on the present *taẕkira*: 1028–1031.

[13] I am grateful to Florian Schwarz for offering these observations. Cf. also Fritz Meier, *Zwei Abhandlungen über die Naqšbandiyya* (Stuttgart: In Kommission bei F. Steiner, 1994), 257–59; and Schwarz, *"Unser Weg schliesst tausend Wege ein": Derwische und Gesellschaft im islamischen Mittelasien im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2000), 142–43. Here, Schwarz discusses the story of a West Turkistani *pīr* who—as the tale is told in a 16th-century Kubravī hagiography—demonstrates his supernatural abilities by proving that he can recognize which graves held the bodies of Uzbek amirs' ancestors and relatives: he walks from grave to grave, identifying each as a particular relation, and when he completes this task the amirs in question all become his followers. As in the

Segues between the *taẕkira*'s motifs and episodes sometimes appear hasty, but they are never entirely lacking, and thus the text appears quite coherent and continuous.[14] The episodes are roughly divided between two overarching narrative halves. In the first half, we see Muḥammad Sharīf traveling independently and developing knowledge both exoteric (formal training in the *maktab* and *madrasa*) and esoteric (communication with the spirits of saints, especially Satuq Bughrā Khān). In the second half, we see Muḥammad Sharīf acting in association with ʿAbd al-Rashīd Khān, often in the development of Islamic institutions. He engages in construction projects and establishes *awqāf* in collaboration with this ruler, and he also joins him in waging war against the Qirghiz. As a lone *qalandar* in the first half of the text, Muḥammad Sharīf accomplishes several miracles and intercessions, but it is only in conjunction with the Khān that he is able to lay pious groundwork of a more permanent sort. In this way the text seems to encourage a certain perception of sovereignty: we are given to understand that it is a ruler's patronage which "grounds" the spiritual master and ensures that divine gifts become embedded in lasting foundations. Thus, ʿAbd al-Rashīd harnesses the powers of the globe-trotting Muḥammad Sharīf in concrete institutions for the benefit of a specific population (namely, this ruler's own subjects). By the same token, the text emphasizes the means by which a shrewd and pious ruler can benefit—both in worldly and otherworldly terms—by associating himself with the likes of Muḥammad Sharīf.

Beyond his alliance with the Khān, scholars have long debated whether Muḥammad Sharīf can be associated with any specific organization or Ṣūfī order. It has been common for historians to associate the saint with an "Uvaysī" order, a point which will be discussed in the appendix to this vol-

Muḥammad Sharīf text, we find the *kashf al-qubūr* motif serving here as the occasion for communal bonds to be asserted or re-apportioned in light of a Ṣūfī master's "reading" the sacred space beneath his feet.

[14] We may contrast this with the great number of hagiographical texts from the same era which appear to be compendia of more-or-less unconnected tales, united only by their common subject (the saint in question) and often separated into distinct chapters by the word "*naql,*" *"ḥikāyat"* or "*al-qiṣṣa*" (sometimes "highlighted" in red ink). In fact, one of the manuscripts of the Muḥammad Sharīf *taẕkira* (MS Jarring Prov. 73) deploys the "floating" word "*ḥikāyat"* as a means of offsetting a few of the text's tales, but all of the other copies I have seen omit this.