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SUFIS AND THE STATE IN MEDIEVAL PERSIA

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Sufism is part of the common heritage of Islam. Its manifestations and popularity have been diverse and varied in different regions and at different times. In the following pages I shall be concerned with the role of the Sufis in society, their relations with the state and their contribution to the theory of government in medieval Persia. My perspective is a limited one and I shall not discuss Sufism as a religious movement. I shall be concerned primarily with those Sufis who combined a tradition of learning and law and theology with Sufi wisdom, rather than with the Sufi orders or with popular Sufism. Clearly, however, the various forms of Sufism cannot be kept in isolation from each other. In a sense the Sufis were able to take a more pragmatic view of government than were the *'ulama'* and the *fukaha'*, who were bound by the *usul al-fikh* and limited by the doctrine of the state based on the supposed practice of the early Islamic community.

The Sufi attitude to the state was more pragmatical than both the Sunni attitude, which is based on authority and the sources of authority, and the Shi'i, which is based on the role of the Hidden Imam. The Sufis, in a sense, stood aside from the state. Their role in society, however, was complex and varied. They straddled many strands of society, urban, rural, and tribal, the notables, the *a'yan*, and the common people, the *'awamm*, official Islam and popular Islam.

Already prior to the Saljuq period Sufism had become more closely associated with the religious institution than heretofore.[1] But it was al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), himself a disciple of al-Muhasibi, al-Makki, al-Djunayd and a long line of Sufis of past centuries, who made mysticism acceptable to 'official' Islam and broke down the prejudices of an exclusively juridical Islam.[2] Al-Ghazali had an immense influence on Muslims generally, Sunnis and Shi'is, and is generally looked upon by both not only as a jurist and theologian but also as a Sufi. His views on government were based on a pragmatic approach and their formation was influenced by his

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[1] G. Makdisi, 'The Sunni revival', in D.S. Richards (ed.), *Islamic civilisation 950-1150*, Bruno Cassirer, Oxford, 1973, 155-168.

[2] G.C. Anawati, 'Philosophy, theology and mysticism' in J. Schacht with C.E. Bosworth (eds), *The legacy of Islam*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1974, 372-4.

Sufism as well as his traditionalism.[3]

They were much quoted by later writers. The *Ihya'al-'ulum* and the *Kimya-yi sa'adat*, written for the edification of the general public in whatever occupation they might be engaged, both belong to the period after al-Ghazali's conversion to Sufism. An essentially pragmatic approach is also to be seen in his Persian letters, collected posthumously by an unnamed pupil and relative, in a work entitled *Fada'il al-anam*.[4]

Al-Ghazali was born in 450/1058 at Tus near Nishapur, which was at that time one of the great cities of the eastern Islamic world and the home of a number of prominent religious teachers and writers and also of poets and statesmen. He is a figure of great complexity, a divided and ambivalent character. He lived at a time when the divine law provided society with an intellectual framework and when it was widely believed that the fundamental purpose of government was the establishment of conditions in which Islam could prosper and Islamic life continue. This was the ideal by which men lived, even though it was frequently denied in practice. It was an age of faith; and even if there was little evidence of solidarity in society at large, there was a general acceptance of the Islamic religion and ethic. At the same time caliphal government was no longer a reality. The caliph still held authority, but power was in the hands of the Great Saljuqs. By their exercise of coercive force, they provided a measure of stability but the balance between order and disorder, security and insecurity, was a delicate one; and towards the end of his life al-Ghazali complains frequently in his works of the oppression and tyranny of Turkish government.[5] But this was not the only threat to security. Islam was also threatened by sectarian divisions, factional strife, heretical doctrines and pagan philosophy, and by the rise of the Batinis. This is the background against which al-Ghazali's works must be assessed. It was largely to counter these various threats that his efforts were directed.

Al-Ghazali's Sufism never led him to deny the fundamental importance of the *shari'a*. By his emphasis on the law, he avoided the tendency to pantheism to which Sufism leads without the control of the law. By refusing to deny historical fact and

[3] See further A.K.S. Lambton, *State and government in medieval Islam*, London Oriental series, volume 36, Oxford University Press, 1981, 108-129. See also I.M. Lapidus, *A history of Islamic societies*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 182.

[4] See G.M. Wickens, 'The Persian letters attributed to al-Ghazali', *Islamic Quarterly*, III (1956), 109-116, for an account of the contents of the *Fada'il al-anam*.

[5] See Lambton, 'The theory of kingship in the *Nasihat al-muluk* of Ghazali', *Islamic Quarterly*, I (1954), 53, also in eadem, *Theory and practice in medieval Persian government*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1980. On the authorship of the *Nasihat al-muluk* see P. Crone, 'Did al-Ghazali write a mirror for princes?' *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, X (1987) 167-91, and J. Sadan, in M.J. Kister and S. Pines (eds), *Studia Orientalia Memoriae F.H. Baneth dedicata*, Jerusalem, 1979, 263-4 (note 30).

the reality of the material world, he also avoided the conflict inherent in the thought of those who looked for fulfilment in messianism or millenarianism. In this respect his thought is distinguished from both Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism and extreme Shi'ism (*ghuluww*). He was deeply disturbed by the contrast between the ideal of divine justice which was to be represented on earth by the Islamic community, and historical reality. He was also greatly troubled by fear of public disorder and anarchy. This led him to seek means to keep worldly authority within the ideal community. He believed that co-operation with the government was the way to maximise the application of the law; and he recognised the necessity for the exercise of coercive power by the ruler if anarchy was to be prevented. He understood that in the realm of human affairs God governs by human instruments; and he probably recognised more clearly than many Muslim thinkers that the relation of these instruments to God and to one another and to the rest of mankind constituted one of the greatest problems which faced them.

Al-Ghazali's Persian letters belong to the latter period of his life, i.e. after his conversion to Sufism. He knew that if the theory of rule did not issue in the performance of its practical duties it would have no real value and so his letters which have survived are mainly to men of state and prominent *fukaha'*, upon whom public welfare largely depended. There is a strong eschatological emphasis in his letters, as there is in his writings in general, but this is coupled with an insistence upon the need for man to fulfil his duties in that state of life to which he was called, whether he was a Sufi, an *'alim*, a student, a temporal ruler or a man charged with public office, an artisan or a merchant. This differentiates his thought from that type of Sufism which advocates withdrawal from the world and from Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism which regarded all government as usurped pending the return of the Hidden Imam, both of which reduced, or negated, the significance of the action of men in the world.

The Sufis in the line of al-Ghazali who wrote on the theory and practice of government were mostly jurists as well as Sufis. I have chosen as examples three writers from the centuries immediately succeeding al-Ghazali: Nadjm al-Din Razi, who wrote in the early 7th/13th century, Shams al-Din Ibrahim Abarkuhi, who wrote in the early 8th/14th century and Kamal al-Din Husayn Khwarazmi, who wrote in the early 9th/15th century. Like al-Ghazali, they were all torn between the need for personal stability and the desire for social equilibrium and order in the midst of tyranny and lawlessness. If there was self-containment in Sufism on a personal level, they realised that the focus of political stability must be an authority exercising control over the body of which it was the head. They believed that only political and social hierarchies could unify the disparate members of society and bridle force and cruelty; and such protests as they made implicitly or explicitly against the ungodly exercise of authority were not seen on the level of a conflict between spiritual and

secular powers. They examined government within the total concept of creation; and their attitude to it was influenced by instinctive assumptions based on the ideal of an integrated society. In this they were not, perhaps, very different from others of the *'ulama'*, whether Sunnis or Shi'is, who wrote on government and kingship.

All three wrote in times of greater or lesser political instability. When Nadjm al-Din Razi, a Kubrawi Sufi, was living, the *dar al-islam* was under the threat of invasion by the Mongols. In 618/1221 he fled from Hamadan and eventually came to Malatiya. For a time he was in the service of Kay Kubad in Kaysari. Shams al-Din Abarkuhi, who held the office of *muhtasib* (market inspector) in Abarkuh during the reign of Öljeitü, abandoned his office in 711/1311-12 and came to Shustar where he became a Sufi. Khwarazmi, a disciple of Khwadja Abu'l-Wafa (d. 835/1131-2), was born between 770/1368-9 and 780/1378-9 and spent most of his life in Khwarazm. He carried out various missions to the *umara'* and surrounding princes on behalf of Shah Malik, his patron. Shah Malik's son and successor did not show devotion to Khwarazmi as had his father, and Khwarazmi was tried for heresy in Harat but cleared himself.[6] He was a Shi'i and his work has a rather different emphasis from that of the other two writers.

Nadjm al-Din Razi was the most influential of the three and is widely quoted with or without attribution by later writers, including Khwarazmi. I have written about him elsewhere. Suffice it to say that his approach to goverment was pragmatic, like that of al-Ghazali. At times his exposition reads like a protest against the abuses of governments of the day.[7] The purpose of kingship was the establishment of conditions in which religion might prosper but Nadjm al-Din recognised that in order to prevent weakness which led to disorder which in turn led to injustice, the king must rule. Ideally the greatest good was achieved when the kingship of faith and of the world were united in one person. He refused to recognise the tyrannical rulers as the Shadow of God.[8] His exposition of the importance of the wazirate is also informed by a recognition of the practical needs of the administration of the king-

[6] *Yanbu' al-asrar fi nasa'ih al-abrar*, ed. Mihdi Darakhshan, Tehran, AHS 1360/1986-7, xxvii. On Khwarazmi's works see also Muhammad Taki Danishpazhuh, 'An annotated bibliography on government and statecraft', tr. and adapted by Andrew Newman, in Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and political culture in Shi'ism*, State University of New York, 1988, 219-220.

[7] Lambton, 'Justice in the medieval Persian theory of kingship', *Studia Islamica*, XVII (1962), 110-15, also in eadem, *Theory and practice in medieval Persian government*.

[8] *Mirsad al-'ibad, min al-mabda' ila'l-ma'ad*, ed. Husayn al-Husayni al-Ni'matallahi, Tehran, AHS 1312/1933, 244.

dom; and he emphasizes the need for full consultation between the ruler and the *wazir*.[9]

Shams al-Din Ibrahim Abarkuhi, who composed the *Madjma' al-Bahrayn* between 711/1311-12 and 714/1314-15[10] is, in a way, the most original of the three writers I have selected. The *Madjma' al-Bahrayn* is about Sufism and the Sufi Path, but in the first part of the book the author uses the institutions of kingship to illustrate Sufi ideas. There are, however, many explicit and implicit references to worldly government. As a *muhtasib* Abarkuhi had had experience of public affairs. At the time when he was writing abuses in government were rife, office was insecure and many officials were corrupt. He states that the desire for worldly kingship was the cause of strife and sedition.[11] Perhaps he felt that the only safe way to express his views on government was to do so in an oblique manner. Perhaps, too, he felt that it was the role of the Sufi to help men to see and hear the images that the world gave, if they had eyes to see and ears to hear. However, at the same time he states that the Sufi *khalifa* was not to reveal himself or communicate the truth to the uninitiated.[12]

He takes the view that the Perfect Man was the *khalifa* of God[13] and also that the sultan was the Shadow of God.[14] He has a good deal to say of the traditional qualities demanded of the *khalifa* in the world,[15] of kings, sultans, wazirs,[16] *kadis*, tax collectors,[17] the desirability of proper accounting in revenue matters and the army.[18] He lays great emphasis on the need for justice, but points out that this was not to be expected in the absence of the imam and his *wali 'ahd* (successor).[19] When a right order existed between the king, the army and the subjects such that the king was a righteous ruler (*farmandih-i 'adil*), the army submissive and the people obedient, it could be said that justice prevailed in the kingdom, because justice consisted in keeping things in their proper place.[20] The stability of the kingdom

[9] See further Lambton, 'Personal service and the element of concession in the theory of the vizierate in medieval Persia', in C.E. Bosworth, Charles Issawi, Roger Savory and A.E. Udovitch (eds), *The Islamic world: classical to modern times*, the Darwin Press Inc., Princeton, 1989, 183-5.

[10] Ed. Ma'il Harawi, Tehran, AHS 1364/1984-5. See also Muhammad Danishpazhuh, op.cit., 219.

[11] *Madjma' al-bahrayn*, 76.

[12] Ibid., 95.

[13] Ibid., 32.

[14] Ibid., 113.

[15] Ibid., 66-76.

[16] Ibid., 116-120.

[17] Ibid., 182-4.

[18] Ibid., 197.

[19] Ibid., 39.

[20] Ibid., 74.

depended upon justice and justice upon good administration (*siyasat*)[21] and good administration on wisdom (*hikmat*).[22] Abarkuhi demands justice not mercy of the king.[23] The wellbeing or otherwise of the subjects depended upon him to whom God had entrusted the caliphate. If the *khalifa* was righteous, the subjects would be so also; and if he was evil, they, too, would be evil.[24] In an oblique reference to *mukta's* (those to whom assignments of land or revenue had been made), he states that they must not misappropriate what did not belong to them, and that the man responsible for each village ought to pay its *kharaj* (tax) in full and at the proper time.[25]

Realising the need for coercive force, Abarkuhi states that the army was the basis on which the kingdom and kingship rested.[26] Troops must be sent under an *amir* to each of the four frontiers to defend the kingdom so that the inhabitants of the kingdom might dwell in security.[27] He also has something to say on the conduct of war, and states that those who were distinguished by bravery on the battle field must be rewarded.[28] The *khalifa* must consider it incumbent upon himself to protect himself in the best possible way on the day of battle and must not lead in person, because in the event of defeat, the dignity of kingship would depart.[29]

Abarkuhi was familiar with the *Akhlak-i Nasiri* of Nasir al-Din Tusi, whom he quotes on several occasions. His discussion of the need for co-operation and the division of labour and of equality as being necessary for justice and the good order of the world is reminiscent of Tusi.[30] Abarkuhi uses several rather unusual and vivid similes. After stating that the subjects were a trust from God, he describes a king who protected the nobles (*ashraf*) and the strong and who considered contemptible the common people and the weak to be like a gardner who gave water to a tree which had plenty of water and left a tree which needed water without any. But is was perhaps wishful thinking that made him say that the kingdom of a king who did not treat the subjects well would be disturbed. The king, he wrote, was like a great river and his officials like the canals leading off from it. If the river water was

[21] The term *siyasat* also means punishment.
[22] *Madjma' al-bahrayn*, 95.
[23] Ibid., 102.
[24] Ibid., 56.
[25] Ibid., 57.
[26] Ibid., 197.
[27] Ibid., 198.
[28] Ibid., 99.
[29] Ibid., 203.
[30] Ibid., 86.

sweet, the canal would also be sweet, but if it was not the canal water would not be sweet.[31]

Khwarazmi, like many writers before him, regards kingship as the deputyship and viceregency of God[32] and the most perfect means for the worship of God and for approach to him.[33] His exposition of kingship is shot through with an eschatological emphasis and his language is often ambiguous and capable of interpretation in a Sufi sense as well as in terms of everyday life. He repeats the traditional view that the subjects are a trust from God and that the king's duty is to spread justice and equity, to restrain the unjust (*zalimun*) and the corrupt (*fasikun*), to strenghten the weak and to correct the strong, and to hold the *'ulama'* in respect.[34] He gives a slightly different twist to the old adage 'religion and kingship are twins', stating that 'justice and kingship are twins'.[35]

The relations of the king towards the subjects are seen almost entirely in terms of morality - though the king is warned not to allow evil persons to infiltrate his entourage. If they did, they would interfere in the affairs of the kingdom, introduce innovations and illegal customs, and increase ordinary and extraordinary taxes (*ikhradjat wa kharadjha wa kismat wa tawzi'at wa tamgha wa badjha*) and misappropriate *awkaf* and *sadakat*. The result would be to give the ruler a bad name in religion and in the world. There was also a practical reason for avoiding such conduct: rumours of his tyranny and weakness would spread to outlying parts of the world[36] and presumably provoke attack by enemies. Khwarazmi goes on to point out that it was necessary for the ruler, once he had performed the obligatory duties of religion, to consider the affairs (*masalih*) of the kingdom and to be accessible to the subjects, exert himself in upholding Islam and in preserving the rights of the Muslims, and so act that the rebellious would be deterred from embarking on opposition for fear of retribution.[37]

The second *makala* of Khwarazmi's work starts with a discussion on loyalty. He seems to interpret this primarily in terms of loyalty to the Sufi way, but he also demands loyalty to temporal rulers. Breaking one's undertaking (*nakd-i 'ahd*) and disloyalty (*bi-wafa'i*) were displeasing to God and man.[38] In this section Khwarazmi relates that his patron Shah Malik sent him on a mission to the rulers of the step-

[31] Ibid., 101-2.
[32] *Yanbu' al-asrar fi nasa'ih al-abrar*, 115,117.
[33] Ibid., 115-16.
[34] Ibid., 116.
[35] Ibid., 118.
[36] Ibid., 119.
[37] Ibid., 121.
[38] Ibid., 226.

pes.[39] Khwarazmi is unequivocal on the duty of obedience to royal commands. He writes, "Know that obedience to the royal command and the following of and submission to the royal order is the key that opens the gates of happiness," and he goes on to state explicitly that "obedience to the command of the king is tantamount to obedience to the command of God and his chosen prophet."[40] Arguing that obedience to the three precepts, "Obey God, obey the Prophet and obey those in authority among you," could not be separated, he states that men of perspicacity (*ashabi-i basirat*) saw in this verse proofs of the glory of the dignity of kings and reason to honour the greatness of those exercising rule on earth. But he qualifies this by stating that those who held worldly kingship must not consider themselves to have been exalted to the ranks of those who held true kingship.[41] Stating that "the *imam* or ruler (*hakim-i ahkam*) is a shield for the people as he wages war on the enemies of religion and protects the frontiers (*thughur*) of the Muslims,"[42] he makes it clear that he is referring to kingship in the world. He then makes an unequivocal statement that "No one should rebel against the king and the ruler (*hakim*), whether he is tyrannical (*khwah djabir wa djafi bashad*) or not,"[43] and he supports this by reference to traditions. The sultan was, he writes, the Shadow of God in the sense that sultans are the manifestation (outward signs) of the qualities of the true king. Therefore, since opposition to the command of God resulted in damage in this world and the next, similarly opposition to the command of a visible king (*padishah-i suri*) was the height of stupidity (*ghabawat*) and wretchedness (*shaqawat*).[44]

Like many other writers, al-Khwarazmi states that it was the duty of the ruler to keep the people in their proper places and not to appoint to office those who were base, tyrannical, corrupt, calumniators, or sycophants (though in view of his theory of government it is likely that the ruler would in fact be surrounded by sycophants). Similarly, the qualities he demands for the *wazir* are in line with those demanded by other writers. He was to be learned, just, good tempered, possessed of discrimination, well-informed, experienced, of good judgement, pious and of good religion, and compassionate.[45] The function of the *wazir* was to inform the king of the conditions of all the people, so that the king would ensure that the righteous were preferred over the corrupt and what was saleable over what was in little demand.[46] As a result the different ranks of the people, which were the outward signs of their

[39] Ibid., 225.
[40] Ibid., 235.
[41] Ibid., 236.
[42] Ibid., 238.
[43] Ibid., 239.
[44] Ibid., 239.
[45] Ibid., 276.
[46] Ibid., 279. This appears to be the meaning of the phrase, *ra'idj az kasid mumtaz gardad*.

various qualities, would be clearly apparent. Thus the king would fulfil the Quranic command, "Cause the people to be put in their proper places," and the *sadat* and *'ulama'* would be held in respect and honour.[47]

Discussing the relationship of the ruler to the rest of the population, Khwarazmi shows that he was not oblivious of practical affairs. He recognises the importance of the peasants (*muzari'an wa dahakin*) for the prosperity of the world and the provision of food and of craftsmen and tradesmen for the carrying out of those tasks which the people could not perform themselves. The former group were to be protected from oppression and heavy burdens were not to be placed on the latter. He also recognises that the kingdom could not be preserved without an army and that the labours of the peasants provided for its upkeep. The king was to reward the military according to their service and to treat them kindly so that they would become his sincere servitors, and prevent disputes and rivalries arising among them such as gave rise to great confusion from which enemies benefited, as had been the case in former times. The employees of the *diwan* were to hold ready the wages of the military and to pay them in full at the proper time.[48]

To what extent the great Sufi masters influenced the conduct of the state by holding up the ideal of righteous government is difficult to assess. It was perhaps the spread of Sufism among the public which above all forced the government to take notice of the Sufis. In Khurasan from the 3rd/9th to the 6th/12th century there was a rapid growth of "mystical" Sufism. Hudjwiri in the 5th/11th century states that he met 300 *shaykhs* in Khurasan alone.[49] This was before Sufism was institutionalized into *tarikas*. The great *shaykhs* were *foci* of devotion and enthusiasm for large bands of disciples, who dwelt in the shade of the *baraka* of the great *shaykhs*. In contradistinction to the *'ulama'*, some of whom carried out official functions for the government and were therefore subject to some measure of governmental restraint, or at least influence, the Sufi *shaykhs* and their followers could not be easily controlled and were seen by the official classes as a potential threat to public order and the *status quo*. It was, perhaps, partly for this reason, as well as to curb the emotional excesses of the more extreme, that al-Ghazali was concerned to bring Sufism within the orbit of orthodox religion.

[47] Ibid., 279,281.
[48] Ibid., 282-3.
[49] Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: their empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran 994:1040*, Edinburgh at the University Press, 1963, 189.

Abu Sa'id b. Abi'l-Khayr is a crucial figure in the development of Sufism in Eastern Persia; and his disciples spread his influence to other parts of Persia also.[50] He was born in 357/967 in Mayhana and died there in 440/1049. His father belonged to a small Sufi group in Mayhana and Abu Sa'id was introduced to Sufism in childhood. His early years were spent studying *fikh* under different masters, mainly in Marv and Sarakhs. He was a Shafi'i and an Ash'ari. While in Sarakhs he entered a *khanakah* and studied Sufism there. Later he also studied in Amul and elsewhere. He regarded Hallaj and Abu Yazid Bastami with special veneration. Finally, after years of study, he returned to Mayhana and passed the rest of his life, apart from a few short journeys, between Mayhana and Nishapur, where in either case he had a *khanakah*. During these years he had a wide circle of acquaintances among the great *'ulama'* and *shaykhs* of the day. He was a man of great learning and spirituality and counted many distinguished *'ulama'* among his pupils and disciples.

Nishapur was at that time one of the great cities of the Islamic world. The notables, the *a'yan*, of Nishapur were prosperous. In religion they were orthodox and supported the political and social *status quo*. According to the *Asrar al-tawhid*, the biography of Abu Sa'id, written by his great-great-grandson Muhammad b. Munawwar, the spiritual gifts of Abu Sa'id drew many followers to his side, from among the *'ulama'*, officials, city notables, merchants, shopkeepers, tradesmen and master craftsmen. Many of the *a'yan* were, however, suspicious of his power and leadership and especially of his appeal to the common people. That his presence in Nishapur aroused fear of social disturbances is explicitly voiced in the *Asrar al-tawhid*. There was also criticism of his Sufi practices by some of the *'ulama'* and some Sufis, notably Abu'l-Kasim Kushayri, who were dubious about his use of music at his *dhikrs* and *madjalis-i sama'* and the practice of dancing to induce ecstasy. Two of his strongest opponents, the Hanafi *kadi* Sa'id and the Karrami leader Abu Bakr Ishak, sent a written indictment of Abu Sa'id to Sultan Mahmud in Ghazna, alleging that public security was threatened, that the majority of the common people had joined Abu Sa'id and that there was a danger of sedition. The sultan replied that the Hanafi and Shafi'i *'ulama'* should investigate the case against him and that whatever penalty was demanded by the *shari'a* should be inflicted upon

[50] For a full account of the life of Abu Sa'id b. Abi'l-Khayr see Muhammad Rida Shafi' Kadkani's introduction to his edition of Muhammad b. Munawwar, *Asrar al-tawhid fi maqamat Shaykh Abi Sa'id*, 2 vols. with introduction and notes, Tehran, AHS 1366/1986 and also his introduction to his edition of *Halat wa sukhanan-i Abu Sa'id Abu'l Khayr* by Djamal al-Din Abu Rawh, who was also a great-great grandson of Abu Sa'id, Tehran AHS 1366/1986, and F. Meier, *Abu Sa'id-i Abu l-Hayr (357-440/967-1049): Wirklichkeit und Legende, Acta Iranica Textes et memoires*, vol.iv, Tehran, Leiden, 1976. See also Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: their empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran 944:1040*, 189-94, and idem, 'An early Sufi shaykh: Abu Sa'id of Mayhaneh', in R.M. Savory and D.A. Agius (eds), *Logos Islamikos Studia Islamica in honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens*, 1984.

him. His opponents decided to hang him, but nothing came of this and according to the account of the *Asrar al-tawhid* the *shaykh's* supernatural powers won over his enemies.[51] Whatever the truth of Muhammad b. Munawwar's account, it suggests that religious conflicts played an important part in local life and that local tensions tended to be manifested as religious conflicts. Also, that Abu Sa'id had assembled a considerable body of followers.

We do not know a great deal about the details of the conversion of the inhabitants of the Central Asian steppes to Islam, but it is probable that Sufis and holy men played a part in this - though not as much as was originally supposed.[52] Muhammad b. Munawwar relates various anecdotes of Abu Sa'id's relations with the Saljuq leaders Toghril Beg and Chaghri Beg and the former's half-brother Inal and also with Toghril's *wazir* Abu Mansur Warakani. According to one of these stories Toghril Beg and Chaghri Beg came to Mayhana after they had taken possession of part of Khurasan, but before the battle of Dandankan, and asked Abu Sa'id's blessing. He is alleged to have told the former that the divine will had given him rule over 'Irak and the latter that he would rule Khurasan.[53] Perhaps nothing more is to be read into these stories than that they are legends which, faithful followers had accumulated around their *shaykh*. But their purpose may also have been to show that the *shaykh's baraka* was operative in the course of history.[54] It is very likely that the Saljuq leaders did in fact venerate Sufi *shaykhs*, visit them and look to them for a share in their *baraka*, while Sufi *shaykhs* themselves intervened from time to time in public affairs in the interests of themselves or their followers and sometimes they acted as mediators, as did the anchorite Ahu-push between Sanjar and Atsiz in 543/1148 at the request of the latter.[55]

[51] Muhammad b. Munawar, *Asrar al-tawhid fi maqamat Shaykh Abi Sa'id*, i, 68-73. The exercise of supernatural powers by a *shaykh* to achieve his ends, thus demonstrating that he did not need human support, is an important feature of hagiographical literature.

[52] Professor Madelung questions the claims of Bartold and Pritsak on this ('The spread of Maturidism and the Turks,' in *Actas IV Congresso de Estudos Arabes e Islamicos, Coimbra-Lisboa 1 a 8 Setembro de 1968*, Leiden 1971, 119, 32n.).

[53] Muhammad b. Munawwar, *Asrar al-tawhid*, i. 156. There are stories of a somewhat similar kind concerning Sanjar's alleged relations with Sufis (Lambton, *Continuity and change in medieval Persia: aspects of administrative, economic and social history, 11th-14th century*, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, number 2, the Persian Heritage Foundation under the imprint of Bibliotheca Persica, 1988, 240), and in later times of Timur's alleged visit to Khwadja 'Ali Safawi and Khwadja Ahrar's relations with the Timurid Abu Sa'id (Meier, *Abu Sa'id-i Abu l'Hayr*, 327).

[54] On *baraka* see J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi orders in Islam*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1971, index.

[55] W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol invasion*, 3rd. ed. with an additional chapter translated by Mrs. T. Minorsky and ed. C.E. Bosworth and with further addenda and corrigenda by C.E. Bosworth, London, 1968, 328.

In any case, many of the Sufi leaders had a wide following among the people and for this reason, if no other, the ruling class could not ignore them. It patronized them and built *ribats* for them. The *ribats*, later more generally known as *khanakahs*, served as residences for the *shaykhs* and their disciples and as centres of instruction and also as hospices for travelling Sufis and others who would join in the fellowship meal of the darvishes. In some cases the *khanakahs* would be attached to a mosque and a *madrasa*, forming part of a large complex; others were centred round a particular *shaykh*. When the *shaykh* died he would be buried at the *khanakah* and his disciples would hold assemblies round his tomb.

In the course of the 6th/12th century numerous orders were founded. There was much diversity among them. Some drew adherents in the towns and remained in contact with the *madrasas*. Others which spread in rural districts were more subject to local influences,[56] though the distinction between town and country at this time was not clearly drawn: the towns and cities were closely related to their hinterlands. The *khanakahs* meanwhile became linked to the orders. Some were under a *shaykh*. Others were less formally organised. The *khanakahs* also served as places of retreat and refreshment for the *'ulama'* and others and as hospices for travellers.[57] Their influence thus extended beyond the immediate circle of the orders to which they belonged. At any one time the temporary residents might outnumber the permanent residents.

While the relationship of the state with the *'ulama'* tended to be one of interdependence, their relationship with the Sufis, in spite of the work of al-Ghazali, was ambivalent. This was partly because governments tended to be, at least in theory, "orthodox" and to be supported by the "orthodox" *'ulama'*, who were often suspicious of, and even outraged by, some of the practices of the Sufis. Another factor which possibly militated against close relations between the government and the Sufi orders was the fact that the orders spread among the common people and the tribes, neither of whom were considered by the government to be of primary importance. However, there were exceptions, especially in the case of dynasties which rose to power on tribal support. Some orders co-operated with governments. Others tended to opposition; and yet others were apolitical. Some rulers patronized Sufi *shaykhs* - sometimes no doubt out of genuine belief and religious zeal, but also in order to acquire legitimacy for their rule and support from the following which Sufi *shaykhs* had among the common people. At the same time, the power of the Sufi *shaykhs* depended to some extent upon worldly success and an ability to manipulate daily

[56] Anawati, op.cit., 379.

[57] See further Trimingham, op.cit., 166-93 on the organization of the orders.

affairs.[58] Thus each needed the other and so their relationship was delicately balanced. Many *shaykhs* disposed of considerable funds and revenues from properties donated to them by their followers and by rulers. This contributed to their independence.

The late 6th/12th and early 7th/13th century was a period of increased Sufi activity and spiritual vitality both among Sufi mystics and Sufi orders. The changing position of the religious institution under the Khwarazmshahs may have had something to do with this. In any case it was the period of the great mystics, Farid al-Din 'Attar and Nadjm al-Din Kubra, both of whom died about 618/1221, the latter allegedly during the sack of Khwarazm by the Mongols, Shaykh Ruzbihan (d. 606/1209-10), Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234-5) and others. The main Sufi order of the period was the *Kubrawiyya*, founded by Nadjm al-Din Kubra in Khwarazm.[59] Some of his disciples, including Nadjm al-Din Razi, fled westwards just ahead of the Mongol armies. Among those who remained, Sa'd al-Din Hamuya and Radi al-Din 'Ali Lala (d. 642/1244), both disciples of Djamal al-Din Gili, were active at the Ilkhan court later in the 7th/13th century. The Hamuya *shaykhs* exercised considerable influence both in the Persian milieu and among the Turks and Mongols. They were spiritual guides to many tribal leaders. Tradition attributes Ghazan's conversion to Islam to Hamuya's son and disciple Sadr al-Din Ibrahim Hamuya, who was also the son-in-law of 'Ata Malik Djuwayni.[60]

One of Nadjm al-din Kubra's disciples, Sayf al-Din Bakharzi (586-659/1190-1260), who had remained in Central Asia after the Mongol invasions, was sent to Bukhara to establish a branch of the *Kubrawiyya* there. He enjoyed a high reputation among the Mongol rulers and was patronized by Sorqoqtani, the wife of Toluy and the mother of Möngke. She gave 1,000 silver *balish* for the construction of a *madrasa* in Bukhara and put Sayf al-Din in charge of the project and ordered villages to be bought and made into *wakf* for it and *mudarrisan* to be appointed.[61]

[58] See also Lapidus, op.cit., 266.

[59] On the *Kubrawiyya* order and its decline in Central Asia see D. DeWeese, 'The eclipse of the Kubraviyah in Central Asia', *Iranian Studies*, XXI, 1-2, (1988), 45-83.

[60] B. Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran*, 4th ed., Berlin, 1985, 154, and see H. Landholt's introduction to Nur al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman istara' ini, *Le révélateur des mystères, Kashif al-Asrar*, Tehran, 1980, 15. See also DeWeese, op.cit., 47. Djuwayn became one of the main Sufi centres in Khurasan about this time. Several Ilkhanid ministers, including Shams al-Din Djuwayni, chief minister to Hülegü, Abaqa and (briefle) Tegüder Ahmad, and his brother 'Ata Malik Djuwayni, the father-in-law of Sadr al-Din Ibrahim Hamuya, came from Djuwayn or had links with it, and it can be assumed that they were familiar with Sufi activity there.

[61] 'Ata Malik Djuwayni, *Tarikh-i djahangusha*, ed. Muhammad Kazwini, Leiden and London, iii, 8-9. Fasihi states that the sum was 1,000 gold *balish* and that it was a *khanakah* that was to be built (*Mudjmal-i Fasihi*, ed. Mahmud Farrukh, Mashhad, AHS 1339-41/1958-61, ii, 317, 319). The foundation grew in size and continued to be administered by Sayf al-Din's descendants after his death. Ibn Battuta,

Bakharzi is alleged to have played a crucial role in Berke's public profession of Islam in 655/1257.[62] The Kara Khitay ruler of Kirman Kutlugh Terken (d. Ramadam 681/December 1282-January 1283) was also a generous patron of the religious classes, including Sufis. She constituted many *awkaf* for their benefit. Sayf al-Din Bakharzi's son Burhan al-Din Ahmad came to Kirman in 608/1211-12 and died there in 696/1296-7.[63] Kutlugh Terken treated him with favour and her stepson Soyurghatmish appointed him *shaykh* of a *khanakah* which he had built.[64]

A number of new orders were founded in the 7th/13th century and received patronage from the Mongols after their conversion to Islam. The most famous is the *Mawlawiyya*. Another was the *Safawid* order, founded by Safi al-Din (d. 735/1335) at Arbadil. Its influence, spread partly by lay members, extended far beyond the confines of Eastern Adharbaydjan. Hamd Allah Mustawfi states that the Mongols were greatly attached to Shaykh Safi al-Din and that he restrained them from molesting people.[65] There was also the ephemeral *Djuriyya* order of Shaykh Hasan Djuri, who preached Sufi doctrines in Sabzawar in the reign of Abu Sa'id the last Il-Khan. Shaykh Hasan was a disciple of a certain Shaykh Khalifa, himself a disciple of the Kubrawi Sunni *shaykh* 'Ala al-Dawla Simnani. The order seems to have spread among urban tradesmen and artisans. Apart from a branch in Mazandaran it was confined to Khurasan. Its followers played a significant part in the short-lived Sarbadarid dynasty in Sabzawar in the middle of the 8th/14th century.[66]

During the Ilkhanate the religious activity of the Sufi orders was largely centred on the *khanakahs*, which were a characteristic feature of the religious life of the period. They were to be found all over the empire, established predominantly by local people.[67] Many of the *shaykhs* to whom these *khanakahs* belonged exercised

when he visited Bakharzi's tomb in 1333, stayed in the *khanakah*. He mentions the large *wakfi* properties belonging to it. See further O.D. Chekhovich who has published a number of *wakfi* documents dating from 726/1326 and 734/1333 belonging to the tomb (J.M. Rogers, 'Waqfiyyas and waqf-registers: new primary sources for Islamic architecture', *Kunst des Orients*, XI, 1/2 (19) 1833ff.).

[62] Jean Richard, 'La conversion de Berke et les debuts de l'Islamisation de la Horde d'Or', *Rev. des études islamiques*, XXXV (1967) 173-184, DeWeese, op.cit., 49.

[63] *Tarikh-i Shahi-i Qara Khita'iyan*, ed. Muhammad Ibrahim Bastani Parizi, Tehran, Shahinshahi 2535/1976-7, Nasir al-Din Munshi, *Simt al''ula*, ed. 'Abbas Ikbal, Tehran, AHS 1328/1949-50, 43-4.

[64] Nasir al-Din Munshi, *Simt al-'ula*, 58.

[65] *Tarikh-i guzida*, ed. 'Abd al-Husayn Nawa'i, Tehran, AHS 1336-9/1958-61, 675.

[66] See J. Masson Smith, Jr., *The history of the Sarbadar dynasty 1336-1381 A.D. and its sources*, The Hague and Paris, 1970.

[67] 'Izz al-Din Mahmud b. 'Ali Kashani (d. 735/1334-5) claims that the building of *khanakahs* for the residence of Sufis was a new and praiseworthy custom (*rasmi muhdath az djumla-i mustahsanat-i sufiyan*) (*Misbah al-hidaya*, ed. Djulal al-Din Huma'i, Tehran, n.d., 153). But it seems that he means by this not that it was a new custom in the 8th/14th century but rather that *khanakahs* were not built for Sufis in the early centuries of Islam. He states that there were two kinds of persons to be found in *khanakahs*, permanent residents and travellers (ibid., 155). He also discusses the customs of the *khanakahs* and the

considerable influence locally and often succeeded in some measure in protecting their followers from molestation by government officials. Some were men of substance, as witness their buildings and the *awkaf* they constituted for their benefactions. One such was Shaykh Taki al-Din Muhammad Dada (d. 700/1301-2). He was born in Isfahan and migrated to Yazd where he built *khanakahs* at Bundarabad, Sar-i Ab-i Naw, Ishkidhar, 'Izzabad, Maybud, Bideh, Bardjin, 'Akda and Haftadar.[68] Two other notable examples were Sayyid Rukn al-Din Muhammad b. Kawam al-Din b. Nizam al-Din (d. 732/1331-2), at one time *kadi* of Yazd, and his son Shams al-Din Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad (d. 733/1332-3), who was apparently married to one of Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah's daughters, built and endowed fourteen *khanakahs* and eleven *ribats*. Some of the former were part of larger complexes; others, including a number of *ribats* which were fortified posts, were on the desert roads from Yazd to Kum and Kashan. Rukn al-Din's grandfather had also built a *khanakah* outside the walls of Yazd.[69] But it was not only private persons who founded *khanakahs*. Ghazan Khan and his minister Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah both included *khanakahs* among their numerous benefactions. The former built a *khanakah* in the Shanb-i Ghazan, the suburb which he made in Tabriz, a large *khanakah* in Buzindjird in the province of Hamadan, and another in Baghdad. Rashid al-Din built a *khanakah* near his tomb in the Rab'-i Rashidi, the quarter which he built in Tabriz, and a *khanakah* in the complex which he made in the Yazd, which also contained a mosque and a bazaar.[70] So far as rulers founded *khanakahs* and constituted *awkaf* for their upkeep they probably also appointed the *shaykhs* in charge of them. There is a document in the *Dastur al-katib* for the appointment of a certain Nizam al-Din Mahmud Arbadili as *shaykh* of the Ghazani *khanakah* in the Shanb-i Ghazan of Tabriz.[71]

conduct of their residents (ibid., 155-60).

[68] Dja'far b. Muhammad b. Hasan Dja'fari, *Tarikh-i Yazd*, ed. Iradj Afshar, Tehran AHS 1338/1960, 112.

[69] See J. Aubin, 'Le patronage culturel en Iran sous les Ilkhans: une grande famille de Yazd', *Le monde iranien et l'Islam*, III (1971), 107-18.

[70] In a letter to Shaykh Safi, Rashid al-Din mentions that he had sent a small sum (*andak wadjhi*), drawn on the Ghazani and Rashidi estates, to the shrine at Ardabil for the holding of Sufi assemblies (*sama'*) there. During the reign of Öljeitü, Kalkhwuran, near Ardabil, of which Shaykh Safi was native, was made into *wakf* for him and his descendants. Înal Khatun, who had been allocated rather over half of Kalkhwuran by Ghazan for her expenses, was authorised by a decree in 705/1305 to constitute part of the village into *wakf* for Shaykh Safi and his descendants, and some ten year later in 714/1315 Öljeitü constituted the remainder of the village, which was *diwani* land, into *wakf* for the *shaykh* (Lambton, *Continuity and change in medieval Persia*, 322-3.

[71] Muhammad b. Hindushah Nakhdjiwani, *Dastur al-katib fi ta'yin al-maratib*, ed. A.A. Alizade, Moscow, ii (1976), 231-3. Cf. also V. Minorsky, 'A Mongol decree of 720/1320 to the family of Shaykh Zahid,' *BSOAS*, 1954, 515-27.

In the 8th/14th century the orders continued to spread and their influence among the common people grew; and rulers continued to patronise Sufi *shaykhs* by presents of various sorts. But although Sufi *shaykhs* were spiritual guides to some tribal leaders and to some officials, there is little evidence to indicate that the orders exercised influence on the state directly - perhaps because the nature of the Il-Khan state left very little opportunity for participation in its operations by the common people.[72] Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahim al-Isfara'ini (d. probably in 717/1317-18), who was a disciple of Shaykh Ahmad Jurpani (d. 667/1269 or 669/1270); who was in turn a disciple of Radi al-Din 'Ali Lala, had relations with a number of prominent men. Letters of spiritual direction which he wrote to ministers and rulers have survived. One of these is to Djamal al-Din Dastdjirdani, who became inspector of *awkaf* in 'Irak in 683/1284, *wazir* to Baydu in 694/1295 and to Ghazan in 695/1295-6; five are to Sadr al-Din, Gaykhatu's *sahib diwan*, three to Sa'd al-Din Sawadji, whom Isfara'ini congratulated upon becoming a *murid*, one to Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah, one to Tadj al-Din, at one time joint *wazir* with Rashid al-Din, and two to sultans, one of whom was probably Ghazan and the other Öljeitü. Landholt suggests that there is to be found in Isfara'ini's letters of direction to prominent men and rulers traces of a doctrine which accords to the Sufis a role as spiritual directors to those who held power in the Mongol administration. Isfara'ini states that while the *'arif* or mystic was the pole (*kutb*) of *malukut* (invisible sovereignty) the sultan was the pole of *mulk* (worldly sovereignty). He explains that the soul and the body were conjoined for good and evil, any defect in one being felt in the other. It was this, he states, to which the Prophet was alluding when he said, "People follow the religion of their kings" (*al-nas 'ala din mulukihim*), and the truth which Ardashir had perceived when he inscribed on his throne 'religion and kingship are twins'.[73] While this hardly goes beyond the theories of al-Ghazali, Nadjm al-Din Razi and Abarkuhi, there is perhaps a new emphasis in that Isfara'ini bases his doctrine on *walayat* and the spiritual heritage of prophecy. In the letter to a sultan, who was probably Ghazan, Isfara'ini emphasizes the need for justice. He reminds the sultan that he had been singled out by God for kingship (*saltanat*), that the sultan was the shadow of God upon earth and that the purpose of rule was not to exercise dominion over the people by force and to seize their goods illegally. God had placed the people, their lives and their goods in his hands as a trust and entrusted to him the carrying out of every command and prohibition which had been given to the Prophet by God and been transmitted by him to the community. The sultan would be held responsible for any damage or loss to the religion of the Muslims because it would

[72] See further, however, DeWeese, op.cit., on Central Asia.

[73] Nur al-Din Isfara'ini, *Le révélateurs des mystères, Kashif al-asrar*, introduction, 16-17.

be due to his neglect and failure to ensure that the orders transmitted to him were carried out. He continues, "In our times, because the sultans have no care for the affairs of Islam and many of the affairs and regulations of religion have fallen into disorder, the hands and tongues of the Muslims are restrained from enjoining the good and forbidding evil, blessing has departed from the people of the world, corruption and sin have become notorious, the *'ulama'* practice deception and fraud...and the *kadis* take bribes."[74] If the letter was in fact addressed to Ghazan, it is possible that Isfara'ini's admonitions had some effect, because we know that Ghazan made efforts to reform the administration.

Space forbids a discussion of the role of Sufism in Central Asia under Timur or of the expansion of the Sufi orders in Anatolia under the Ottomans, the veneration in which they were held by the Turkoman dynasties, the spread of the *Safawid* order and the foundation of the Safawid empire.[75] Once the Safawid empire had been founded, the head of the order became the ruler of the empire. But it was not Sufism but Ithna Ash'ari Shi'ism which became the official religion. Further, the Safawids, like the Ottomans and the Bukharan monarchies, once they were in power, established a bureaucracy in which the *'ulama'* played an important part. Tensions developed between the *'ulama'* who belonged to the establishment and whose duty it was to uphold the law in all its rigidity and the Sufis. This led to a decrease in the influence of the latter in governmental circles. Moreover since the shah was the head of the *Safawid* order, there was no room in the political field for other orders which might dispute the supremacy of the *Safawid* order. They played little or no part in political affairs and some were suppressed.[76] Later when Shah 'Abbas destroyed the supremacy of the Turkoman tribes and reformed his military forces, the *Safawid* order lost its character as a militant order. Under Shah 'Abbas II the *'ulama'* attacked the Sufis in general and their doctrines, though 'Abbas II himself appears to have patronised non-*Safawid* Sufis.[77] These attacks were later renewed by Mulla Muhammad Bakir Madjlisi (1037/1627-8/1111/1699-1700), who was the most powerful Shi'i scholar of the period. Religious intolerance, from which Sufis, Sunnis, philosophers, Christians and Jews suffered, sowed dissension among the people and probably discouraged intervention in affairs of state by the Sufis and by

[74] Sayyid Muzaffar Sadr, *Shaykh 'Ala al-Dawla Simnani*, Tehran, 1334/1955, 36-40.

[75] See H.R. Roemer, 'The Safavid period' in Peter Jackson and the late Laurence Lockhart (eds), *The Cambridge history of Iran*, VI, *The Timurid and Safavid periods*, 189-350, and also Aubin, 'L'avènement des Safavides reconsideré, (Études Safavide, III), *Moyen Orient & Océan indien XVI-XIXes.*, V (1988), 1-130.

[76] The Nurbakhshi order was suppressed by Tahmasp but survived underground and re-emerged in the 18th century (DeWeese, op.cit., 62).

[77] Muhammad Tahir Wahid Kazwini, *'Abbas-nama*, ed. Ibrahim Dihgan, Arak AHS 1329/1950, 256, 321. I am indebted to Mr. A.H. Morton for this reference.

others. In the late 18th century changes began to take place. Notably there was a revival of the *Ni'matallahi* order, which began to challenge the authority of the *'ulama'*.[78] The rift between the Sufis and the *'ulama'* continued under the Kadjars, although there was a temporary restoration of the fortunes of the Sufis during the reign of Muhammad Shah who, whith his minister Hadjdji Mirza Akasi, patronised Sufis.

In the foregoing pages I have suggested that Sufis came from all walks of life. The effect of Sufism on the ethos of society was therefore widespread, but because Sufism manifested itself in many different guises its effect was not uniform. Primarily it was a spiritual movement, but because there was no separation between church and state in Islam, it inevitably impinged upon the theory and practice of government, whether simply by holding up an ideal and thereby seeking to influence the conduct of those holding power, or by influencing the conduct of ordinary men in more intangible ways. The primary duty or aim of the Sufi was contemplation of God; the ideal king was not exempt from this and the practical expression of his contemplation of God was to be seen in his care for his subjects.[79] At one extreme of Sufism was asceticism and piety, at the other latitudinarianism; on the one hand co-operation with the government and on the other withdrawal form worldly affairs.

Theorists may set limits to the state in the name of the individual, but practical resistance is a matter of group consciousness and group action. It might therefore have been expected that the Sufi orders would lead movements of opposition to the state, but in practice they were seldom able to express a will in the political field beyond the wills of their individual members.

In conclusion I would like to suggest as a provisional hypothesis that the Sufis were, in some measure, the keepers of the public conscience in the Saljuq period. Their role in this respect became muted in the Ilkhanate, because of the change in the nature of government, while in the Safawid period, the ruler himself being the head of the *Safawid* order, there was little opportunity for the exercise of independence in the public domain by other Sufi orders. Under the Kadjars, with the changing relationship of the *'ulama'* and the state, individual *'ulama'* took over the role which the Sufis had earlier exercised as keepers of the public conscience in the public domain, leaving the Sufis to exercise this function only in the private domain, so that for the Sufis sovereignty rested not with the state but with the private conscience.

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[78] See further H. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906*, University of California Press, 1969, 37-8 and Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imaam. Religion, political order and societal change in Shi'ite Iran from the beginning to 1890*, University of Chicago Press, 1984, 244, 249.

[79] See Fadl Allah Ruzbihan, *Mihman-nami-i Bukhara*, id. M. Sotoodeh, Tehran, AHS 1341/1962, 37.